

Motivation Science Can Improve Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Trainings

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Abstract

Recent reviews of efforts to reduce prejudice and increase diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in the workplace have converged on the conclusion that prejudice is resistant to change and that merely raising awareness of the problem is not enough. There is growing recognition that DEI efforts may fall short because they do not effectively motivate attitudinal and behavioral change, especially the type of change that translates to reducing disparities. Lasting change requires sustained effort and commitment, yet insights from motivation science about how to inspire this are missing from the scientific and practitioner literatures on DEI trainings. Herein, we leverage evidence from two complementary approaches to motivating change and reducing defensiveness: self-determination theory, a metatheory of human motivation, and motivational interviewing, a clinical approach for behavior change, to tackle the question of how to improve DEI efforts. We distill these insights for researchers, teachers, practitioners, and leaders wanting to apply motivational principles to their own DEI work. We highlight challenges of using this approach and recommend training takes place alongside larger structural and organizational changes. We conclude that motivation is a necessary (but insufficient) ingredient for effective DEI efforts that can energize personal commitment to DEI.

Keywords

diversity training, prejudice reduction, self-determination theory, motivational interviewing

Recent reviews of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) trainings¹ have highlighted that there is a long way to go in systematic, high-quality research evaluating its effectiveness (Devine & Ash, 2022) and that the evidence that exists shows modest effects immediately following the intervention but few lasting effects (e.g., Lai et al., 2016; Paluck et al., 2021). Likewise, DEI trainings often fall short of driving the type of change that translates to real-world gains in inclusivity in workplaces (Chang et al., 2019; Kalev et al., 2006). Chang and colleagues (2019) demonstrated this in an impressive field experiment. Their findings showed attitude improvement among people who took the diversity training, but when the researchers examined long-term effects, they found these did not translate to workplace behaviors months later.

Recently, there have been calls to improve the effectiveness of DEI trainings by addressing a missing element: attendees' motivation (Carter et al., 2020; Hagiwara et al., 2020; Onyeador et al., 2021; Schmader et al., 2022). In the current article, we consider how

the motivational principles of self-determination theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2017), a “top-down” or theory-driven approach to motivating behavior change, and motivational interviewing (MI; Miller & Rollnick, 2012a), a “bottom-up” or clinical experience-driven approach to behavior change that shares many of the same basic principles (Miller & Rollnick, 2012a), can improve DEI efforts at work. We focus here on DEI trainings, although these motivational principles can also be applied to other workplace efforts, such as conversations with supervisees and communicating about new organizational policies and initiatives. We posit that there is much to be gained by putting motivational perspectives at the forefront of DEI efforts and propose a bold and potentially controversial approach that runs counter to many existing ones.

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We apply a clinical perspective to a social phenomenon and public-health issue (Devakumar, Selvarajah, et al., 2020), building on prior health-behavior-change work that uses both SDT and MI (Patrick & Williams, 2012; Teixeira et al., 2012) to address the problem of prejudice in a meaningful and sustained way. This approach is based on the premise that attending to motivation when implementing DEI efforts allows individuals to take responsibility to decide for themselves how much to change and why they might do so. The approach is collaborative and not prescriptive, and it respects individual autonomy.

Building on evidence-based clinical techniques within MI, we share concrete steps to implement motivational principles in DEI work, explain how they support basic psychological needs according to SDT, and make a case for why each is important for attitude and behavior change. Thus, we have two goals for this article: propose a theoretically derived approach to motivating change in the context of DEI trainings and help people to implement it in their own DEI work. Furthermore, we explore challenges of using this motivational approach, such as validating individuals without validating prejudiced views they may express. We also recognize that any DEI training should happen alongside larger structural and organizational changes. Finally, despite the merit of this approach, we conclude that motivation is a necessary but insufficient ingredient for effective DEI efforts in that it can help to get people *started* in caring about DEI in an authentic and self-driven way.

Treating the Problem of Prejudice

At first glance, it may seem odd to tackle prejudice by applying the same motivating principles used in SDT and MI to treat substance addiction. What does prejudice have in common with a health behavior such as quitting smoking, a behavior that SDT (Figuroa-Moseley et al., 2006; Hiemstra et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2002) and MI (Hettinga & Hendricks, 2010; Lindson et al., 2019; Rollnick et al., 2010) have a strong evidence base in treating? First, prejudice, and racism in particular, has been recognized as a public-health problem (Andrews, 2021; Devakumar, Selvarajah, et al., 2020; Saguy et al., 2014) that exists, in part, at the level of individual attitudes and behaviors.² Framing prejudice as a public-health problem conveys its pervasiveness, the larger structural forces that shape it, and when left untreated, its potential to cause great harm to the groups targeted (Devakumar, Shannon, et al., 2020; Godlee, 2020). It also suggests that health-behavior-change approaches may offer a remedy.

Second, both prejudice and addiction can be thought of as bad habits. Acts of prejudice, such as derogatory language or biased decisions, have been described as deeply rooted and detrimental habits driven in no small part by heuristics (Devine, 1989), in much the same way that addiction involves, in part, automated habits that compel behavior (Everitt & Robbins, 2005). Although bias can exist with conscious awareness under volitional control, biases are thought to operate largely outside of awareness (Dovidio et al., 2002). Like prejudice, some variability in addiction is believed to be under volitional control, but the amount of control varies between individuals and contexts (Heather, 2017). One might speculate individuals have more control over their prejudice than their addiction—substances are physiological addictions with profound rewards. Yet prejudice offer its own rewards, including team cohesiveness (McGregor, 1986), benefiting from privilege (Lenski, 2013), and affirming identity (Fein & Spencer, 1997). In support of this view, a “habit-breaking” bias-reduction intervention focusing on awareness, raising concern, and strategies to counteract bias showed success in both the short and long term (Devine et al., 2012).

