

A CASE FOR CULTURAL DIVERSITY TRAINING

EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

This research project resulted in the development of a project charter document that can be used to initiate the implementation of cultural diversity training in a large urban fire department. The problem was there was an assumed need for cultural diversity training within the organisation. The purpose of the project was to produce a project charter to action the implementation of cultural diversity training within the Department.

This research employed both historical and action research, to address the following research questions. What cultural diversity training have other fire services or organisations provided to their staff? What are the benefits of cultural diversity training for staff in organisations? What potential problems exist for the organisation if such training is not undertaken? What indicators in the organisation's community demonstrate the need for such training?

The principal procedures employed form part of action research methodology and visiting the experience of initiatives where such training could have been of benefit.

The major outcomes of the research were principally the production of a project charter acceptable to the organisation and identification of; the presence of such training in other organisations, training benefits, problems if such training is not undertaken and the indicators that demonstrate the need for such training in the organisation's community.

The recommendations resulting from this research included (a) accessing similar programs prior to course content finalisation, (b) inviting tenders from recommended providers of similar programs, (c) undertaking a four level evaluation of the planned program, (d) measuring where possible benefits of programs, (e) including multicultural community and

political representatives in program communication strategy, and (f) including pilot program outcomes in communications strategy.

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INTRODUCTION

The Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Service Board (MFESB) operates within a large urban environment in the city of Melbourne, Australia. This environment contains a number of significant features. It is geographically large with an area to provide service within of some 1,200 square kilometres. It has a large population of 3.5 million. It is a multicultural city that has developed since the second world war into a city of many different racial origins and many residents with a non English speaking background.

The MFESB in the past few years has undertaken a number of initiatives in meeting the fire education needs of its community. The problem is that there is a need for cultural diversity training (CDT) of MFESB staff to better deliver existing and future educational programs and to also improve its ability to do business with its community.

The purpose of this research project is to develop a project charter for the implementation of cultural diversity training within the MFESB. Historical and action research methods are employed to answer the following questions:

1. What cultural diversity training have other fire services or organisations provided to their staff?
2. What are the benefits of cultural diversity training for staff in organisations?
3. What potential problems exist for the MFESB if such training is not undertaken?
4. What indicators in the MFESB community show the need for such staff training?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The MFESB exists in a significant multicultural and NESB environment. Twenty-eight point eight per cent of Melbourne's population has a language other than English as the first language spoken at home (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1993). The political head of the State

of Victoria also holds the ministerial portfolio of multicultural affairs. The current government is committed to meeting the special needs of the population's demographic make up. It recently instituted a policy that 5% of the advertising expenditure of all government and its agencies must be dedicated to languages other than English.

The MFESB has undertaken a variety of activities to provide services to NESB parts of its community. In 1995, the MFESB Fire Prevention department undertook research following guidelines found in the publication *The Community - Based Fire Safety Program Preliminary Report*, published by Tridata Corporation (Rossomondo and Schaenman, 1993).

The research sought to gain an appreciation of the degree of fire safety knowledge and smoke alarm presence in the Vietnamese community. The process was inclusive and sought to involve the target population in problem identification, strategy development and implementation. The experience led the MFESB to become more active and focused in its fire safety education for NESB communities. A number of NESB specific education programs were developed and NESB components were added to existing programs from 1995 through to present time.

Some of the more significant programs include:

- FLAMES, Better English through Fire Safety, a joint initiative of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) and Adult Multicultural Education Services, Victoria (AMES). This program trains selected firefighters as sessional English language educators to deliver a curriculum that achieves English language and fire safety education outcomes using specially developed English language curriculum developed with fire safety as the learning material subject matter. The program is delivered to new

migrants who when they arrive in the country do not know how to contact the Fire Services or what a smoke alarm is as examples of knowledge gaps.

