

Background

Diversity is not just the 'right & proper thing to do', it has 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 most 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 some 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 – in essence it could be creating a **'climate of fear'**.

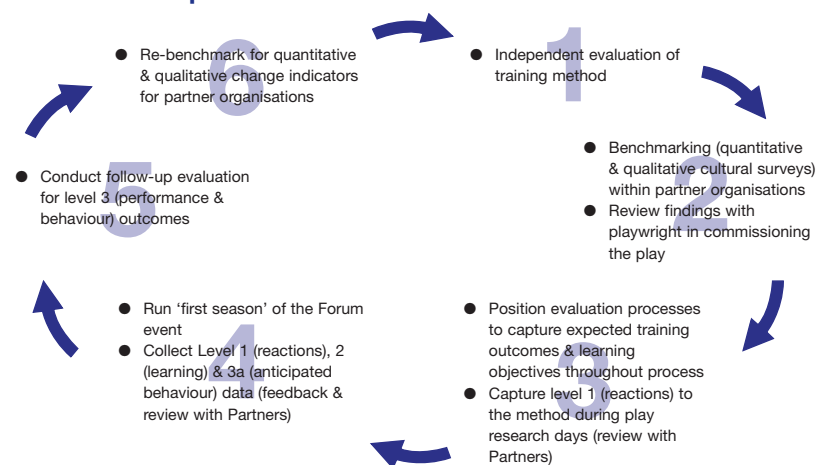
Theory-into-practice

A dearth of evidence 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 pressure 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 & thinking) & **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.

Our Response - Best Practice in Method



Forum Theatre

Forum Theatre is a process that allows the audience to become directors and scriptwriters with a team of professional actors and a facilitator. Using a number of scenarios on the theme of diversity the participants then direct the actors with new actions and lines, challenging situations and raising issues.

The process is widely used for training in organisations and the community and allows the audience to empathise with characters and their situations. Forum Theatre does not require the audience to act or perform at any time.

This is the method of training which captured & integrated **local dialogue** which was then used in the commissioning of **Hidden Voices**. Confidential interviews and Forum Theatre research sessions were held with local organisations and community groups.

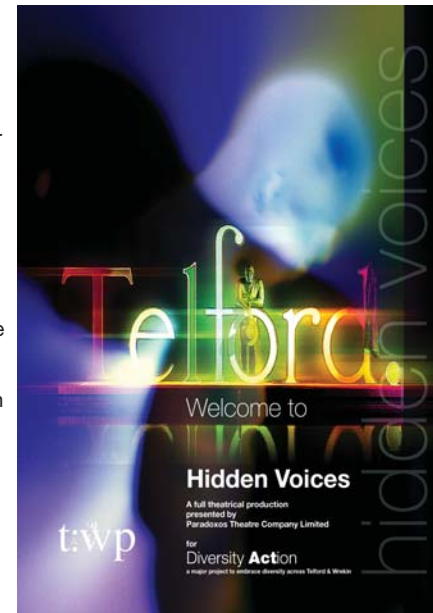
>>Increases ecological validity (credibility) of training

Identified research themes included: Race, Sexuality, Disability, Ageism, Community 'lack of heart', Diversity overload, One-issue people, Politically Correct language, Climates of fear and intra-organisational tension, Managers afraid of managing and Training versus 'the real world'.

hidden voices

The Partnership

The Telford & Wrekin Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), as part of the Diversity Action Project, commissioned **Hidden Voices**, a professional play from Paradoxos Theatre Company, exploring issues around Diversity. The play is in recognition of the importance placed by all of the partners in making our organisations more aware of the diverse communities we serve and our desire to place diversity at the heart of the way we deliver our services to the community.



The process that has been used to produce the play has itself identified the many different communities that there are living, working and visiting in Telford. We want our communities to know that we care about what they have to say and we want to use this ambitious project as a springboard to make their often **Hidden Voices** heard.

The Objective:

- Through the partner's shared commitment to embrace diversity, we wished to listen to people's real life experience of diversity issues in Telford so as to embed the diversity agenda within our organisations ensuring diversity is at the core of our policies and procedures.

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. During the afternoon the audience split into groups where, using Forum Theatre, they were able to re-run scenes from the play and had 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.

- >>Increases personal engagement with training event**
- >>Rehearses new behaviour and articulates the 'what-if?' responses to challenging situations**
- >>Anxiety reduction through exploration**

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!
- I did recognise both communities & emotions which I see everyday

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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Evaluation Process: Ann Bicknell, Independent Evaluator, Occupational & Organisational Psychologist: email - a.c.bicknell@aston.ac.uk

Organisations from Telford already committed to this project include:

- Borough of Telford & Wrekin
- West Mercia Constabulary Telford & Wrekin Division
- West Mercia Probation Service
- Telford College of Arts & Technology
- Telford & Wrekin Primary Care Trust
- Shropshire Chamber & Business Link
- Learning + Skills Council Shropshire
- Telford & Wrekin Council for Voluntary Service
- Shropshire Fire & Rescue Service
- Connexions Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin
- Telford & Shropshire Race Equality Council
- The Wrekin Housing Trust
- Neighbourhood Watch
- Jobcentre Plus
- STAY

Evaluation Frameworks

This training is consistent with & structured around two accepted models.

1) Kirkpatrick's Training Evaluation Model

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|---------|---|
| Level 1 | Reactions to a training event (immediate) |
| Level 2 | Learning from a training event (knowledge or mastery indicators before & after training events) |
| Level 3 | Behaviour or Performance in the workplace following training (transfer of learning) |
| Level 4 | Organisational Results demonstrable from training (strategic outcomes & operational performance indicators) |

2) Working with the Local Government Association (LGA) Equality Standard

- Best Value
- Self-assessment
- The audit process
- Community Planning
- Scrutiny & Independent audit

Formative Conclusions

There is evidence to conclude that a valuable event has taken place, to the point of surprising a majority of respondents!

The performance-oriented follow-up questionnaires are in preparation now to determine transfer effects into practice and the extent to which people are 'leading by example'.

The ultimate test will be at quantitative re-benchmarking, in assessing the extent to which significant indicators of L4 change can be shown. 'Season Two' is planned for the autumn.