Third, prejudice, much like addiction, is judged negatively by society, and much like the labels “addict” or “alcoholic,” people who exhibit prejudice are labeled (e.g., “racist,” “sexist”; Bouvier, 2020). This makes it riskier to share negative attitudes with people who may disagree and tempting to discuss them only with others who are similarly minded. It is easy to understand why these negative judgments occur—expressions of racism, sexism, homophobia, or other forms of prejudice are harmful to individuals who hold those identities and to the broader workplace culture. However, just as MI argued for a compassionate approach to treating addiction (Miller & Rollnick, 2012b), we argue for a compassionate approach to treating prejudice by making a behavior-versus-person distinction: One can value the person while condemning the behavior. The idea of humanizing someone expressing prejudice may feel aversive, especially for people who have been on the receiving end of prejudice and discrimination. However, valuing people despite their prejudiced views allows one to connect with those individuals as a first step to engaging them.

Two Complementary Approaches to Motivating Inclusion

What can be learned from SDT and MI to motivate greater DEI within workplaces? SDT and MI both discuss how to motivate effective and sustainable behavior change and why it happens. They overlap and

complement one another to a large degree, and so we focus here on the insights each approach brings for motivating prejudice reduction. SDT provides the theoretical underpinnings for understanding why effective and lasting change happens, and MI provides guidance on how to bring about this change using concrete strategies that are well suited to DEI training.

Both approaches share the humanistic view that people will naturally move toward growth if provided the right nutrients by the social environment because each individual is guided by an active, agentic self (Deci et al., 2013; Rogers, 1961). SDT, in particular, studies the “bright” and “dark” sides of human behavior, arguing that with the right provisions from the social environment, people are naturally inclined toward helping and inclusivity (Amiot et al., 2012; Weinstein & Ryan, 2010). Thus, both seek to gently facilitate rather than demand change, and they recognize that lasting change must come from individuals listening to their own deeply held values. Second, relatedly, both emphasize the importance of self-directed action and choice in supporting individuals to find their own way of making positive changes.

In addition, both approaches take the stance that individuals are their own experts (Deci & Ryan, 2012). In light of this view, before flooding attendees with content, training facilitators might ask attendees to consider how their own values and goals align with the objectives of the training. In other words, SDT and MI argue that facilitators evoke motivation and emotions in attendees alongside presenting informational content that explains the problem at hand and the need to tackle it. Third, these approaches are careful to avoid shaming and stigmatizing attendees. This can be difficult to achieve because prejudice and discrimination are unacceptable at work. Despite this reality, individuals, but not their biased actions, can be valued by avoiding labels (e.g., “He is a racist”) and by normalizing biases and the cognitive, interpersonal, and structural forces that give rise to them. SDT helps to explain why this is important to do: Shaming can shut down capacity for self-reflection because individuals are put in the position of defending their value and esteem rather than being open to explore how their biases may contradict important values they hold (Legate & Weinstein, 2023).

SDT highlights the why

SDT is a top-down theoretical framework with a strong evidence base that is centered on inspiring optimal motivation and well-being in others (Deci & Ryan, 2000). SDT highlights that motivation underlying any behavior varies on a spectrum ranging from outside of the individual to

fully internalized within the individual. Behavior that is motivated by threats, pressure, or demands from others or the social context is termed “controlled motivation.” Controlled motivation also encompasses acting to avoid feelings of shame or guilt (self-imposed pressures and demands that echo the voices of others). When people have controlled motivation to inhibit prejudice, they do so to avoid feeling guilty or looked down on by others or out of fear they will get in trouble if they do not (Legault et al., 2007). On the other hand, “autonomous motivation” for a behavior comes from personally recognizing its importance, finding the behavior inherently rewarding, or aligning that behavior with one’s core values. A large body of work across varied domains has demonstrated that autonomous motivation predicts long-term behavioral change, whereas controlled motivation does not (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Sheeran et al., 2021; Su & Reeve, 2011).

Social environments can promote autonomous versus controlled motivation and meaningful behavior change by supporting individuals’ basic psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Individuals experience autonomy when they are choiceful and volitional in their actions and when behaving in ways that are consistent with their core values. They experience “relatedness” when they feel close and connected to others, trusted, and understood. Finally, individuals feel a sense of competence when they can effectively pursue and achieve meaningful goals (Deci & Ryan, 2000). A large literature in SDT, especially within the domain of health-behavior change, shows that supporting needs is essential to fostering autonomous motivation and lasting behavior change (Ng et al., 2012; Sheeran et al., 2021). One foundational experimental study (Legault et al., 2011) examined this in the context of prejudice reduction and showed that supporting autonomy when presenting information about prejudice reduction led to lower prejudice, whereas thwarting autonomy with control and shame “backfired” and led to higher levels of prejudice compared with a neutral condition. Although this study did not examine whether effects were lasting, it demonstrates promise for need-enhancing strategies applied to DEI interventions and the potential costs of strategies that thwart needs.

Although SDT has strategies to support needs when implementing DEI trainings (see Legate & Weinstein, 2023), we focus on the clinical strategies within MI herein because they support psychological needs while being more directive in catalyzing behavior change. Directive strategies may be particularly well suited to promoting DEI in organizations because organizations have much to lose if employees do not act inclusively (Dover et al., 2020).

MI highlights the how

MI is described as a “client-centered, directive method for enhancing intrinsic motivation^[3] to change” (Miller & Rollnick, 2002, p. 25). Like SDT, it is concerned with helping people to take interest in their own change process. This approach was formed in response to persuasion-information-based interventions that attempted to motivate change through informing individuals of their detrimental behavior and its potential harm, which tended to be ineffective and elicited more defiance than compliance (Graybar et al., 1989; Pavey & Sparks, 2009). MI argued that it is important that clients take responsibility for themselves to decide why they should change and to identify goals that feel worthwhile and attainable. These tasks cannot be done to or for them: MI is collaborative rather than prescriptive and values the autonomy of clients.