- Bilingual staff as Community Educators. This program involves the recruitment and training of MFESB bilingual staff as community fire safety educators. Various NESB groups have been recruited to receive this program. Outcomes have included significant relationship building with these communities.
- Safe Accident Free Environment (SAFE) program. This is a partnership program with a community safety education program provider that delivers to thirteen different language groups. This program has recently been selected for inclusion in a manual by the Victorian Multi-cultural Commission, as an example of best practices. Firefighters are trained to work together with community seen presenting to deliver relevant fire safety information to targeted ethnic groups.
- Ethnic Media Program. This consists of paid message spots on ethnic radio, which research shows is the most effective means of reaching certain ethnic groups. It also includes editorial and bilingual MFESB staff on talkback shows.
- Fire Ed NESB module. This consists of take home materials produced in thirteen languages as part of a comprehensive schools program so that the partnership principles of the program can be achieved with parents who do not speak English.

It is obvious that, though the various efforts have been praiseworthy in themselves, there was a need for consolidation and an encompassing strategy. Such a strategy was developed by staff with this author in 1997 and launched by a Government Minister (Metropolitan Fire Brigade, 1997).

That strategy was focused on fire safety education in the community and its action plan did not specifically address the particular training needs of our firefighters in meeting the demands of existing activity and plans to deliver more effective fire safety education programs within the NESB community.

This research is related to the leadership and communication elements of the National Fire Academy Executive Development course. The initiatives to date have been pro-active and have had substantial external impact. It is now appropriate to break new ground, to exercise leadership in promoting enhanced communication skills to better relate to each other and our community.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature was reviewed at the National Fire Academy (NFA), the MFESB library and interlibrary loan where appropriate. The focus of the problem and purpose statement is cultural diversity training of firefighters (and non operational staff) to meet the needs of better service delivery to a diverse community.

Much of the literature sourced was focused on diversity training to meet internal human resource management needs. There did not appear to be a great body of material that would inform research question results to a very significant degree. It is expected, however, that the research methodology and procedures will deliver the outcomes required.

It is also expected that a secondary outcome of the CDT will be enhanced valuing of internal organisational diversity to the extent it is currently present.

Cultural diversity training is fundamentally about the establishment of a dialogue that takes place within ourselves, between people and with the world around us. It brings into play

core attitudes, values and beliefs that in other forms of training generally remain at a safe distance from those involved in the learning process (Gacciardo-Masci and Gonzalez, 1998).

La Russo (1993) describes the implementation of 'ethnic traditions' training into the City of Aurora, Colorado. This training forms part of a bigger picture that includes on call translators and the use of basic question cards by first response crews. He provides a number of very straightforward examples that clearly illustrate how ignorance of other cultures' attitudes can very easily frustrate normal operational activity and success in building relationships within a community.

Kemper (1998) writes from a global training perspective. She sees that skills we have relied on in the past are no longer adequate. She believes that the ability to adopt methods and to work effectively in a cross-cultural or multicultural setting has become critical. She reports that quite often the effect of culture on training success is still often realised only after a wake-up call or experience of culture clash in a training setting.

Johnson and O'Mara (1992) describe diversity training in a large utility company of some 27,000 employees where a strategy employed was to develop diversity trainers internally which had a number of benefits. The company sees that managing diversity is the right thing to do, and makes good business sense by creating better customer service, improving its public image and boosting consumer confidence and credibility. The company has what appears to be a comprehensive customer service program that meets the needs of people of different ethnic origins. The company's approach has been recognised by the United States Department of Labour.

Payne and Mobley (1992) describe the significant potential and reality of backlash or resistance to diversity training. They provide a very useful table (p. 47) that lists twenty issues

that can foster resistance to such training. They also offer a number of strategies for success: get management aboard, involve employees, work from an inclusive definition of diversity, use well qualified professionals as trainers, acknowledge resistance, let experience be the teacher, affirm the value of trainees' experience, put an end to the PC (Politically Correct) police, be clear on business connections, laugh, smile and enjoy, follow up, co-facilitate, create an open atmosphere, keep up with new developments and integrate special topics.

Nelson et al (1991) found that ethnicity along with membership of rural or urban communities were variables in regard to citizen preference for obtaining threat – relevant information and preference for participation in the process of community emergency management. Their findings were specific and highlighted the need to investigate particular ethnic group preferences prior to delivery of education / information programs or requests for participation.

