May 2011

Research Note

M. Benjamin
Southern Illinois University Carbondale

G. Haas
Southern Illinois University Carbondale

F. Jefferson
Southern Illinois University Carbondale

M. Judge
Southern Illinois University Carbondale

J. Luna
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
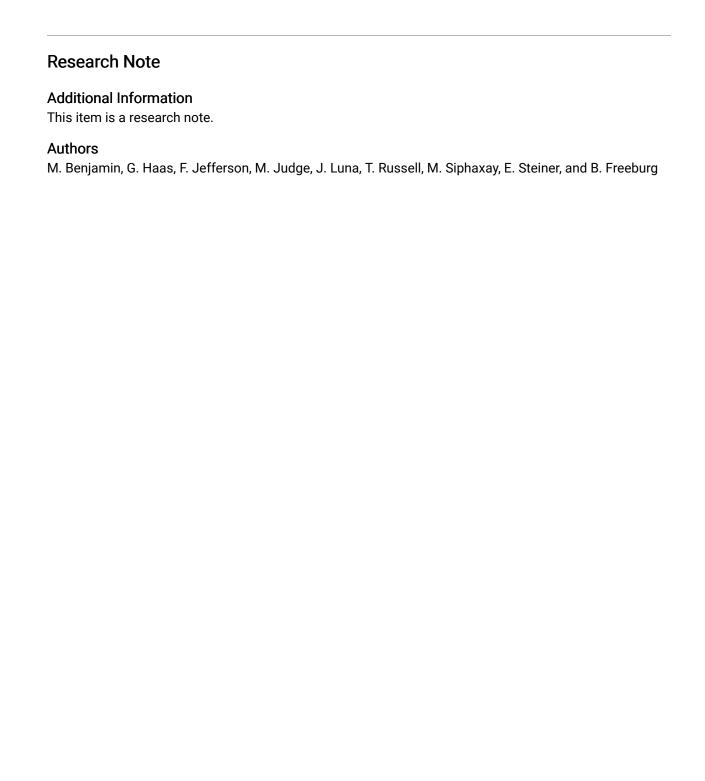
See next page for additional authors

Follow this and additional works at: https://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/ojwed

Research Note

Additional Information

This item is a research note.

Authors

M. Benjamin, G. Haas, F. Jefferson, M. Judge, J. Luna, T. Russell, M. Siphaxay, E. Steiner, and B. Freeburg

Attitudes toward and Perceptions of Workplace Diversity:

The Impact of Diversity Training on HR Professionals

M. Benjamin, G. Haas, F. Jefferson, M. Judge, J. Luna, T. Russell,

M. Siphaxay, E. Steiner, & B. Freeburg

Southern Illinois University Carbondale

Background

　　Human resource (HR) professionals as strategic business partners in public and private sector organizations have as part of their responsibilities to create and implement training for their workforce. These responsibilities include the emerging initiatives regarding diversity and creating multicultural organizations (Cox, 2001). Diversity includes primary and secondary dimensions that describe differences within the workforce (Loden & Rosener, 1991). Primary dimensions include age, race, ethnicity, gender, disability, and sexual/affectional orientation. Secondary dimensions include work background, income, marital status, military experience, religious beliefs, geographic location, parental status, and education. Cox (2001) suggests that diversity initiatives begin with the training of organizational leaders, include HR professionals. The *purpose of this research note* is to identify the impact of diversity training on attitudes and perceptions of HR professionals toward workplace diversity.

Method

　　Eight working HR professionals were enrolled in a graduate workforce diversity course as part of a professional degree program. The course was delivered in a three-weekend format and included "foundational information concerning the diverse, multicultural society. Importance of understanding cultural and demographic similarities/differences and how this information relates to the workplace and to education/training environments" (*SIUC Graduate Catalog*, 2010-2011, p. 490).

　　As a pretest, the learners completed the Reaction to Diversity Inventory (De Meuse & Hostager, 2001). That is, they were asked to identify words frequently associated with workplace diversity from a list of 70 words from five different dimensions: emotional reactions (e.g., compassionate, apprehensive); judgments (e.g., justified, worthless); behavioral reactions (e.g., participate, patronize); personal consequences (e.g., enrichment, rivalry); and organizational outcomes (e.g., profitable, liability). Thirty-five words were positive emotional reactions and 35 were negative emotional reactions; as such, the possible ranges of scores was + 35 to - 35. At the end of the course, learners completed the Inventory as a posttest. Pre and Post test scores were averaged and difference calculated.

Findings

 The average pre-test score was 15.4 (range = 3 to 34). The average posttest score was 17.8 (range = -2 to 35). The impact of training resulted in a 2.4 increase in learners' positive emotional reactions to diversity. As a note, two learners' scores after training revealed an increase in negative emotional reactions to diversity.

Discussion and Implications

 This small study revealed that diversity training did impact in a positive way the attitudes and perceptions of HR professionals toward workplace diversity, including the discovery of the primary and secondary dimensions of diversity. This a beginning finding regarding diversity training for HR professionals who have a strategic role as a business partner in implementing diversity initiatives in the public and private sectors that seek the benefits derived from a multicultural organization.

References

Cox, T.H. (2001). *Creating the multicultural organization*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

De Meuse, K.P., & Hostager, T.J. (2001). Developing an instrument for measuring attitudes toward and perceptions of workplace diversity: An initial report. *Human Resource Development Quarterly, 12*(1), 33-51.

Loden, M., & Rosener, J. (1991). *Workforce America: Managing employee diversity as a vital resource*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

SIUC graduate catalog. (2010-2011). Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University.