MI has shown strong efficacy with change-resistant behaviors such as smoking or drinking, and randomized controlled trials have shown improvements lasting 2 years compared with educational approaches in treating addiction (Calomarde-Gómez et al., 2021; McCambridge & Strang, 2004; Miller & Baca, 1983; Staton et al., 2022). Furthermore, MI appears to complement other approaches; for example, combining MI with existing information-based approaches can show sustained effectiveness (Burke et al., 2003; Hettema et al., 2005). MI complements SDT well: Whereas SDT is concerned with supporting psychological needs to promote autonomous motivation and is therefore equally interested in engaging with individuals across the spectrum of “change readiness” (Miller & Tonigan, 1997), MI was specifically developed for people who are not yet “on board” with change. Together, these approaches help to tackle different levels of resistance attendees may bring.

SDT and MI are particularly concerned with reducing defensiveness

Before MI was developed, clinical interventions to treat addiction were dominated by the use of pressure to motivate change and blame when failing to do so (Prochaska et al., 1993). Miller and Rollnick (2012b) argued that the confrontational nature of blame created a self-fulfilling cycle by increasing defensiveness and preventing individuals from engaging in the process of positive change. They suggested that even people resistant to change should be listened to in order to form a compassionate and collaborative relationship. They further argued practitioners should assume some resistance at the outset and that their task is to reduce or alleviate these feelings collaboratively (Miller & Rollnick, 2012b; Rollnick et al., 2008). Specifically, defensiveness is

conceptualized as a normal part of a client’s “ambivalence,” the cognitive state of both wanting to change and wanting things to stay the same (Miller & Rollnick, 2012b). In MI, facilitators give voice to both sides of ambivalent attitudes and treat both sides as valid. If facilitators press too heavily on the side of change, clients will naturally feel the need to give voice to the side of them that wants things to stay the same (i.e., defensiveness).

In the context of prejudice reduction, treating defensiveness as normal and valid may seem counterintuitive, but defensive reactions are often present even if they are unspoken. In general, discussing prejudiced attitudes and behaviors has the potential to elicit feelings of defensiveness (Howell & Ratliff, 2017; Onyeador et al., 2021). Furthermore, concepts commonly covered in DEI trainings, such as “privilege,” commonly elicit defensiveness (Phillips & Lowery, 2015), as does merely telling people their biased attitudes may be different from what they believe them to be (Howell et al., 2013, 2017). Ignoring defensive feelings, or worse, shaming people for them, is likely to backfire by stifling self-reflection and inducing a desire to protect against the interpersonal threat (Cramer, 1998; Guo & Main, 2012).

To facilitate willingness to explore and even challenge one’s assumptions, beliefs, and behaviors, it is important to reduce defensiveness by providing a supportive motivational climate. Prior work suggests that this can be done in part through nonjudgmental listening—a tool fundamental to both SDT and MI—in conversations about prejudice (Itzchakov & Weinstein, 2021; Kalla & Broockman, 2020; Weinstein et al., 2022). In experimental studies, nonjudgmental listening predicted lower prejudice because it increased people’s openness to change (Itzchakov et al., 2020). Experimental work by Kalla and Broockman (2020) also demonstrated that nonjudgmental listening reduced anti-immigration and transphobic attitudes at scale and in a real-world canvassing study. Taking this together, DEI trainings can elicit defensive feelings in attendees, but nonjudgmental interactions can buffer these reactions and inspire greater openness and self-reflection.

On the flip side of this, SDT explains how motivators can fuel defiance, often unintentionally: They thwart autonomy by motivating through pressure, shame, and guilt. Specifically, when motivators use these controlling tactics, their efforts restrict the feeling of autonomy and produce defiance, a tense desire to reassert freedom through refusing to cooperate with the motivator (Van Petegem et al., 2015; Vansteenkiste et al., 2014). This phenomenon has been observed in experimental studies, including one that generalized across 89 countries, wherein a controlling public-health message that attempted to produce behavioral change through

pressure and shame yielded higher rates of defiance than when that same message was expressed in an autonomy-supportive way (Psychological Science Accelerator Self-Determination Theory Collaboration, 2022).

Lessons for DEI Trainings

Reviewing above, both MI and SDT recognize that individuals need to be placed at the center of their own positive change; change through pressure and coercion will be ineffective or even counterproductive. The internal state of the attendee who is undergoing training is therefore crucial to consider; conveying information to the attendee is not enough. We focus herein on lessons from SDT and MI in optimizing a DEI training, starting with building rapport or a trusting relationship with attendees, eliciting attendees' own motivation to make their workplaces more inclusive (and equally important, exploring their desire for things to stay the same), discussing any changes attendees want to make, and finally, providing skills to help them make those changes. Using the concrete strategies within MI⁴ along with the psychological needs they satisfy within SDT, we illustrate a change-focused DEI intervention that informs both how facilitators can educate (e.g., building on the didactic approach of a training session) and inspire change. Table 1 presents a simplified version of these ideas with applied examples, and we have labeled each to facilitate integration between the table and text.