Duguay (1996) summarises key information from a report titled “Cultural Diversity and Disaster”, published by the University of British Columbia Disaster Preparedness Resource Centre for Emergency Preparedness in Canada. This information lists a number of facts and advice items that support information found in other literature. The facts and advice are comprehensive and straightforward and would be useful information for any emergency services to reference.

Palumbo (1994) examines the impact of cultural diversity training within the Chesterfield Fire Department. An unexpected result was that 66% of survey respondents perceived that this training did not assist them in dealing with the public / customers they serve. A number of recommendations are provided which would address this result.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (1993) found that 17.4% of the population in Australia aged five and over live in homes whose first language is other than English. This breaks down to 28.8% of the population in Melbourne. Appendix A breaks down the size of the Victorian community speaking a language other than English. Appendix B displays the lack of English proficiency within nominated ethnic groups. Appendix C compares the top 10 countries population by birthplace against settler arrivals.

Adult Multicultural Education Services (1999) provides an evaluation of a pilot cultural diversity training program held at one fire station. A number of useful suggestions were provided by participants. The thrust of the evaluation is very positive. One participant reported now engaging local Vietnamese in conversation in shops, something he had not previously done.

The literature summarised offers a variety of information to assist in obtaining results for the research questions. It offers the learnings of others which can be matched or contrasted with findings of procedures used to achieve results from the research questions.

PROCEDURES

Definition of Terms

Project Charter	A document format developed by the MFESB to capture key information about a planned project that will allow decision makers to sign off.
MFESB	Metropolitan Fire & Emergency Services Board
MFB	Metropolitan Fire Brigade
NESB	Non English Speaking Background

Research Methodology

The desired outcome of the research was to develop a project charter for the implementation of cultural diversity training of MFESB staff to be better able to deliver existing and planned

services to an ethnically diverse population. The research was historical research which considered the available literature and existing organisational reports and strategies in order to understand the current situation in the MFESB and its environment.

The research was also action research in terms of using current understanding and results of research questions to inform the development of a project charter that can take the initiative forward within the organisation. Demographic information contained in Appendixes A, B and C was found as a result of historical research and used in the development of the project charter to be found in Appendix D.

Assumptions and Limitations

The literature that related to cultural diversity training focused on the community or customer was limited. The organisational support for such a project is assumed given political sensitivity of the challenge.

Action Research Steps

The following action research steps were sourced from the National Fire Academy's *Executive Development* course student manual (National Fire Academy, 1997).

- a) Recheck problem statement for clarity and comprehensiveness.

The problem is very clear in that there is a management assessed and staff assessed need for cultural diversity training. It is comprehensive in terms of the charter addressing the key organisational information needs to accept the charter and move forward.

- b) Establish broad goals.

The purpose is to develop a project charter for the implementation of cultural diversity training within the MFESB.

- c) Conduct a situational analysis including influencing focus.

This analysis can be found in introduction background and literature review. A situational force field analysis is provided here.

Assisting Forces

- Political environment
- CEO support
- Budget availability
- Use of pilots
- Union briefing
- Quality of training to be sourced

Resisting Forces

- Apathy of staff
- Lack of project management time

d) Define and prioritise strategies.

The project charter and follow on action plan will capitalise on assisting forces and minimise impeding forces where appropriate. (See Appendix D).

e) Set objectives.

Set in project charter available at Appendix D.

f) Develop step by step action plans for accomplishing each objective.

Set in project charter to the extent appropriate for extended trial in 10 workplaces.

g) Implement the plans – monitor for timely completion.

Not applicable in this research. Implementation will occur in next phase. Pilot at one fire station completed on time.

h) Evaluate outcomes.

Externally evaluated as discussed in literature review.

A number of specific processes were used to address each research question. These processes were chosen pragmatically given the basic nature of the research was action research to achieve a specific outcome.

Research Question 1. What cultural diversity training have other fire services or organisations provided to their staff?

Use of literature review, staff discussion, review of Fire Services training program directory.

Research Question 2. What are the benefits of cultural diversity training for staff in organisations?

Use of literature review and professional judgement accessing experience of previous service delivery to NESB groups.

Research Question 3. What potential problems exist for the MFESB if such training is not undertaken?

