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**Leading the diversity and inclusion narrative through continuing professional education**

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## Leading the diversity and inclusion narrative through continuing professional education

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**Abstract:** This conceptual research aims to connect aspects of learning activities of continuing education for professionals (CPE). The objective is to provide conclusions about modes of professional learning within diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) training. This interpretation is placed in context relating to the process of professional learning objectives. A CPE DEIB training plan is presented as an example of how to provide continuing professional education to adult learners within a DEIB curriculum (El-Amin, 2020). The purpose of incorporating the foundations of CPE into DEIB training permits organisations to strengthening organisational development and productivity. By connecting the foundations of curriculum design, alignment, assessment and mapping, and research-informed innovation, CPE aims to enhance the effectiveness of organisational DEIB initiatives. A CPE DEIB training plan emphasises the importance of accountability, employee involvement, and effective training to drive DEIB initiatives.

**Keywords:** continuing education for professionals; CPE; andragogy; adult learning; diversity; equity; inclusion; belonging; DEIB; training and developing; transgression; training engagement theory; TET.

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## 1 Introduction

### *1.1 Leading the diversity and inclusion narrative through continuing professional education*

Continuing professional education (CPE) is defined as how individuals maintain familiarity and skills related to their profession; thus, continuing education is applied to professional development (Kasworm et al., 2010). CPE obligations are common to most professions. Many professions demarcate CPE as a systematised method to learning to assist competency in practice, requiring knowledge, abilities, and practical experience. CPE can involve any applicable learning activity, whether formal and structured or informal and self-directed. Currently, many professionals opt for online professional education because of convenience.

CPE provides opportunities for professionals to close the gap in training, which impacts social justice issues and pay equity in the professions (Rudling et al., 2023). In the field of education, Hayes and Juarez (2012) posited, “that the racial power of whiteness must be considered and addressed explicitly within the context of preparing future facilitators to realise social justice in the classroom because the sabotaging, silencing and gagging of social justice in the classroom is otherwise unlikely to be interrupted”. (p. 10) The subject of white domination is a difficult subject to understand and even more challenging to experience. There is a direct link to propelling an inequitable education system on others if not understood in the context of ‘the self’. Indeed, facilitators must understand who they are and why they are in the profession before they stand before others and profess. Being an facilitator gives no one the right to promulgate their views upon others without context, conditioning, and purpose (Hayes and Juarez, 2012). Facilitators must adhere to the lesson plan and curriculum while allowing adult learners to share their experiences regarding the subject matter in order to create learning communities. Most importantly, the role of the facilitator is to guide.

### *1.2 Closing the pay gap in continuing professional education*

Moreover, regarding pay parity, the question remains if CPE professionals are willing to address this issue within the adult education field, much less at the human resource level. Payment is an issue for adult facilitators, and while facilitators are valuable to society, they are not compensated relatively (Swartz et al., 2019). Even after years of service, credentialing, and CEUs, facilitators are not paid accordingly to their effort, value, and work. For instance, corporate facilitators must be certified or have a degree in adult education or instructional technology. In comparison, positives to negatives, the argument for pay equity needs more advocacy in research, execution, and in the DEIB training field. Pay equity is essential in context because those who are paid well typically feel valued for their work and provide better service than those who are not (Cohen, 2017).

### *1.3 Elevating practical knowledge*

Applying adult learning strategies and techniques related to professional training for corporate workforce training is a significant workforce development construct (Torrance and Forde, 2017). There are many challenges in ideation, designing, and executing

professional education for organisations (Wrigley and Straker, 2017). As a result, some innovations and methods encompass numerous factors and measurements. For instance, CPE practitioners must adapt quickly to technological changes in the adult education environment. There are two forms of technological advancements in professional education facilitation. The first involves technological advancement in a top-down process, where companies develop new ways to train their workforce using online learning management systems (LMS) (Cohen, 2017). The next evolution for CPE implementation is closely tied to the rise of train-the-trainer models (Woodard et al., 2018). If implemented skillfully and strategically, both LMS and train-the-trainer models allow organisations to upskill less expensively, globally, and collegially.

Additionally, Cudney et al. (2014) demonstrated the systematic CPE had been adopted to improve teaching methods and administrative processes. The introduction and implementation of these methodologies improve CPE quality and add value to enhance participant satisfaction (Pero and Xu, 2023). Broadening, CPE has a significant and measurable impact when used to improve training operations. Such improvements are practical at the department/unit level and institutionally. However, implementing CPE within an organisation is an important responsibility that is most impactful if it involves long-term, strategic planning.