Strategy 1: building rapport through empathy

First, it is crucial that facilitators build rapport and trust with attendees; a collaborative journey toward change must be built on a positive working relationship. Facilitators do this by valuing attendees, listening with humility, showing compassion, helping attendees to express concerns, and meeting concerns with little judgment (Miller & Rollnick, 2012b). Applied to the topic of DEI trainings, the facilitator asks *open-ended questions* (Table 1, 1a) to understand the attendee's perspective (e.g., reasons for being in the training, concerns they have) and engages in *reflective listening* (Table 1, 1b) to help validate and convey understanding when attendees share. Facilitators undermine rapport by judging and labeling attendees or discounting or ignoring a legitimate self-disclosure. MI and SDT understand these undermining strategies to be counterproductive to buy-in and likely to produce resistance from attendees, particularly from people who are not already on board with inclusion values. Instead, the facilitator attempts to convey gentle curiosity or interest in individuals and their values, which the facilitator can

express through a warm and receptive tone of voice (Weinstein et al., 2018), open body language (Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017), and use of receptive and nonjudgmental language (Shrivasta et al., 2014). As some examples of this, the facilitator could provide empathy for feelings of frustration at having to attend "yet another" DEI training, anxiety about saying "the wrong thing," or validate how hard it can be to acknowledge the privileges and the advantages people may have received in their lives. Through these actions, facilitators convey their willingness to engage the attendee without judgment and role model how to engage with people who have dissimilar views. Work by Kalla and Broockman (2020) demonstrated the effectiveness of this type of nonjudgmental listening on prejudice, and notably, it is one of the few studies in the prejudice-reduction literature to demonstrate long-term effects.

Although empathy has been a feature of prior interventions to reduce prejudice, it has centered on building the participant's empathic understanding *for out-group members* (e.g., Broockman & Kalla, 2016; Kalla & Broockman, 2023; Okonofua et al., 2021). These types of empathy inductions can be very effective, and we could imagine using one to strengthen people's commitment to prejudice reduction (e.g., Table 1, 3b). However, we are not aware of any research that explicitly provides empathy to *the participant* for how challenging DEI work can be. Two studies suggest the benefits: Kalla and Broockman's (2020) work using nonjudgmental listening concluded that an atmosphere of nonjudgment may be the key to reducing defensiveness and persuading bias reduction. Other experimental and longitudinal work showed that feeling accepted by the out-group increased people's autonomous motivation to reduce their prejudice (Kunstman et al., 2013). But considering the views of MI and SDT, we want to go a step further and suggest that facilitators intentionally validate and empathize with the challenges and discomfort inherent in meaningful DEI work, such as examining one's biases and privileges and confronting biased actions in others and in institutions.

It is important to distinguish validating individuals and feelings that come up for them versus validating a prejudiced attitude they may express. Facilitators must empathize and validate precisely so that a prejudiced attitude does not get reinforced—an iatrogenic outcome of a DEI training. For example, if an attendee expresses prejudice, the facilitator can reflect on how these attitudes come from societal messages the individual has been exposed to while simultaneously questioning whether these attitudes align with other values the attendee may hold or the values or ethos of the attendee's organization. This approach echoes strengths of unconscious-bias training, which focuses on educating about the source of biases

Table 1. Mapping Motivational Interviewing Strategies Onto Basic Psychological Needs Within Self-Determination Theory With Applications to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Training

Strategy used in MI to create change	SDT need supported ^a	Explanation for why strategy may support the psychological need listed	Example of the MI strategy applied to DEI training
1a. Open-ended questions	Autonomy	Facilitates self-reflection and inner curiosity; nonpressuring	“How does inclusion fit in with your values?”
	Relatedness	Nonjudgmental; builds trust and rapport between attendees and the facilitator	
1b. Reflective listening	Autonomy	Helps attendees to feel understood and valued	Facilitate discussion about what attendees want to get out of a training and reflect back themes
	Relatedness	Builds trust and rapport	
2a. Offering double-sided reflection that gives voice to both sides of the argument	Autonomy	Nonjudgmental reflection that makes ambivalence explicit so the individual can reflect on both sides; normalizes ambivalence about changing	“You want to say something because it’s the right thing to do, but you don’t want to create trouble for yourself.”
2b. Rolling with resistance (working with, rather than against, defensiveness)	Autonomy	Allows attendees to reflect on more challenging feelings that stand in the way of change	“What will you lose if the culture at work changes?”
	Relatedness	Embracing and not judging resistance helps build trust between attendees and the facilitator	
2c. Amplifying reflections to exaggerate the point	Autonomy	A form of reflective listening that exaggerates a point; it develops discrepancy because people will naturally argue the other side	“It sounds like the organization is pretty perfect in being inclusive. There’s no room to grow.”
	Relatedness	Promotes trust when sincerely (and not cynically) conveyed	
2d. Offering summaries of discussed content	Autonomy	An elaborated form of reflective listening that sums up a larger conversation on the topic; can highlight ambivalent feelings that come up to facilitate reflective decision-making	Summarize points from multiple attendees about a topic, highlighting both the reasons to change and the reasons to stay the same
	Relatedness	Builds trust and rapport; shows listening attentively and valuing	
3a. Eliciting self-motivational statements (change talk that vocalizes commitment to making a change)	Autonomy	Strengthens attendees’ desire and commitment to change when they discuss wanting to change; focus is on statements that are autonomous versus controlled (want vs. should)	“Do you have any concerns about the current climate?” “What would you like things to look like?” “What changes, if any, are you thinking about making?”
3b. Developing discrepancy between current behavior and values	Autonomy	Makes it apparent that there is a problem that needs to be addressed; strengthens person’s own reasons to change	Empathy induction using a case study of someone affected by discrimination at work
4a. Supporting self-efficacy for change	Competence	Provides skills and guidance to help attendees accomplish goals they set	Role-play challenging scenarios (e.g., intervening when hearing a biased joke); provide reporting resources
4b. Providing affirmations	Competence	Emphasizes strengths to give attendees the confidence that they can change	Emphasize that the work attendees do is challenging and important “I see you really grappling with these challenging issues.”
	Relatedness	Helps to build trust with the facilitator; affirmations can be unexpected because attendees may expect to be shamed; must be sincere	

Note: Strategies are labeled (e.g., 1a, 4b) consistently in the table and in the text, in which each is elaborated on. MI = motivational interviewing; SDT = self-determination theory; DEI = diversity, equity, and inclusion.