Consideration of literature review, assessment of Government policy / political climate and professional judgement accessing experience of previous service delivery to NESB groups.

Research Question 4. What indicators in the MFESB community show the need for such staff training?

Analysis of available demographic data and professional judgement.

A limitation of these procedures is that accessing the organisation's experience in service delivery to NESB groups had to be limited to drawing on personal and some key staff's experiences. These experiences and consequent learnings had not been documented as a result of insufficient resources and a priority on action.

RESULTS

A Project Charter developed for the purpose of introducing cultural diversity training within the MFESB is shown in Appendix D.

Answers to Research Questions

Research Question 1. The literature provides a number of different examples of cultural diversity training in organisations. These range from a small fire department (La Russo, 1993) to a large private sector utility (Johnson and O'Mara, 1992). The MFESB has piloted such training at one station (Adult Multicultural Education Services, 1999). The programs described are well structured with clear outcomes and have been evaluated to some degree. They all focus on the area this research is directed towards, that being the development of staff to better meet the needs of the organisation's community or customer base. Staff knowledge provided information that two sister emergency services, Police and Ambulance, in Melbourne did in fact have programs worthy of reference but not published in the literature.

Research Question 2. The benefits of cultural diversity training are generally positive in the literature including the authors cited above. Palumbo (1994) is an exception in that the evaluation of the target audiences' perception of such training in dealing more effectively with a small fire department's community was found to be negative.

The benefits of such training include enhancing the organisation's capacity to deliver services such as fire safety education, firefighting, emergency medical response and improving the effectiveness of partnership approaches to emergency issues within the community.

Research Question 3. The problems that exist for the organisation if such training is not undertaken include political scrutiny, less effective service delivery outcomes, reduced standing and public image in the community. One clear danger is a trigger point such as cultural conflict

in an area of service delivery could occur resulting in negative outcomes for the organisation and the community. This initiative is proactive and intended to prevent problems occurring. The organisation wants to become more community and partnership focused in its activities. Such training will provide staff with the skills and most importantly attitudes to foster those outcomes.

Research Question 4. The indicators in the MFESB community that demonstrate the need for cultural diversity training are found in two main areas. Firstly, the Australian Bureau of Statistics census data is discussed in the literature review and reflected in appendixes A, B and C. A key fact is that 28.8% of Melbourne's population live in homes where English is not the first language spoken. Secondly, the experience of the organisation in delivery of existing programs to NESB groups has seen an assessment by activity leaders and managers involved that such training of staff would add considerable value to existing service delivery. This assessment included the learnings achieved by informal discussions with training providers. It has also raised awareness of the firefighter deliverers, of what they don't know, hence leading requests from firefighters for training.

The outcome of the action research is contained in Appendix D. It is a project charter, that provides the organisation with key information about a project to the extent that an appropriate project sponsor can sign off. It contains information about the proposed project including a summary, a rationale, basic timing, budget, success factors, background, constraints, assumptions and reporting requirements. This Project Charter approach is new for the organisation at this level and this project is bench testing the process.

DISCUSSION

The outcome of the action research has been developed using appropriate results from the research questions. The project charter is a means of achieving support within the organisation

for development and implementation of an action / implementation plan to make the initiative happen.

The literature review discovered examples of cultural diversity training unknown to the MFESB. Discussion with staff identified two programs being delivered within Melbourne to Police and Ambulance services that can be followed up in detail in the program development phase.

The literature review discussed a number of benefits of this training ranging from small fire departments to a large scale utility. These benefits match the understanding derived from accessing our historical experience and informal discussions over time with cultural diversity trainers. There was a clear difference described by Palumbo (1994) where 66% of respondents to a survey said that the training did not assist them in dealing with the public / customers they serve. Kirkpatrick (1979) offers a model of training evaluation based on four levels. These levels are; 1. Reaction, 2. Learning, 3. Behaviour and 4. Results. I suspect that the way the question was put in the survey had respondents respond at the results level. I suspect that the survey was not broad enough in scope or of sufficient depth to provide sufficient data to come to such an unqualified conclusion. In any event it raises the critical question of ensuring training is matched to identified need which research question four attempts to address. It also raises the need to ensure a sustainable evaluation process is put in place for the forthcoming program.

