

5 Measuring Outcomes

The problem of evaluation

From our surveys of trainers and clients there was little evidence of serious attempts at evaluation of the contribution of race relations training to the achievement of specific or general equality objectives. Our informants pointed out that it is very difficult to envisage a way of telling how much the training, as opposed to other measures, affects the way employees and organisations change. However, even if one accepts that evaluation will always fall a long way short of this, it is still perhaps the area of greatest confusion and least systematic action. Indeed, one reason for its relative neglect could be an unwillingness to acknowledge that it cannot give an absolute answer, and a consequent paralysis over developing evaluation systems from which one could expect useful but less grand results. Many of our informants, trainers and clients alike, suggested that the training in which they were involved had not been ‘properly’ evaluated, as if it were an area in which their courses were deficient when compared with others. Their view was that direct evaluation is feasible but they have been unable to do it; we argue in this chapter that, on the contrary, direct evaluation is not feasible, but the evaluation tools already in use are of value.

Many informants talked about appraisal of the whole equal opportunities effort, usually in terms of ethnic monitoring, targets, and profiles of employees and customers. When we asked whether any evaluation of the training itself had taken place, the most frequently mentioned evaluation tool was the self-completion form handed out at the end of the course. This kind of form usually asks participants to score various aspects of the course on a rating scale and to express their general views about its merits and any problems. Most of our informants were sceptical about its value in telling whether a course has achieved its aims, but said they do find it useful for amending and improving the running of courses, and identifying elements that cause

problems for trainees. One reason why the information is of limited value is that individual trainees may like course for reasons that have nothing to do with its impact in terms of their own learning or changes in the way they work; similarly a negative response may be elicited by an uncomfortable course which challenges a participant's work practice in exactly the way intended.

On many courses the trainees develop a personal or sectional action plan. Where the resources are available, this can be used as an aid to follow-up and evaluation: six months later the trainees can be asked about their progress on the action plan. Other in-service monitoring is also used to see what effects courses have: line managers are asked formally or informally about changes in the subsequent work of trainees.

There were several methods of evaluation. There were questionnaires filled out by those who received training - more than your usual 'happy sheet.' Part of the training involved drawing up an action plan and setting a timetable. Line managers were responsible for seeing action plans were implemented.
(Charitable organisation)

The monitoring is now beginning to show the results of the equal opportunity policies. Last year we achieved seven and a half per cent ethnic minority recruitment. Ten per cent of graduate recruitment is ethnic minorities, and 50 per cent women. Now we want to target areas where it should be higher.
(Large Finance Company)

During the course of the surveys we began to ask questions about the evaluation of other types of training in organisations. It appears that the agonizing over how to evaluate equal opportunities training is not matched by an interest in evaluating other types of training: very little evaluation of any training takes place. Perhaps this is because there is a general acceptance by employers that training is a necessary and acceptable part of staff development; the value of training per se is not therefore called into question. Equal opportunities training appears to be treated in a different way: as noted in Chapter 2, it is called to account in a way that other training is not.

Given these problems, it is worth unpicking the tangle of threads that make up the notion of evaluation. There seems to be a number of different things that we might want to measure, depending to some extent on the aims of the training. The list that follows may not be exhaustive, but it does show that the effects of training cannot be

conceived of as one-dimensional; and all of the items on the list have been assessed by one or more organisations in our survey.

Evaluation: Possible Indicators

- a. trainees' knowledge of the legislation and related concepts
- b. trainees' knowledge about their specific work duties in terms of equal opportunities
- c. trainees' beliefs about minority groups, women, race relations and other equal opportunities matters
- d. trainees' skills pertaining to equal opportunities (e.g interviewing)
- e. how well courses work, in terms of trainees' reactions, likes and dislikes
- f. the extent to which trainees feel antipathy towards racial minority groups and other disadvantaged groups
- g. on-the-job equality performance of individual trainees
- h. equality performance of a department or a whole organisation
- i. the policy and structure of a department or a whole organisation

Items (a) to (e) can be measured with some expectation of useful information pertaining to a particular training course or programme, using 'before and after' questionnaires (or, in the case of (e), simply a post-course questionnaire); they cannot, however, give direct evidence of improved equality performance. Changes in (g) to (i) can be measured as part of an organisation's comprehensive monitoring programme, but they do not necessarily help evaluate the contribution of training to the success of the overall equal opportunity package – though over time they might deliver some significant clues to this. As regards (f), the measurement of underlying racial antipathy, there is little hope of any valid 'before and after' test since a course would teach trainees the acceptable ways of saying things, irrespective of the tenacity of their personal feelings.

In summary, it would seem that it is practicable to evaluate the extent to which particular training courses achieve some of their short-term aims, but not their long-term equality outcomes; and it is

practicable to evaluate outcomes of overall equal opportunity programmes, but not the special contribution that the training makes to these. All of these assessments have value, but it is important to recognise what they are and what they are not. Except in informal, impressionistic terms, it is not possible to assess directly whether a training course 'works' in terms of improvements in equality performance of a department or organisation.

The contribution of individual trainers

With any course that relies on people to engage with participants on difficult issues, success is dependent on the skills, experience and abilities of the trainers; and in every field of education and training, a poor teacher can make a mess of a good syllabus, while a good teacher can take a dull or inappropriate syllabus and build a valuable learning experience on it. Equal opportunities training is no exception, and our interviews suggest that some of the generalisations about its value and its problems have been based on limited experiences with trainers, among whom there is a range of skills and abilities as there is among any group of professionals. Again we should make the point that people do not usually judge whole fields of training activity on the basis of a single experience: people would not assess the value of health and safety training, or keyboard skills training, on the basis of observing one course. Equality trainers feel that they are too readily judged as a whole group.