^aColumn lists which need may be supported by the strategy in the first column. Autonomy involves feeling choiceful and volitional in one’s actions and behaving in ways that are consistent with core values. Relatedness involves feeling close and connected to others, trusted, and understood. Competence involves feeling that one is able to effectively pursue and achieve meaningful goals (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

(Fiarman, 2016; Ogunyemi, 2021), but also supports psychological needs and activates the individual's core values, which can bring about deeper, more meaningful change (Assor et al., 2020).

To do this properly, facilitators should be on board with the “spirit of MI,” which entails a belief in the inherent worth and potential of the other person, and openly offer acceptance and compassion (Miller & Rollnick, 2012b). According to Carl Rogers (1961), whose client-centered approach forms the conceptual basis of MI, people will naturally move in the direction of positive change when given these conditions. Failing to do so will further alienate people, leaving them alone with their conflict. However, it is very unlikely that this motivational approach will work for everyone—a small portion of the population does not value equality or care about the problem of racism or other forms of prejudice, and so, appealing to their values will not help (Livingston, 2021). But luckily, a much larger portion of the population will be flexible around their views when gently challenged to consider how they fit with other values they find important. In other words, we doubt this will be effective for everyone, but there is good reason to believe people risk more than they gain by not assuming everyone has the capacity for positive change.

Strategy 2: eliciting ambivalence

Establishing rapport allows facilitators to gently explore and challenge existing views, and one way they can activate attendees' motivation to change is by eliciting ambivalence. Eliciting ambivalence involves making attendees aware of their personal reasons for acting more inclusively but also their reasons for wanting things to stay the same. Attendees are therefore indirectly challenged to reflect on their reasons for and their resistance to change. Doing this makes both sides of people's reasons for and against change conscious so that people can make an informed choice about what to do next. It involves elucidating meaningful sentiments expressed, if even subtly, by the person via open-ended questions and reflecting back stated reasons both for and against change.

This approach requires some level of trust that attendees have values or goals that are inclusive. Indeed, research shows that most people do value helping—not hurting—others (Schwartz, 1994; Weinstein & Ryan, 2010) and desire positive relationships with the people they work with (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Asking attendees how a behavior (e.g., intervening on a racist joke) does or does not fit in with their values may inspire a desire to change (Hall et al., 2012) because it challenges them

to reflect on their behaviors alongside their other endorsed beliefs.

For example, instead of instructing attendees to intervene when they hear expressions of prejudice, facilitators would ask attendees to share the potential benefits of intervening (e.g., living in line with their values) as well as potential costs (e.g., fears about disrupting relationships with colleagues). The facilitator can highlight ambivalence through a reflection bearing both sides of an issue (a *double-sided reflection* Table 1, 2a; e.g., “It sounds like you want to live in line with your values, but you don't want to create trouble for yourself”). Implicit in this, both sides of the ambivalence are treated as valid, understandable, and natural, with resistance simply representing the side of the ambivalence of wanting things to stay the same.

It is natural for facilitators and others who deeply care about DEI to want to advocate for the side of change—in this case, the costs of prejudice and the benefits of inclusion. However, MI explains that although this can be useful at times, it places attendees in the position of defending the other side of the argument if they hold ambivalent feelings. In this case, the attendee will want to temper the facilitator's optimistic position by giving voice to why it is difficult to improve. MI instead proposes that *rolling with resistance* (Table 1, 2b)—avoiding confronting or fighting with resistance head on—disarms instead of fuels it. Facilitators roll with the resistance so that challenging feelings that have prevented change in the past are wrestled with by the attendee, not the facilitator.

It is important that attendees come to change insights themselves, and research shows that open-ended questions and reflective listening can catalyze them (Itzchakov et al., 2020; Kalla & Broockman, 2020). One helpful way of catalyzing change insights is through *amplified reflections* (Table 1, 2c), or adding meaning to what was said by taking a statement to its extreme. For example, a facilitator hearing an attendee say “There is nothing wrong with how things are at work” can reflect back “Things at work are perfect. There's no room to grow.” Generally, most people will come back with a more balanced statement and supply the reasons why a change might be needed. It is important that the facilitator be empathic and not convey mocking or judgment when amplifying. In addition, facilitators can ask open-ended questions such as “What will you lose if things change?” and reflect attendee concerns (e.g., losing comradery, no longer being able to joke at work).

Another effective way of integrating insights made on both sides of the issue of change are *summaries* (Table 1, 2d), or verbal interventions that review a

number of key ideas shared by attendees (Hettema et al., 2005). Summaries can achieve several goals. First, they make salient the key values and principles that were conveyed in a broader discussion by an attendee or among multiple attendees. Second, they convey the facilitator's listening, empathy, and understanding; build rapport; and role model value-driven exchanges. Finally, they promote self-reflection about changing by raising both the pros and cons of a change the person is considering and providing takeaways that condense complex issues.

Strategy 3: attending to self-motivational statements

Building on the insights gained when eliciting ambivalence, the facilitator can also attend to and strengthen "change talk," described in MI as key words and phrases that indicate the client is exploring the possibility of change (e.g., "I want to try to use more gender-inclusive language"). Likewise, within an SDT perspective, the facilitator would attend to and emphasize autonomous reasons for change (La Guardia, 2017). In fact, change talk is sometimes called *self-motivational statements* (Table 1, 3a), an arguably more appropriate term in that it recognizes the importance of autonomous motivation ("I'm starting to see it's in line with my values to use gender-inclusive language") in producing long-lasting change versus change talk that reflects controlled motivation ("I should use gender-inclusive language because I could get in trouble if I don't"), which is less effective at eliciting lasting change (Sheeran et al., 2020).