The literature does not focus explicitly on problems for organisations if such development is not undertaken. It does focus on benefits and hence implies that the benefits are only attainable if this organisational development occurs. The results identify political scrutiny as an issue which results from being sensitive to the external environment. Other problems identified include reduced public standing and less effective service delivery. These problems

would be difficult to measure. This organisation is seeking to be pro-active on the issues. As yet there has been no 'trigger' to action and we are seeking to develop the organisation's competency in this area to better and more effectively meet our mission of meeting the community's need for protection of life and property.

The literature review provides substantial demographic information about the Melbourne community. This information matches our experience of service delivery and professional judgement that indicates the need for such training. The pilot at Richmond Fire Station provided information that the training was needed. This means that we need to communicate the need as part of our communication strategy in the implementation plan.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the project charter developed be taken forward formally within the MFESB so that approval can occur for an action plan and implementation phase to occur.
2. That the content, structure, methodology and delivery of similar programs within Police and Ambulance services be examined prior to finalisation of MFESB course content.
3. That dependent on feedback on success of programs within Police and Ambulance services that concerned providers be invited to tender.
4. That the developed MFESB course be the subject of an evaluation that encompasses the four levels of evaluation described by Kirkpatrick (1979).
5. That the positive benefits in terms of public image and enhanced service delivery be the subject of measurement to the extent that is realistically possible.
6. That appropriate multicultural community and political representation be included in the program's communication strategy.

7. That the communication strategy include reports of the positive pilot program to encourage voluntary participation

8. That other researchers focus efforts on evaluation and as rigorous as possible measurement of benefits as the literature shows a need for increased research in this area and such information will be useful in generating support for funding of organisational development around cultural diversity issues in other organisations.

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APPENDIX A

Size of Victorian community Speaking a Language other than English in the Home

Top 12 – Total People

	'000	%
1. ITALIAN	178,907	18.9%
2. GREEK	132,475	14.0%
3. CHINESE LANGUAGES	60,700	6.4%
4. VIETNAMESE	39,608	4.2%
5. ARABIC (including Lebanese)	34,869	3.7%
6. GERMAN	36,136	3.4%
7. MACEDONIAN	31,009	3.3%
8. MALTESE	27,733	2.9%
9. CROATIAN	24,184	2.5%
10. SPANISH	23,669	2.5%
11. TURKISH	23,610	2.5%
12. POLISH	22,373	2.4%

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (1993).

APPENDIX B**Lack of English Proficiency within Ethnic Communities**

VIETNAMESE	47%
KHMER	45%
JAPANESE	35%
RUSSIAN	32%
KOREAN	31%
BURMESE	28%
TURKISH	28%
THAI	28%
PORTUGUESE	27%
CHINESE	26%
ROMANIAN	26%
SPANISH	24%

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (1993).

APPENDIX C

TOP TEN COUNTRIES POPULATION BY BIRTHPLACE (1991) VS SETTLER ARRIVALS 1991 – 1994 ALL PEOPLE

	1991	91 – 94
1. UNITED KINGDOM & IRELAND	27.1%	13.7%
2. NEW ZEALAND	6.7%	8.6%
3. ITALY	6.2%	0.3%
4. YUGOSLAVIA	3.9%	4.6%
5. GREECE	3.3%	0.3%
6. VIETNAM	3.0%	8.2%
7. GERMANY	2.8%	0.8%
8. NETHERLANDS	2.3%	0.3%
9. CHINA	1.9%	3.6%
10. PHILIPPINES	1.8%	5.5%

Excluding Australian Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (1993).

APPENDIX D

PROJECT CHARTER

PROJECT TITLE: CULTURAL DIVERSITY TRAINING IN THE MFESB

Cultural diversity is a simple phrase representing a complex combination of factors with which we are born and which we acquire in life that create our individual sense of identity.

Building intercultural relationships requires an understanding of cultural differences in perceptions, values and behaviour. As a service provider, the MFESB has identified a need for greater understanding of its culturally diverse clients in order to better serve them and, in the process, further develop good community relations.