External and internal trainers

The jolt that training can give to an organisation is more effective, according to some informants, if the trainers are outsiders. Compared with internal trainers, staff see them as more neutral, impartial, professional and removed from the politics of the organisation, and so they are able to operate with an immediately greater degree of credibility. The use of outside trainers is not without its problems, however. Because outsiders know less about the organisation than the staff, they can make mistakes or pitch the training at the wrong level; these dangers are of course reduced in proportion with the amount of collaborative planning and familiarisation that can be arranged between the client and provider.

Clients' appraisal of the training

The problems of evaluation described above mean that it is difficult to give any hard and fast answers about the contribution of race relations or equal opportunities training to the equality efforts of the organisations we visited. We have to rely on the views of the informants and our general impressions of the degree to which the training has been successful in these terms. To add to this difficulty, some of the organisations are at relatively early stages in their equal opportunities programme and their training programme, and therefore any assessments of outcomes are provisional.

Nevertheless, it is our strong impression that race relations and equal opportunities training has, in the majority of organisations we visited, had a beneficial outcome in terms of the development and implementation of equal opportunity programmes. The mechanisms by which the training has made its contribution vary from organisation to organisation, but that is to be expected, given the long list of activities that fall under the heading of race relations and equal opportunities training. For example, some have benefited by policy development, others by improvements in recruitment and selection procedures, and others by increased sensitivity of staff to the needs of minority ethnic clients. There were few examples of training going badly wrong, and in those cases other training measures were taken to put matters right.

Indicators of overall equality performance of organisations were mentioned by informants as showing, at least in part, the effect of training. Some organisations quoted the changes in the ethnic profile of their workforce and applicants for jobs. Some pointed out changes in the management of their organisation – such as the voluntary organisation that now has an improved representation of black people on its executive committee. Others said that there have been tangible improvements in the quality of service delivery: in the public sector, rules and procedures for dealing with clients have been revised, with the aim of reducing room for discrimination, and more attention has been paid to the careful translation of leaflets and publicity into minority languages; voluntary organisations said they now had better links with ethnic community groups, and had broadened their work to include previously ignored ethnic groups (for example, one scheme which deployed young people to carry out repairs to churches expanded their work to include mosques); and organisations in all

Training for equality

sectors, including private companies, said they had changed their publicity and advertising material to reflect the multi-racial community. There is no doubt that a number of the employers we visited have seen considerable changes. Although, as suggested above, it is usually difficult to separate the contributions of different elements of the policy and programme, some informants made it clear that the training was a key part of the process:

Training has worked to the extent that it has created a climate where the majority of white workers support the idea of rights for all workers. It's got a lot to do with training.
(Local Authority)

The courses were positively received and generated enthusiasm... The presentation was sophisticated and action plans were produced at the end... Attitudes were challenged and several people said that although they thought they knew enough already, attendance at the course had raised their awareness considerably. As tangible evidence, there has been a marked improvement in the writing of job descriptions and person specifications.
(Higher Education Institution)

You can see that after one day of training it is dawning on them that what they are doing is discriminatory.
(Local Authority)

People talk about it now, and they didn't before. We are getting more applications from ethnic minorities and more get offered jobs.
(Large Minerals Company)

Some informants made less specific comments about the improvements that race relations training has led to, saying that staff have an improved sensitivity and feel for issues of race and discrimination, and that there have been clear improvements in the way things were done, although the improvements have not been measured – or are unmeasurable. For example, one informant said that two years ago staff were bewildered about taking on the issue of equality, but now they think it is part of their job, and they are capable of doing it. Often at least part of the aim of race relations training is changing the culture of an organisation, something which, if successful, can be felt but not measured. One informant talked of the training programme bringing their staff to a threshold of awareness about equal opportunities and thus enabling action; others said that things were being brought up, day to day, that never were before, and that queries related to equal opportunities were being referred to

personnel and training departments. The injection of equal opportunities change into the culture of an organisation can have other, more general effects, too: some informants said that race relations training has been important to developing the momentum for other changes within the organisation.

For voluntary and community organisations, and to some extent in local authority departments, one result of race-related training seems to be a change in their dealings with white clients: they are more likely to make a stand against racial abuse, harassment and exclusion. In some cases where staff were previously confused on the occasions when clients invited them to collude with racist views and even racist actions, the training equipped them to deal firmly with the problem. In some organisations this has been an important stage in opening up services and facilities to minority clients.

Sometimes another result of race related training and associated programmes is a heightened sense of identity among ethnic minority employees. In these cases it appears that the initiation of a discussion of racism and discrimination within an organisation allows people to voice common problems that were previously understood as individual difficulties. This process in turn becomes a further spur to the organisation's equal opportunities effort.

Although many informants said that training has led to improvements, some measurable and some not, in the equality performance of their organisations, others also reported satisfaction with the training but said there has been little actual progress on equal opportunities. They said that this is because other measures have not been sufficient to follow up the training with changes in the way their organisation works. This frustration was most common among specially appointed equal opportunities staff. They reminded us that there is a limit to what training can do, even if it is successful in its own terms, and that it could not work as a substitute for real organisational change.