#### *1.4 Training engagement theory*

Experiences that alter previous knowledge of adult learners is related to ensuring CPE material is relevant and engaging, so the ‘what to train’ is just as important as ‘how to train’. Indeed, Sitzmann and Weinhardt (2018) indicated that training engagement theory (TET) provides a multilevel cause and effect analysis of training effectiveness. By multilevel, they refer to the hierarchical nature of organisational positions and the temporal nature of processes. The hierarchical manner of TET provides an account of how processes at several levels in the organisational hierarchy are dependent on one another and contribute to training programs’ efficacy. The theory’s temporal nature advocates for examining the processes that occur from before training is conceptualised until the completion of training to analyse the cause and effects of training effectiveness. Notwithstanding, the facilitator/facilitator is the representative of the organisation and has an enormous impact on training programming efficacy (El-Amin, 2022).

This learning matters because a reflection and synthesis of learning and reactions (intellectual, emotional, and physical) to this course’s learning activities are made. Additional impactful personal learning discoveries during the course were the discussions on explaining the historical aspects of adult and community education, those exploring racial constructs in society, and the classroom. The rationale for this is when articulating and executing adult and community education in the classroom, in scholarly writings, and in vocation, it is desirable to understand the underpinnings of the craft from a historical and theoretical perspective; to include the historical, current, and future trends, challenges, and opportunities in adult and community education. Further, discussions in a diverse group regarding various perspectives on racial, ethnic, and cultural groups’ contributions, inclusion, and exclusion in the applicable theoretical models and frameworks were appreciated. Often racial injustice and social justice are not discussed in forums such as this. Thus, the outcomes of not discussing DEIB issues promulgates ‘isms’ in organisations.

### *1.5 Transgression to improve diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging training*

Moreover, facilitators must go through transgressing to understand themselves before facilitating others (Hooks, 1994). Furthermore, the importance of language cannot be negated; it is a powerful tool and can catapult or smite participants (Le Fevre, 2023). The latter can cause irreparable damage to individuals. In the context of CPE, participants pursue training for career or personal development, promotion, or as a means of liberation. Previous knowledge must be altered concerning how language and process impacts education. Without knowledge of self, facilitation is a game of ‘Russian Roulette’ because the facilitator is unprepared to provide the necessary care in facilitation and deal with the dynamics of managing uncomfortable classroom encounters.

### *1.6 Developing diversity and inclusion curriculum and training*

The purpose of this effort is to develop a DEIB curriculum and training plan, connecting foundations for curriculum design, alignment, assessment and mapping, research-informed innovation, and curriculum change.

### *1.7 Vision and purpose*

#### *1.7.1 The role of leaders in DEIB management*

The vision of DEIB training is to strengthen organisational development and productivity. Organisations must hold leaders and human resource functions accountable for improving the DEIB dashboard; hiring Chief Diversity Officers (CDOs) or Directors to manage the process, develop human resource policy to ensure recruiting, hiring, promotion, retention, and succession of diverse staff; incorporate employees into the DEIB planning process by creating employee resource groups (ERGs), provide an ombudsman structure, and finally implement authentic and sustainable training programs that work.

#### *1.7.2 Mainstream DEIB training is not effective*

Training is the vehicle to leverage DEIB performance (El-Amin, 2022). By optimising the experiences of those in the organisation with guided expertise, DEIB initiatives improve. Moreover, there are opportunities to re-train individuals who do not see the value of DEIB. An effective strategy for introducing ‘hostile work environment mitigation’ training to individuals who have experienced a limited number of cultures is to schedule regular training that consists of in-person (50%), practical scenario-based (25%), and computer-based training (CBT) (25%). Another effective strategy is to diversify DEIB programs that are comprised of services, training, allies/support, and ERGs to maximise change.

**Table 1** Diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging curriculum map

Session	Topics	Readings	DQs	Assignment	Video (V)/ assessment (A)	Innovation
<i>Diversity matters series</i>						
Session 1	Unpacking implicit bias and micro-aggressions: what are they and how do they affect me?	Session 1 Workbook	1. Express information about you and your background 2. Your objectives and expectations in taking this course 3. And any other information you would like to share	On-site or virtual work groups	V1: Self-introduction	Interactive diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) curriculum
Session 2	Be ALL-STAR!: use the STAR method for workplace conflict	Session 2 Workbook	1. D&I STAR reflection: 2. Describe a situation that occurred because of a D&I organisational conflict 3. What tasks were used to eliminate the conflict? 4. What specific actions did you take to resolve the issue? 5. What was the result of your actions? 6. Who were the key individuals involved? 7. Who were the responsible parties? 8. How could you have handled the situation better? 9. Provide a reflection?	On-site or virtual work groups	A1: Short paper reflection	Focus on systemic internal issues
Session 3	A framework to build a high-performing diversity, inclusion, belonging, and equity culture	Session 3 Workbook	1. What is the existing DEIB framework in place today? 2. What works well? 3. What improvements are needed? 4. Who is held accountable for performance standards?	On-site or virtual work groups	V2: Unit reflection	Training for radical inclusion (multi-networked stakeholder recruiting and management)

