



Do Differences Matter?

The Impact of Single-Identity Cohorts
on Training Outcomes

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Research has proven time and again that diverse teams outperform teams without diverse representation. For example, 87% of diverse teams make better decisions and 35% of diverse organizations outperform the competition. However, there are times when employees, especially employees in underrepresented groups, need opportunities to connect with peers who have a similar background. It provides a safe space to talk through their experiences and challenges and to support one another.

At The Humphrey Group (THG), we know training experiences can be a vulnerable space, so we wanted to know if employees from underrepresented groups prefer learning with other individuals from the same group or if they prefer learning in cohorts with others from different backgrounds.



TD

To conduct this research, we needed a client partner that is dedicated to fostering a diverse and inclusive culture. Enter TD. With nearly 95,000 employees across the globe, TD's mission is to "cultivate a service-oriented, barrier-free culture that attracts, invests in, and promotes all talent, reflecting the diverse communities it serves." TD has multiple initiatives in place dedicated to building inclusion and belonging, and it was interested in offering a leadership development experience specifically for Black, Indigenous, and Visible Minority leaders and allies. TD wanted to measure how providing identity-specific learning spaces contribute to employees' learning, sense of belonging, and level of confidence with taking on new leadership roles.



The *Inspiring Leaders*[™] Program

THG's *Inspiring Leaders*[™] program was selected to meet both TD's development goals and provide an opportunity to test the impact of dedicated identity-based cohorts on the learning experience. *Inspiring Leaders*[™] is a purpose-built space for Black, Indigenous, Visible Minority leaders, and allies to share their unique challenges and learn from one another while building leadership communication skills and a network of support. Participants engaged in asynchronous online learning modules, live virtual sessions led by a THG facilitator, and 30-minutes of 1:1 coaching. In addition to *Inspiring Leaders*[™], participants also engaged in a capstone project where they were given the chance to apply their learning and identify opportunities and recommendations for TD to continue to build a diverse and inclusive culture.

We worked in partnership with TD's Black Experience, Indigenous Peoples and Multicultural Network Executive Steering Committee to deliver this program to 28 employees across Canada and the U.S. The program was delivered in 3 cohorts, with 8-10 learners per cohort.

- Cohort 1:** Black, Indigenous Peoples, Visible Minority Employees, and Non-Visible Minority Allies
- Cohort 2:** Indigenous Peoples Learners Only
- Cohort 3:** Black, Indigenous Peoples, and Visible Minority Learners Only

Findings

To measure the impact, program participants responded to a set of pre-program and post-program surveys and responded to questions during a 30-minute, one-on-one post-program live feedback session. Inspiring Leaders Overall Feedback:



A Positive Experience – The vast majority of participants (**92%**) across all three cohorts described their program experience as positive. Participants appreciated having a safe, purpose-built space for learning as well as the opportunity to build practical communication skills.



Improved feelings of belonging – Half of the participants stated that the Inspiring Leaders™ program made a positive difference to their sense of belonging at TD. Of those who indicated the program made little to no difference, about a quarter of them said it was because they already felt a high sense of belonging at TD.



Higher confidence – **80%** of participants said they felt confident pursuing leadership roles at work after attending the program.



84% of all participants said they felt as if the learning opportunities provided by the organization contribute positively to their well-being at work



After the program, **100%** of participants said they can define the core traits of their authentic leadership



After the program, **92%** of participants said they can communicate with a clear message to their stakeholders



After the program, **92%** of participants said they could build a strong message that influences their audience's decision-making at work



After the program, **96%** of participants said they could inspire action from their stakeholders through communication at work





We were able to share our experiences in a place that was, for lack of a better term, safe. We could have those discussions that might otherwise be uncomfortable in a business setting.



Cohort-Specific Findings

- **Cohort Composition Made a Positive Impact –**
Most participants (85%) described the impact of their cohort on the learning experience as positive.
- **Presence of Non-Visible Minorities Impacted Feelings of Safety –**
30% of participants in Cohort 1 shared negative or mixed reactions to the presence of non-Visible Minority participants in the cohort. They said it impacted their feelings of safety and comfort with engaging in discussions and raised questions about how the cohorts were formed.
- **Most Participants Indicated a Preference for a Blend of Underrepresented Races and Ethnicities in Cohorts*, with the Exception of Indigenous Peoples –**
Indigenous participants indicated they have very few opportunities to connect with others like them, and this opportunity increased their feelings of connection and safety.

*It's also important to note the potential effects of bias influencing the participants' responses to this question as most respondents indicated a preference for the same racial/ethnic demographic design as the cohort they had participated in.

Conclusion

As a result of this research, it's clear that Black, Indigenous, and Visible Minority participants prefer having the opportunity to learn and connect with other Black, Indigenous, and Visible Minority participants in the classroom. However, with the exception of Indigenous Peoples, participants don't always prefer groups comprised of the exact same race or ethnicity. Offering multiple cohort options that best suit participants' needs and preferences gives participants the opportunity to self-select into the cohort they feel will best meet their needs. Additionally, if the program is advertised as being specific to particular identity groups, and individuals outside of the identity groups are included in the program (e.g., non-Visible Minority allies), it's important to communicate the participants' intentions for allyship, how and why the participants were chosen, and set clear expectations for all participants.



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- i. <https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/article/1742040/diversity-drives-better-decisions>
- ii. <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/why-diversity-matters>
- iii. <https://jobs.td.com/en/why-choose-us/diversity/>