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An evaluation of 40 years of research has found that diversity training workshops have only a small effect in reducing bias against members of minority groups. The research also shows the impact on behaviour decays over time, and shorter training programs lead to smaller changes.

Given this and the pervasive and insidious nature of racial stereotypes and discrimination, Starbucks' planned afternoon of unconscious bias training may not be sufficient to make a lasting difference.

Starbucks will close all of its 8,000 American stores on the afternoon of Tuesday, May 29, for employees to participate in a "training program designed to address implicit bias, promote conscious inclusion, prevent discrimination and ensure everyone inside Starbucks stores feels safe and welcome".

The training was announced after two black men were arrested at a Starbucks store in Philadelphia after refusing to make a purchase. More recently, police tackled a black woman after she refused to buy cutlery at a Waffle House restaurant.

The half-life of diversity training

Whether in classrooms , on the streets or in workplaces , the evidence clearly shows that black people around the world experience relentless covert and overt racial discrimination. One in five Australians report experiencing racial abuse.

Diversity training programs appear to help individuals develop knowledge about diversity issues and modify their behaviour. In particular, this helps participants learn new ways of solving conflict over diversity issues or calling out prejudiced jokes.

Diversity training also has a positive (yet small) impact on attitudes towards diverse colleagues and customers.

But the fact that the impacts decay over time, and that shorter programs have smaller impacts, means there must be follow-up training or integration into a larger framework to be effective.

Read more: ***What's unconscious bias training, and does it work?***

Diversity training programs that span a year or longer tend to focus on immersive experiences relevant to employees' day-to-day work. These signal to employees that the organisation is committed to inclusive behaviour between employees and towards costumers.

Organisations can also survey employees about their actual behaviours both before and after training to measure outcomes and provide feedback for future initiatives. Transparency and clarity around specific expectations – or being able to articulate the intended outcomes to trainees – are vital for success.

It also matters what the racial (and gender) make-up of senior leadership is, especially in comparison with employees at other levels of the organisation.

For instance, if the leadership is disproportionately white this does not signal a strong commitment to tackling racial inequality. Therefore, initiatives to increase representation of minorities in leadership positions would be an important next step for businesses like Starbucks to consider.

Read more: ***Unconscious bias is keeping women out of senior roles, but we can get around it***

Addressing racism is no simple task; we are talking about one of the most intractable social problems around the world.

As we see in the Starbucks and Waffle House cases, the perception of black people (and black men, in particular) as dangerous troublemakers is a key driver of excessively harsh disciplinary action and even incarceration
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In Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up only 3% of the population yet 27% of the incarcerated population
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Guaranteeing a welcoming environment for all requires a thorough review of patrons' rights to sit or linger in stores, the expected behaviours of employees and customers, and the way spaces are designed.

Read more: We need evidence-based law reform to reduce rates of Indigenous incarceration

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Tokenistic efforts at diversity management simply don't cut it.

Unconscious bias training programs at selected organisations alone will not reduce racial harassment and discrimination. Starbucks' employees will continue to operate in an environment that reinforces racial disparities. How far can the impact of half-day diversity training take them?

A societal, systemic approach to tackling racial disparities would be a challenging but ultimately

more fruitful approach. Needless to say, corporations have a very important role to play in this effort, but the responsibility should not rest in their hands alone.

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Read more http://theconversation.com/why-short-unconscious-bias-programs-arent-enough-to-end-racial-harassment-and-discrimination-95422