**Table 1** Diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging curriculum map (continued)

<i>Session</i>	<i>Topics</i>	<i>Readings</i>	<i>DQs</i>	<i>Assignment</i>	<i>Video (V)/ assessment (A)</i>	<i>Innovation</i>
<i>Women's empowerment series</i>						
Session 4	Own your accomplishments: know your worth!	Session 4 Workbook	1. What is most prized accomplish to-date? 2. Where do you see yourself in one year? Where do you see yourself in five years?	On-site or virtual work groups	A2: Short paper reflection	Interactive diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) curriculum
Session 5	Wonder Woman: She's Bossy! No, She's the Boss: Women share experiences, co-create solution-based actions, and accountability measures to ensure success in one's career	Session 5 Workbook	1. List three women leaders who are inspirational to you? 2. What qualities do admire about these women? 3. Which qualities do these leaders have, that you also have?	On-site or virtual work groups	Q1: Leadership	Training for radical inclusion (multi- networked stakeholder recruiting and management)
Session 6	Raise the bar (how to network)	Session 6 Workbook	1. Have you networked in the past? If so, how, where, who? 2. Are you part of an online networking platform? 3. How and where do you network in-person and virtually?	On-site or virtual work groups	V3: Unit reflection	GEMBA (quality walks)
<i>Maximise organisational performance: workplace communication series</i>						
Session 7	Worksite communication for leaders	Session 7 Workbook	1. Why is ethical leadership important in organisations? 2. What are workplace communication issues that affect your work? 3. How does poor workplace communication impact the bottom-line?	On-site or virtual work groups	A3: Short paper reflection	Interactive diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) curriculum

**Table 1** Diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging curriculum map (continued)

<i>Session</i>	<i>Topics</i>	<i>Readings</i>	<i>DQs</i>	<i>Assignment</i>	<i>Video (V)/ assessment (A)</i>	<i>Innovation</i>
Session 8	Leadership fundamentals: embracing change	Session 8 Workbook	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Exceptional organisations incorporate innovative change management, learning, and curriculum strategies that are conveyed through training. How does your organisation implement change management?</li><li>2. Organisations must take a no-tolerance approach to inequity in the workplace. To this end, organisations must develop DEIB curriculum, gather pertinent data, assess data analytics, convey targets, disseminate advancement data, and encourage organisational stakeholders to reveal and live their true identities within educational and professional settings</li><li>3. What kind of DEIB initiatives has your organisation created? Are they working well? Are you engaged in the process?</li></ol>	On-site or virtual work groups	Q2: Communication	Interactive diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) curriculum
Session 9	Leadership fundamentals: leading innovation	Session 9 Workbook	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. What value do CSR (corporate social responsibility) programs offer to organisations and society?</li><li>2. CSR is about an organisation taking responsibility for the impacts of its decisions and activities on all aspects of society, the community, and the environment.</li><li>3. What kinds of CSR initiatives does the company you for work perform?</li></ol>	On-site or virtual work groups	V4: Unit reflection	Interactive diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) curriculum
Session 10	Course reflection	Session 10 Workbook	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. What does it mean to take control of one's career?</li><li>2. How will you use this learning in your interpersonal life?</li><li>3. How will you use this learning in your professional life?</li></ol>	On-site or virtual work groups	Q3: Course evaluation	Linking Heutagogy (self-determined learning) to DEIB curriculum



## 2 Curriculum project plan

- Diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB): The purpose of this course is to provide on-going training, development, inspiration, and encouragement, engaging all staff. This curriculum plan provides organisational-wide training requirements.
- Short papers: Short, 2–3 page, writing assignments designed to keep you actively writing about your ideas in relation to the readings in the DEIB course. In the short paper you will address the topics introduced in the training and write about the ones that interest you the most. You will be using them as topic items to conversations in the discussion boards.
- Discussion questions (DQs): Guiding questions are provided. Participants should provide an initial response and reply to at least two peers.
- Assignment: collaborate and present. Individuals work in on-site or virtual work breakout groups to discuss DQ concepts and then present to the entire group.
- Self-improvement quiz and reflection: Complete the quiz and incorporate outcome and reflection into session discussion board.