To encourage change talk that is autonomous and self-motivated, the facilitator collaborates with, rather than prescribes action to, attendees. The collaboration between facilitator and attendees is especially important because these motivational perspectives recognize that the decision to change ultimately rests with each individual. Following this assumption, the facilitator cannot simply "give" change talk to attendees ("You should use gender-inclusive language"). To create a collaborative environment, the facilitator asks open-ended questions such as "If you could make the work environment more inclusive, what could you personally do?" Thus, the facilitator asks attendees to envision changes they would like to make and reflects back phrases they hear (e.g., "I hear you saying you want to stand up for your colleague next time") to help them anchor to these visions. Indeed, these phrases may reflect people's willingness to engage action in line with their positive values, indicating that they have internalized the inclusive goals conveyed and are to some extent prepared to behave in line with them.

Developing discrepancy (Table 1, 3b) is another MI strategy that can strengthen the side of the ambivalence that desires change and corresponding self-motivational statements. The function of developing discrepancy is to help attendees understand that there is a problem with the status quo. In a DEI intervention, developing discrepancy would be designed to help attendees to explore the costs of prejudice in the workplace. To develop discrepancy, facilitators can ask open-ended questions ("What are the potential costs of ignoring the comment?"); present information about the negative impacts of racism, sexism, and other forms of prejudice; and perhaps most effective, help attendees experience empathy for individuals facing prejudice (Cikara et al., 2011; Gloor & Puhl, 2016). To strengthen change talk, facilitators can reflect statements attendees make about their desire to change.

In the final phases of an effective MI and MI-informed DEI training, facilitators seek a different type of change talk: that which strengthens attendees' commitment to DEI efforts. Alongside envisioning goals for change, MI emphasizes the importance of commitment to change, recognizing that setting goals is only a first step to pursuing them. The facilitator therefore elicits commitment from attendees to follow through on their newfound goals. Developing a commitment to change is especially well suited to the issue of prejudice reduction because working with individuals from diverse backgrounds represents a lifelong commitment versus a matter of completing competencies (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998).

Strategy 4: supporting self-efficacy

Building rapport, eliciting ambivalence, and attending to change talk together function to get buy-in from attendees, to help them understand and internalize the personal importance and meaning of change such that they are agents behind their own DEI journey. But buy-in is not enough. Once buy-in is achieved, the facilitator further strengthens the attendees' likelihood of change by *supporting self-efficacy* (Table 1, 4a). After the attendee has set meaningful change goals, the facilitator can provide attendees with resources, explain concrete skills, and ask the larger group to generate concrete plans to help accomplish these goals. The facilitator also distinguishes between what can be achieved at the early stages of the DEI process and which goals are better viewed as future or long-term ambitions because they require more work, resources, or time to accomplish. Likewise, facilitators might also have attendees forecast obstacles to accomplishing a goal along with ways to overcome obstacles. Offering practical skills and guidance for attainable goals attendees set satisfies the SDT

need for competence, which drives behavior change by empowering individuals through the belief that they can affect their environment to achieve desirable ends (Ryan & Moller, 2017).

Alongside providing skills and guidance, facilitators can support self-efficacy throughout the training by providing sincere *affirmations* (Table 1, 4b) to attendees when possible. Unlike skills that are better suited to later stages of a training (after buy-in has been achieved), affirmations can be given early in a session, such as “I appreciate your willingness to share so openly” and “You didn’t want to come in, but you did it anyway.” Affirmations recognize and bolster attendees’ strengths, give them confidence that they can change, and encourage them to persevere (Glassman et al., 2013). However, not all affirmations are equally effective. Work in SDT (Carpentier & Mageau, 2013) suggests that affirmations that focus on malleable qualities, such as attendees’ behaviors, values, and effort (e.g., “I can see you are making enormous effort”), are more motivating than those that focus on dispositional qualities (e.g., “You are a very good person”).

Existing Evidence for Supporting Basic Needs for Prejudice Reduction

Together, these strategies are designed to leave attendees feeling that they are able to achieve (i.e., supporting competence) the DEI goals they feel are personally meaningful (i.e., supporting autonomy) with the help of an aligned facilitator who values them (supporting relatedness). In other words, the strategies described above satisfy all three of SDT’s psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2017; see Table 1). Although we are not aware of studies that have applied MI strategies to DEI work, a handful of studies within SDT have shown that supporting basic psychological needs is effective in motivating prejudice reduction. A key example, a multifaceted need-supportive intervention by Devine and colleagues (2012) was designed to increase autonomous motivation, support competence with skills and guidance to “break the habit” of prejudice, and boost relatedness by encouraging contact with and taking the perspective of diverse individuals. The intervention was effective at reducing race bias, measured through implicit and explicit measures immediately and at follow-up, compared with a control group. This intervention is frequently cited as one of the few prejudice-reduction interventions to demonstrate lasting effects. A separate study of the effects of psychological-need support in a prejudice-reduction effort by Legault et al. (2011) tested the effects of communicating about prejudice with autonomy-supportive strategies (e.g., emphasizing choiceful action) versus strategies that undermine

autonomy (e.g., pressure and shame). Results of their experiments showed that supporting autonomy reduced prejudiced attitudes, operationalized with both implicit and explicit attitude measures, through increasing participants’ autonomous motivation to reduce their prejudice. Conversely, controlling strategies backfired and increased prejudiced attitudes.

Our own correlational work in policing, a context in which prejudice reduction is of utmost importance (Cooper & Fullilove, 2020; Lammy, 2017), suggests that a need-supportive climate may be important for training. In a national survey of 34,529 police officers and staff in the UK, we observed a link between participating in antibias training and lower prejudice only when people perceived that the force communicated about prejudice reduction in need-supportive ways; there was no effect of training on attitudes in the absence of a need-supportive workplace climate (Legate et al., 2023).

