Background

Diversity is not just the ‘right & proper thing to do’, it is a strong business case. For public sector & community organisations to function effectively, they must respond to & reflect the needs of their service users. Staff training, is one of the most common ways to support such organisational development (OD).

The aim of the Diversity Action Project is to embrace diversity across Telford & Wrekin as part of the Local Strategic Partnership’s shared commitment to help create a more inclusive workplace and a community that acknowledges and values difference.

The Need

Diversity training is suffering from a lack of innovation. Most public sector organisations have undertaken at least one mandatory, top-down, classroom based courses, strategically delivered to reinforce the importance of leadership on Diversity. In a number of representative pre-benchmarking survey responses, there was evidence to suggest that ‘more of the same’ would not achieve further OD & worse, risked creating resentment around Diversity.

Personnel reported knowing more about the issue, but less on how to apply that knowledge. Such a position risked an increase in anxiety & tension around Diversity issues, despite its intention to encourage exploration within organisations – it essence it could be creating a ‘climate of fear’.

Theory-into-practice

A dearth of guidance exists to determine the effectiveness of Diversity training; either leading on it, or impact evaluation. The literature lacks theory-based or systematic evaluation. There remains the political imperative to ‘do something’ on Diversity issues, yet there is very little guidance for organisations to choose between interventions. Few organisations engage in any pre-training benchmarking, making return-on-investment, added value or ‘transfer’ from training into the workplace difficult to determine.

Attitude Re-appraisal

A failure to integrate large pedagogical & psychological bodies of knowledge represents a singular gap in evidencing ‘joined-up’ decision making on Diversity training. In response, an alternative training method was proposed that would contain behavioural as well as cognitive (knowledge & truth) and affective (emotional) elements or the three widely researched components of an ‘attitude’. This was consistent with the training objectives for people in the Telford & Wrekin area. Targeting each element would increase the ‘power’ of the training event. A flagship approach to managing Diversity.

Diversity Action Training

The LSP held 10 days of training with over 1000 employees and community members attending. Delegates from each organisation attended a training day where they watched the scripted play, Hidden Voices. In the morning, the process was split into groups where, using Forum Theatre, they were able to re-run scenes from the play and have the opportunity to direct the actors and develop new or deeper dialogue on points of contention in the play, or by bringing in new issues.

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Emergent & Theory-Based Level 2 Themes

Disclosure from the members of these groups was reassuringly candid. This supports its validity (achieving the aims of the training & capturing that which the evaluation sought to measure). Only a fraction of results to date are shown - the project includes literally thousands of responses:

Affective (Emotive):

- You feel part of a whole process
- Giving people space to express their problems with widely accepted views or opinions

Cognitive & Engagement (Learning & Thinking):

- Seeing your ‘ideas’ acted out was vital to making it worthwhile – especially when they didn’t work out!
- It is good to know that they are interested. We worked during lunch!!

Behavioural (Putting learning to work):

- The forum sessions really bring out the nature of issues for real people
- How the spoken word can become more powerful when combined with body language & touch
- Leading on Diversity:
  - [I will] try & make other people aware of their actions
- Be more positive when I suspect there are issues to be dealt with

Benefits of Collaboration & Inter-agency working:

- It is good to know that they are interested. We worked during lunch!
- Shared resources allow for improved quality!

For further information please contact:

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