## 3 Plan for curriculum work

### 3.1 *Curriculum: diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging organisational training*

- Purpose: The purpose of this curriculum is to facilitate DEIB training for educational, corporate, and governmental environments. The research indicates the best organisational cultures value innovation, DEIB, training, and safety (El-Amin, 2023). Likewise, these are attributes of a suitable place to work, go beyond traditional norms such as collecting data, assuming accountability, fostering awareness, and analysing recruitment/hiring (Park et al. 2019). Innovations incorporated in the training are Trauma informed training and development, interactive DEIB curriculum, focus on systemic internal issues, training for radical inclusion (multi-networked stakeholder recruiting and management), GEMBA (quality walks), and linking Heutagogy (self-determined learning) to DEIB curriculum.
- Audience: Organisational administrators, staff, faculty, or students (training is divided by population or in collective populations)
- Core activities: The core activities of DEIB training consists of engaging discussion boards, interactive individual video presentations, and seminar group breakout sessions/presentations.

### 3.2 *Curriculum outcomes*

- CLO1: Develop DEIB awareness and intercultural communication skills to improve organisational culture and climate.

### 3.3 Program learning outcomes

- PLO1: Participates will describe, create, and apply effective strategies and intercultural skills to cultivate improved organisational culture and climate. In doing so, participates will perform self-evaluation, collaborate in diverse groups, gain insights, and develop a growth mindset.

### 3.4 Training standard

- TS1: The trainer ensures that DEIB training participants acquire a profound understanding of the vital models and ideologies of DEIB. Similarly, by participating in the training participants can apply the frameworks introduced to advance increased awareness of DEIB in organisations.

**Table 2** Innovative vision descriptions

<i>Innovative vision descriptions</i>	
Innovation 1: Trauma-informed diversity training	Trauma-informed diversity research-informed curriculum focuses upon strengthening relationships, which improves working environments
Innovation 2: Interactive diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) curriculum	Innovative DEIB research-informed curriculum includes aligning the current organisational diversity landscape and culture change, laying the groundwork for organisational diversity culture shifts, developing a framework for systematic diversity organisational learning, creating representative approaches to organisational diversity learning, and future aspirations and expectations of diversity learning initiatives
Innovation 3: Focus on systemic internal issues	The lack of success in organisational DEIB programs is they tend to neglect the systemic, organisational cultures
Innovation 4: Train for radical inclusion	Radical inclusion is an innovation that aims to embrace diversity authentically instead of obligatory HR initiatives
Innovation 5: GEMBA (quality walks)	GEMBA's purpose is to permit managers and leaders to view the existent work activity, engage with organisational stakeholders, advance expertise about the work process, and reconnoiter prospects for continuous improvement
Innovation 6: Linking Heutagogy (self-determined learning) to DEIB Curriculum	A grounded theory approach to research-based curriculum design where evidence-based frameworks are utilised to collect and analyse data

### 3.5 DEIB continuous improvement

Increasing knowledge and understanding diversity and inclusion is a continuous process. Further, the mitigation of hostile work practices must be an objective of training and development for organisation change management to work. For instance, DEIB training helps organisations improve both workplace culture and financial results. Organisations maximise return on investment through DEIB strategic management. Leaders must use a no-tolerance policy regarding hostile work environments as they impact profitability and organisational culture. This ethos starts with leadership and HR. The benefits of well-managed organisations who value employees with respect, inclusion, and equity is

in direct correlation to improved organisational outcomes, corporate social responsibility (CSR), productivity, and revenue streams (El-Amin, 2022).

### 3.6 Building collective responsibility among curriculum teams

Facilitators have a responsibility to participants, administrators, and the institutional system when developing innovative, research-informed, evidence-based curriculum (Zhang et al., 2009). Intentionality is increasingly noteworthy in the present education environment because of competition and resources available in the digital format. An exact comprehension of an institution's internal operations drives an impetus to design innovative curriculum, linked to curriculum evaluation (Nilsen, 2000). To this end, it is imperative that DEIB facilitators and organisations develop DEIB curriculum by considering subject requirements, participant level, participant abilities, learning styles, technological capacity, administrative support, collaboration, engagement, and facilities (Roth and Kadri, 2016).