Future Research Developing Inclusion and Prejudice-Reduction Efforts

The work of applying motivational principles to attitude and behavioral change in the context DEI trainings is nascent. The motivational approaches we have discussed, which have been heavily documented in other domains, need elaboration and application in the context of inclusion and prejudice-reduction efforts. We call on experimental and field researchers to test the application of MI techniques and SDT principles in this context. Experimental research that manipulates elements proposed here, such as bringing ambivalence to the forefront, creating attitude change from a place of compassion, and supporting self-efficacy, are all needed. In lab settings, some of these techniques may have a nonlinear effect across time and may even create initial discomfort. Ultimately, there is good reason to believe they would produce more buy-in, and so experimental studies should vary in the depth of their exploration and extent of additional measurements across time. Experimental studies can also test mediational models because there is good reason to believe that MI interventions will conduce psychological need satisfaction, autonomous motivation for change, and lower defiance, all of which provide explanations for why intervention strategies change attitudes and behaviors. Furthermore, reciprocal models could be examined. Although we argue here that interventions aimed at increasing need satisfaction are effective at reducing prejudice, prejudice reduction likely also increases need satisfaction. For example, demonstrating benefits to relatedness, identifying with broad and inclusive social groups acts as a “social cure” that positively affects health and well-being (Wakefield et al., 2019),

and previous experimental work has shown that excluding others thwarts people's own psychological needs for autonomy and relatedness, even when it feels like their excluding behavior was justified (Legate et al., 2021). Likewise, discrimination, prejudice, and stigma thwart relatedness (Lattanner & Hatzenbuehler, 2023). For this reason, successful prejudice-reduction effort likely provides relatedness benefits for attendees and others within the workplace.

Alongside specific manipulations, fieldwork is needed to develop these principles in real-world organization settings. It is challenging to develop robust and context-sensitive interventions in the real world (Ijzerman et al., 2020). The approaches we describe here benefit from extensive real-world applications in difficult circumstances but still require translation from clinical and health contexts to those having to do with effective attitude change. In doing this, understanding boundary conditions in the implementation of motivational DEI interventions, such as dosage, format, and aspects of the facilitator, will be critical for future research. For example, nonjudgmental listening can promote autonomous motivation and attitude change (Itzchakov et al., 2020), but it is unclear whether brief exposure to these strategies is sufficient to catalyze change or whether they need to be couched in a more comprehensive, multifaceted program. A review by Paluck and colleagues (2021) highlighted that most approaches to prejudice reduction use light-touch interventions with modest effects immediately following the intervention but that few investigate and find sustained effects. As a rare exception, work by Kalla and Broockman (2020) found that prejudice reduction from brief, nonjudgmental listening lasted through a 4-month follow-up, inspiring some optimism.

Future work may consider other competing models of change in contrast to the one we have explored in this article. For example, a different model of change would predict that injunctive norms—the expectations of what most others approve or disapprove of and what they ought to do (Cialdini et al., 1991)—can drive prejudice reduction mainly through individuals conforming to these expectations (Jacobson et al., 2011). Yet findings from this work (e.g., Jacobson et al., 2011) also show that injunctive norms have lower influence under conditions of exhaustion or depletion, suggesting that they may not be effective in influencing behavior under stressful work conditions or in high-stakes jobs such as policing or medicine.

Likewise, many of the principles we describe involve a facilitator interacting with attendees in a session that relies on bidirectional conversation. It is unclear whether a prerecorded session that uses many of the principles described here (open-ended questions, providing

affirmations, and even perhaps programming reflections based on common responses) would satisfy basic psychological needs in the same way. It will be important to define characteristics of the facilitator that inspire effective change. MI and SDT highlight that practitioner styles that are warm, gentle, and receptive may drive down defensiveness and promote engagement (Treasure, 2004) and that this may be conveyed through motivators' tone of voice (Weinstein et al., 2018) or nonverbal behaviors (Thompson & Almond, 2014). Understanding the level of training required to effectively implement these techniques will be important in guiding how to train facilitators and developing DEI interventions that are cost-effective.

Finally, it is important to consider the interpersonal and organizational context in which training takes place. For one, it seems likely that the identities of the facilitator and attendees interact. The effectiveness of the motivational strategies reviewed herein may be influenced by the social and cultural backgrounds of attendees and the facilitator and the match (or mismatch) in those characteristics. Research shows people have a harder time and become more defensive after hearing challenging feedback from an out-group member than when it comes from another in their in-group (Hornsey & Imani, 2004). However, making a shared characteristic salient, such as belonging to the same organization, may mitigate defensiveness (Hornsey & Esposito, 2009). Given the heavily interpersonal dynamic of the training principles discussed herein, these and other aspects of the interpersonal context should be explored in future work.

In addition, norms and the culture of an organization, especially those concerning treatment of prejudice and discrimination, are likely to affect the course of training and its outcomes. Training could facilitate discussions around organization-specific norms or practices that permit bias. It can also anticipate barriers that may get in the way of personal and organizational change. Developing discrepancy between an organization's DEI goals and its current practices, exploring attendees' motivation for challenging current practices, and offering empathy around the difficulties of doing this are some examples of how the facilitator can address the organizational context to enhance training. These approaches can also help develop individuals' autonomous motivation for tackling biases within their own workplaces.

Considerations for Using This Motivational Approach

In this article, we argued that MI and SDT offer empirically supported insights guiding a different way of tackling prejudice reduction. In addition to future research

that examines boundary conditions to the motivational approaches we proposed, there are challenges and considerations to keep in mind. These should be taken into serious consideration when incorporating the ethos and techniques we described into DEI trainings.