1. **Project Sponsor:** CEO Mr B. Solly
2. **Project Leader:** Commander T. Hunter
3. **Project Client:** MFESB
4. **Project Summary:**

What:

The aim of this program is to deliver cultural diversity training to all MFESB staff.

Expected project outcomes include increased staff awareness in relation to the changing needs of Melbourne's multicultural community, in an effort to improve the quality and effectiveness of the Brigade's customer service.

Why:

To develop:

- A greater understanding of the benefits and difficulties arising from diversity of cultural programming.
- An increased awareness of how our own cultural programming influences intercultural relationships and communication styles.
- Coping mechanisms in order to minimise cultural conflict.

When:

Implementation of Stage 1 – a pilot program including program development, marketing, delivery at 10 diverse work sites and evaluation with recommendations – June, 1999.

Implementation of Stage 2 – Program delivery over remaining worksites – June 2000.

How Much:

The budget for the pilot program, to be implemented before June 1999, is \$25,000. This includes the following:

- Program development costs
- Basic communication brochure
- Delivery of 10 sessions to diverse workplaces
- Evaluation report and recommendations

5. Critical Success Factors

Critical Success Factors	Measure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full workforce participation • Demonstrated executive committee support as an organisational priority • Support of workforce gatekeepers • Inclusion in zone business plans for implementation (eg. Attending a set number of multicultural events) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workforce requests for further training • Zone support • Business plan achievement (community safety model)

6. Background

In 1997, the Fire Prevention Department of the MFB developed a Fire Safety Education Strategy for People of Non-English Backgrounds which was formally supported and endorsed by Brigade Executive. The aim of the policy document was to

- raise awareness among Brigade employees of the nature and scope of the multicultural community served by the MFB
- identify current strategies being undertaken to meet the fire safety education needs of these groups
- make recommendations for further action in this area

The document identified that close to 30% of the population of metropolitan Melbourne speaks a language other than English as the first language at home. ABS statistics would also confirm that there are over 130 different languages and dialects spoken and that the nature of these is constantly changing.

Since that time a number of successful initiatives in providing quality community safety information and Education have been developed, implemented and evaluated. These include:

- ▶ □ FLAMES, Better English through Fire Safety, a joint initiative of the MFB and AMES (Adult Multicultural Education Services, Victoria)
- ▶ □ SAFE at HOME, a joint initiative of the MFB and the Royal Children's Hospital SAFE Program
- ▶ □ The use of bi-lingual staff to assist in delivering fire safety education to their community group
- ▶ □ The implementation of the Commonwealth Government's Language

As well, a number of platoons have been active themselves in seeking to better serve the needs of their local ethnic communities. This has included the study of a number of community languages at relevant stations, such as Turkish at Broadmeadows, Cantonese at Burwood and Vietnamese at Richmond and number of Western Zone Stations.

A number of platoons have also voluntarily undertaken a Cultural Diversity Course delivered by AMES to raise their awareness of a number of cultural, social and religious issues which come to the fore when multi cultures meet. This heightening of awareness has become increasingly relevant with the adoption of the Brigade's Emergency Medical Response role, which will see firefighters as the first on scene in time critical medical emergencies.

Although the introduction of strategies and programs relevant for multicultural Melbourne began as a n issue for the Fire Prevention Department, it is becoming increasingly obvious that meeting the needs of our multicultural community is an organisational issue and must be an integral part of the Brigade's Community Safety Model.

It is therefore seen as valuable that all employees of the Brigade, operational and non-operational, be required to undertake some form of cultural diversity training so that in their respective interaction with the community we serve they are better able to understand these cultures and are able to offer a more effective service.

7. Key Project Constraints

- Zone support
- UFU support
- Workforce reaction
- Need for an effective communication strategy:
 - Accurate flow of information to the workforce through the implementation of an information pamphlet / Firevision
 - Zone to facilitate awareness and preparation of the workforce to participate

8. Key Project Assumptions

That the workforce acknowledges a need for training in the area.

That these training programs will be step forward in operational personnel better serving the needs of the community.

9. Reporting Requirements

Monthly Report

Exception Report (Milestones)

Completion Report

10. Project Client Approval

Department:

Signed:

Date: