# Breaking the resistance to diversity through effective Employment Equity training

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# ABSTRACT

Situation

The University of Cape Town is a higher educational institute that provides a world-class tertiary education and academic and student support to local and international students from all walks of life. The University is made up of different Faculties, each faculty housing departments who specialise in various degrees of education. The Faculty of Commerce, consisting of about 400 staff, is the umbrella to six departments.

The university operates on a hierarchy structure, and because there are many rules and policies within the university, all faculties have to operate in this manner. There is quite a bit of bureaucracy and red tape that the university has which makes change difficult to implement. It also means that any changes implemented take a massive amount of time, because it has to be adopted by various committees.

Under the umbrella of the Commerce Faculty, there are six departments, each housing research units and sections, which operate independently. All departments are governed by the rules of the faculty yet within departments there are different rules created to suite each department. Because of this, silos are created within the faculty, departments as well as small units of departments. There is also a strong sense of division between Academics and Pass staff.

It is still quite a non-diverse environment, caused by historical discriminatory practices and a subsequent resistance diversity practices. The faculty is trying to change through better recruitment practices. One way in which the faculty is trying to improve the landscape is through Employment Equity policies and practices in recruitment processes. Employment Equity representatives (EE reps) are trained on labour policies and equity good practices. For each recruitment process, an EE rep must be included on the selection committee to ensure processes are fair and that employment equity is considered throughout the process. This was a good start to changing mindsets and breaking the resistance to the changing landscape. However, the initial training provided by the organization was very basic and EE reps were left feeling very unprepared for their role in the recruitment process.

Both authors represent their respective departments on the Commerce Faculty Transformation Committee as well as serve on various selection committees, specifically concentrating on Employment Equity in the faculty. We also head up the training on Employment Equity in the Commerce Faculty Office.

Initially the training provided by the university only covered labour laws and policies of equal opportunity. It referred to the [South African Employment Equity Act](http://www.labour.gov.za/DOL/downloads/legislation/Codes%20of%20Good%20Practice/employment-equity/Code%20of%20Good%20Practice%20on%20the%20Integration%20of%20Employment%20Equity%20into%20Human%20Resource%20Policies%20and%20Practices%20-%20Part%201.pdf). New organizational training for EE Reps was implemented in early 2017, the Employment Equity sub-committee felt that there was not enough practical information shared with EE reps, specifically new EE Reps in order for them to feel confident enough to take on the important role.

Because it is a bureaucratic organization, change takes a long time to be implemented. We had meetings with various parties in the university to discuss changes to the training, which we believe is an effective way to improve the diversity of the university. After meeting with the University’s Transformation Servicing Office, we started our own training in the Commerce Faculty. We have introduced smaller focus groups to concentrate on case studies to allow for better practical training. However, this was still not enough as they felt that there is still a lack in learning to understand the content. They need to find a way to increase the effectiveness of training, in order to ensure that EE reps have better tools to equip them in being prepared and to become the most important person on a selection committee. In addition to this, we felt we needed to improve our own skills to ensure effective training in the focus groups.

In this reflective paper, we will unpack ways in which to handle resistance to diversity practice of the Commerce Faculty of the University of Cape Town, South Africa. We will outline methods to implement how to overcome diversity through the training of Employment Equity representatives on selection committees, for the recruitment process.

Concern

Because of this situation, there is a need to train EE reps efficiently in order to ensure that they are equipped to be confident, competent and reliable when serving on selection committees. EE reps ultimately need to become the change agents for the Commerce Faculty, which will spill over into the bigger university. The successful implementation of the intervention will not only break resistance, but also bring the faculty together, building stronger relationships, creating a sense of collaboration and a sense of inclusiveness, which will also allow all employees to embrace everyone’s diversity. In the web article “[Employers need to break recruitment traditions to boost diversity](https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/diversity-in-recruitment-traditions/)” the authors say it is important for employers to ensure that their workplace is inclusive to all. This can be done by employing staff from varied backgrounds, races and social standings. Tipper also advises that increasing diversity “can bring significant competitive advantage” (see [Tipper, J 2004](https://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/abs/10.1108/00197850410542392))

The central argument made in this paper is that by concentrating on the effectiveness of training, it will break the resistance to the diversity of Employment Equity. By ensuring that EE reps are trained effectively this will minimize inequality and unease brought about by diversity, as it not only creates an opportunity for transformation but a way of creating inclusive and sustainable relationships in the workplace. The university currently has a strong focus on recruiting staff from designated backgrounds to redress the inequalities of the past. There is still resistance to this as some recruiters are more focused on the ability to walk into a role and perform immediately with the notion of “hitting the ground running”. It is seen as hard work to try to develop candidates within a reasonable amount of time therefore recruiters would rather recruit a non-equity candidate with more experience. By providing additional training to EE reps, they would be better equipped to guide recruiters and to ensure that the process is fair and equal to all applicants. This forms part of the mandate of implementing best practice to improving the diversity of the Faculty.

Implementation

In order to address the concern, as a sub-committee we needed to identify ways of improving the training of EE reps. There is some research on the effects of diversity training (Combs & Luthans, **2007**; Rudman, Ashmore, & Gary, **2001**; Sanchez & Medkik, **2004**; Stewart, Laduke, Bracht, Sweet, & Gamarel, **2003**), which shows that an influence can be made on attitudes and outcomes. We had already implemented the focus groups which had proven to be successful. We had also developed a user manual, which was a step by step guide to the EE reps role in selection committees. It included frequently asked questions to help them address common problems they may encounter. Part of the focus groups was the use of case studies. We were not skilled in the writing of case studies so it was very brief scenarios that we had the groups work through. We then attended a case writing course and the aim is develop full case studies to be approved and implemented as part of the organizational training provided, not only in the focus groups. The case studies give the EE reps a real life view of what could happen in a selection committee. It also increased dialogue on how to deal with difficult situations and people who are resisting the change.

In addition to the focus groups, new EE reps are required to observe two selection processes before serving as an EE rep independently. We are planning to provide focus groups to experienced reps in order for them to provide effective guidance to new representatives while they are observing. The observation process is an extremely important part of training as it allows the new reps to see exactly what happens and what their role is.

Methodology

In this paper, we have used an Affinity diagram, developed by Jiro Kawakita, (<https://project-management.com/affinity-diagram-kawakita-jiro-or-kj-method>) to gather ideas and thoughts around breaking the resistance to diversity through employment equity practices. We further interrogated the themes around the relationship between effectiveness of training, quality of management and the results of learning, using the Interrelation Diagram to graphically show theses variable lead to the growth of employees and as a result breaking resistance to diversity. Using the Systems Archetypes (Braun W, 2002), we have selected the growth and underinvestment archetype to interrogate these themes in more detail.

Considering the variable quality of management, we discussed how to encourage development and diversity thinking by understanding the equity landscape of the Commerce Faculty. We felt that it is important for management to be able to get to know staff on a different level by encouraging them to share their cultures, diversity and therefore building stronger relationships. Management should also be able to identify gaps in learning of staff and therefore building a succession plan for career trajectory. Particularly when it comes to previously disadvantaged staff, they need to encourage further studies through financially support and an environment for time off for deliverables required throughout their studies, especially when it comes to administrative staff. Management should be at the foreground of creating a transparent recruitment process. Therefore, encouraging equality for all applicants who apply for positions within their departments and the bigger faculty is imperative. This variable positively influence the growth of employees. Which refers to the development of all staff in the faculty. It is important that all staff are given and equal opportunity to grow both professionally, academically and personally through Employment Equity. It is important that staff are guide correctly when it come to the finding the appropriate course or degree to study, in order to use that to further their career. At the same time, it is important that staff are guided correctly on the material to become an EE rep. Staff also need to have enough time off work in order to be committed to their duties as an EE rep. Financial assistance can sometimes be a barrier but the organization should assist with this, as this not only allows for growth of the staff member but it becomes beneficial to the organization, once the person implements their learnings as an EE rep on a selection committee, they entire recruitment process flourishes. In order to peruse this efficiently, it is important to identify the skills that staff require in order to perform their EE rep duties and build on it. Skills and knowledge sharing can also assist with the growth of the EE rep team, through regular training and focus groups. If management prioritizes in making teaching and educating staff a priority in regard to Employment Equity, it will positively impact the results of learning of being an EE rep. Organisational training as a whole is imperative, so that the entire university is aligned with the same goal and vision. Improving the understanding of an EE rep not only applies to the equity of a candidate but also the language used in an advertisement. It applies to the language and behavior of any person when serving on a selection committee. Trainers need to be able to identify the gaps of learning and strategize the most effective way to bring the content across for a diverse staff compliment. This will allow EE reps to be more confident, comfortable and reliable EE reps. Once all necessary resource is available, including materials and persons of experienced, the EE rep will have a strong and reliable support structure. EE reps will have the ability to not only be confident and comfortable, but they will become the change agents of the organization. They will drive positive awareness through the diversity of the organization. This essentially means breaking the resistance to diversity through Employment Equity practices. Ultimately breaking down the barriers of what once thought of as just being another member with not power, EE reps now become the most powerful voice on a selection committee. This allows for skills sharing with other selection committee members, encourages collaboration and a sense of inclusiveness for all staff and future staff.

By breaking these resistances to diversity, it will improve and have a positive effect on the training itself. The effectiveness of training means that we can identify the current employment equity landscape. Identifying the developmental needs of Employment Equity in itself and understanding the diverse environments in which staff work in is of utmost importance. Our role is to ensure that EE reps are trained well enough to serve on various selection committees, no matter the level of the post. In order to train effectively, we need to think about the material that will be presented to the staff. How easy is it to understand and to think about how do staff learn? Coaching and mentoring new reps is required on an ongoing basis. We must think about the convenience around the logistics of the training, which include the venue, time and dates at which we facilities these sessions. Monitoring and evaluation of the current and new reps needs to be done on a regular basis to identifying the gaps of learning. Keeping up to date with new labour laws is also vital. Looking at different employment equity statements and helping reps understand the meaning of using different statements when advertising a position. Where the advertisements are placed to attract the correct candidates are also important, as this creates a transparent and fair recruitment process. Ensuring that the training provided at the faculty level is aligned with that of the organization, and vice versa. Lastly, enforcing that compulsory training is required for all EE reps, staring with the management level to ensure the buy in from staff at lower levels. If this is not done effectively, it will have a negative effect on the breaking any form resistance to diversity.

However, if the effectiveness of training becomes positive, it will have a positively effect on the commitment to teach. Facilitators will be motivated to teach. They will be invested in the EE reps because EE reps will in turn be invested in becoming change agents. This will allow for an open dialogue of diverse conversation and sharing of various cultural history. We will be committed to understand the needs of the EE rep and provide the support required for them both through material and through consultation. Understanding various teaching methods and using them creatively to teach reps from all walks of life is important to grab their attention and keep them engaged. Through focus groups and training sessions, we need to create a safe and inclusive environment for diverse and multi-cultural sharing. This will not only allow us to build a strong network of reps but all reps will be able to build strong and trustworthy relationships with each other., ensuring a strong network of EE reps not only for the faculty but for the bigger university.

Conclusion

Our aim is to improve the way we implement our training of EE reps, through the use off case studies in our focus groups. We will go on a case writing course and work with the case writing specialist in the university to assist us in this. We will then have a number of focus groups over the next few months to upskill the current EE reps and then review the outcomes of the selection processes they serve on.

There are a number of unknown factors in this plan as there is no way to ensure that resistance will be broken. Evidence from [Wiggins-Romesburg](http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1534484318765843) resistance to diversity is “the dynamic interplay of individual and collective behaviors, with individual resistance rooted in unconscious motivation and organizational resistance rooted in the collective behavior of individuals”. What we would like to do is try to break the collective behaviours by changing the mindsets of the individuals.

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