## 4 Modelling an innovative mindset

Systematically modelling an innovative mindset and leading collective responsibility necessitates working with stakeholders and partners to develop a comprehensive, effective curriculum (Park et al. 2019). Stakeholder engagement focuses on knowledge acquisition mechanisms such as: (experiential, pragmatic, and collaborative) and organisational learning processes (information distribution, information interpretation, and organisational structure), by examining their impact on the engagement of facilitator-participant focused responsiveness, innovation, and simulation improvements occur (Ritchie et al, 2007). As a result, these consequences demonstrate that participant learning relates to responsive and evaluative metrics based on participant performance (Park et al. 2019). All the more remarkable, the incorporation of administrator-facilitator-stakeholders ensures engagement, innovation, collective responsibility, support, understanding, and best-in-class execution of innovative, research-informed, evidence-based curriculum (Nilsen, 2000; Ritchie et al., 2007; Whalan, 2014; Roth et al., 2016; Hillen, 2020).

**Table 3** Curriculum innovation chart

<i>Steps</i>	<i>Innovation element</i>	<i>Function</i>	<i>Research support</i>
1. Assemble a team of content experts in the area of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB)	Innovations overview: Curriculum innovations occur when facilitators develop learning experiences by testing novel curriculum and instruction and is an iterative, integrative, and collaborative process	Building collective responsibility	Provide evidence-based research and activities to support training

**Table 3**     Curriculum innovation chart (continued)

<i>Steps</i>	<i>Innovation element</i>	<i>Function</i>	<i>Research support</i>
2. Innovative mindset: work with individual organisations to establish tailored DEIB training incorporating the vision of DEIB training and with purpose/intentionality apply innovations based on the need of the organisation			
3. Opportunities are provided for the team to collaborate to identify specific creative elements for each innovation			
	Innovation 1: Trauma-Informed Diversity Training	Building collective responsibility	Trauma-informed diversity research-informed curriculum focuses upon strengthening relationships, which improves working environments (Herring and Henderson, 2015)
	Innovation 2: Interactive diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) curriculum	Building collective responsibility	Innovative DEIB research-informed curriculum includes aligning the current organisational diversity landscape and culture change, laying the groundwork for organisational diversity culture shifts, developing a framework for systematic diversity organisational learning, creating representative approaches to organisational diversity learning, and future aspirations and expectations of diversity learning initiatives (Golom, 2018)

**Table 3** Curriculum innovation chart (continued)

<i>Steps</i>	<i>Innovation element</i>	<i>Function</i>	<i>Research support</i>
	Innovation 3: Focus on Systemic Internal Issues	Building collective responsibility	The lack of success in organisational DEIB programs is they tend to neglect the systemic, organisational cultures (Mensi-Klarbach and Risberg, 2019)
	Innovation 4: Train for Radical Inclusion	Building collective responsibility	Radical inclusion is an innovation that aims to embrace diversity authentically instead of obligatory HR initiatives (Coughlan et al., 2019)
	Innovation 5: GEMBA (Quality Walks)	Building collective responsibility	GEMBA's purpose is to permit managers and leaders to view the existent work activity, engage with organisational stakeholders, advance expertise about the work process, and reconnoiter prospects for continuous improvement (Alnadi, et al., 2021)
	Innovation 6: linking Heutagogy (self-determined learning) to DEIB curriculum		A grounded theory approach to research-based curriculum design where evidence-based frameworks are utilised to collect and analyse data (Hase and Kenyon, 2000)

## 5 Summary

Given evidence-based curriculum development, its findings, and implications; consideration of benchmarking may help to improve educational gap alignment by incorporating strategy to improve effectiveness promotes and justifies the design of the innovation DEIB training plan (Winstone et al., 2022). Additionally, benchmarking in successful DEIB programs is an excellent way to ensure organisations perform well. Benchmarking permits administrators to identify satisfactory practices, prioritise opportunities for improvement, and enhance workforce productivity (Azeem and Mataruna, 2019). As a result, benchmarking happens in many organisations and used as a methodology to broaden efficiency and reap competitive advantages.

The importance of fostering DEIB training within the context of CPE impacts the values, beliefs, and assumptions of professionals. The goal of facilitation is to provide meaningful shared experiential activities, provide opportunities for critical reflection and embodiment, develop an awareness of personal and professional relative influences, and cultivate engaging course content. As a result, adult education can be complicated and challenging as a form of facilitation. Finally, CPE has the role of developing individuals, which is critical to keeping professionals abreast of new and innovative practices in the DEIB field.

By implementing varied training approaches within a comprehensive DEIB training plan, organisations can work towards creating inclusive and equitable workplaces. Additionally, to define and accomplish familiarity within the CPE field, evidence-based literature, significant trends, and issues related to continuing professional education are required. Likewise, TET provided a framework for understanding CPE. Consequently, investigation and critique of CPE in application were explored. As such, a philosophy and worldview perspective of CPE within DEIB training was developed.

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