Training that involves active and open discussion about potentially challenging or threatening topics, rather than ones that use a pedagogic one-way approach, are powerful, but they are also more difficult to execute, and dynamics between attendees in the room are much more difficult to control. MI talks about “traps” that the facilitator can fall into that are counterproductive. These include asking questions repeatedly to a group who gives superficial responses, presenting themselves as an expert who must solve problems for the group, labeling or blaming attendees for their views, or focusing too early on delivering educational content that attendees may not be ready to receive. Thus, it may be that for motivational DEI interventions to work, the facilitator must be prepared and educated about how to gently, warmly, but also directly challenge attendees to stretch their comfort. Existing research shows that much of the variance in outcomes comes from the facilitator (Glerum et al., 2021), and this may be particularly true for DEI trainings.

Through this facilitator style, one that is gentle, empathic, and attentive, inclusive values are directly role modeled and conveyed to attendees. Through doing so, the facilitator gives attendees hope, as a way of showing them it is possible to change (Perls, 1969; Yahne et al., 2002). Understanding this, it is not just the content of training efforts that produce change; rather, facilitators can be more or less effective at delivering training (Project MATCH Research Group, 1998). This approach may not be suited or of interest to some practitioners; we recognize that a compassionate approach to prejudice reduction could be off-putting. However, we do not see another way to motivate meaningful and long-term change other than helping people bring out the best version of themselves by valuing them with compassion and empathy.

A second concern involves the possibility that in the spirit of compassion, the facilitator is seen to align with or validate attendees’ prejudiced attitudes. The key, and the challenge, is to balance a sense of compassion and valuing for the individual with a consistent and unbending value of upholding equity and inclusion. Facilitators must be intentional about separating out the individual and any biased views expressed when validating and providing empathy. We reviewed this in an earlier section on empathy but believe it is a crucial point that bears repeating.

Third, we do not anticipate that even the most robust motivational training will yield long-term change within hours or a day. Attitudes concerning out-groups are

deeply embedded and evident in children as young as age 7 (McGlothlin & Killen, 2010). Reshaping attitudes, learning inclusive behaviors, and then refining those behaviors with new standards and information is a life-long process (Fisher-Borne et al., 2015). There is reason to believe that a failure to recognize and convey the effort, patience, and time needed to invest in DEI growth results in counterproductive interventions (Ranganath & Nosek, 2008) and that a willingness to engage in self- and cultural exploration with humility is more effective and perhaps less naive than seeking to attain a sense of cultural competence (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). We therefore suggest that facilitators using this approach aim to plant a seed: Activate the inclusive values that drive autonomous motivation, provide attendees with reasons for and tools for greater self-reflection and action, increase their commitment to action, and provide a climate that reduces defensiveness and increases openness. Rather than expecting substantial attitude change in a brief period of time, more modest changes are more realistic and productive when designing trainings.

Finally, as many have pointed out before us, any DEI training needs to be conducted alongside substantial and carefully evaluated institutional and organizational changes (Carter et al., 2020). Increasing organizational accountability to its DEI goals (e.g., by hiring full-time staff positions dedicated to coordinating and monitoring progress toward these goals) and mentorship or networking programs for women and racial minorities are among the most effective (Kalev et al., 2006). Trainings should educate employees about the organization’s goals directed toward increasing DEI and what the organization is currently doing to meet those goals (Onyeador et al., 2021). Initiatives that signal the organization is committed to diversity increase the positive effects of training (Bezrukova et al., 2016). We suspect the opposite to be true as well: DEI trainings in an organization in which there is little to no structural accountability will not stick. We believe that the motivational principles applied herein could work equally well to enhance employee buy-in when communicating new policies and initiatives.

Conclusions

We propose an approach to DEI work that involves (a) valuing and offering empathy to individuals about feelings and reactions they share while simultaneously avoiding reinforcing any biases expressed; (b) embracing and giving voice to, instead of shaming, defensive reactions to help individuals work through their defenses; (c) acknowledging that individuals must themselves decide on the extent they will invest in DEI

while also clarifying behaviors that are not acceptable at work; and (d) prioritizing eliciting emotions and open self-disclosure from attendees over, or at least alongside, presenting educational content.

We recognize that there is little evidence for this motivational approach applied in an attitude context, and a great deal of work is needed to provide proof of concept. Such proofs of concept should be transparent, thoughtful, and vetted by people with lived experience facing prejudice and discrimination. Likewise, although in this article we focus on recommendations about processes that can boost attendee motivation to care about DEI, the specific content of DEI training based on the approaches we discussed must be empirically grounded and relevant to the challenges most salient to the particular organization in which training is embedded, the individuals in it, and people served by the company. Helping people to internalize content that misses the mark will not help anyone reach the ultimate translational goal of reducing disparities.

Although the approach may seem potentially controversial, we operate from the point of view that asking people to truly change or shift in their behavior and attitudes is a big ask. This is especially true for prejudice reduction, a notoriously change-resistant domain. By loosening control and granting attendees greater autonomy to drive their own change, one may be more likely to see lasting changes in attendees' behaviors. Decades of theory and research from MI and SDT suggest that doing so will drive individuals' creativity and persistence toward their own growth as inclusive members of the organization. We believe in trusting in the potential of people to change, versus just pressuring them, to motivate a meaningful personal commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

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Notes

1. We use the term “DEI training” to refer to structured and semistructured workshops designed to educate individuals about DEI topics. Throughout this article, we use “DEI trainings” to refer to antibias trainings, implicit-bias trainings, and

diversity trainings. These are often used interchangeably in the literature, although they contain important differences that are beyond the scope of this article.

2. Prejudice and discrimination exist at the structural, cultural, historical, and individual levels. We focus here on the individual level while recognizing that these levels are highly intertwined.

3. Some may disagree with the term “intrinsic motivation” as it is used here. It is typically defined as enjoyment in the activity with no separable outcome (White, 1959). Because behavior change is generally hard to do and can produce defensive reactions, other terms such as “internal motivation” or “autonomous motivation” may be more appropriate.

4. We focus herein on core MI strategies that can be applied to DEI trainings rather than an exhaustive list of MI tools.

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