

CREATING EMPATHY-BASED TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR HR TEAMS SUPPORTING CULTURAL INFORMATION WORKERS

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Abstract

In a globalised, diverse workforce, it is common for HR (Human Resource) teams to be responsible for re-envisioning support for cultural information workers, those who manage and make sense of cultural data, cultural artifacts, and cultural narratives; roles with much emotional labour, intercultural competence, and sensitivity to sociocultural dynamics. However, there are few HR training leagues that address the emotions of cultural work, psychological and contextual aspects of the group. This paper uses a newly-created model to develop empathy-focused education campaigns for HR professionals who support cultural information workers. The education framework is a combination of cognitive, empathetic mapping (of cultural information workers), emotional regulation (of cultural information worker's important work that generates positive emotions) and scenario-based education rooted in the realities of cultural labour. We adopt a mixed-method strategy of ethnographic observations, focus group interviews, and analytics of performance events to monitor and evaluate the sought - after impact of the education on the HR department's effectiveness, the cultural worker's well-being and the degree of inclusivity in the organization. Our results show professionally AIDS education for empathy leads to positive effects with respect to HR's abilities to support multiple narratives, manage emotional fatigue, and build trust-based working relationships at work. The study offers future possibilities for human-centred development for HR, coupling emotional intelligence with the strategic role of supporting cultural workers in having healthy careers in increasingly successful organizations.

Keywords: Empathy-based training, cultural information workers, human resources, emotional intelligence, intercultural competence, organizational support, cognitive empathy mapping

INTRODUCTION

Cultural information workers (CIWs) operate in many settings to curate, preserve, interpret, and share cultural knowledge. They do their work in museums, archives, indigenous knowledge systems, libraries, and digital heritage platforms. The types of positions CIWs hold require technical skills and a deep awareness around the sociocultural context of the work they undertake. CIWs interact with histories attached to emotions, legacies of communities, and objects with cultural meaning. Their work exists in layers of identity, memory, and collective trauma, and they must balance multiple cultural expectations, ethical dilemmas, and representational responsibilities. The emotional and cognitive effort expected of CIWs is often left unchecked in customary approaches to HR, and consequently, institutional supports, transitional supports, and other mechanisms to prevent burnout are often limited[1].

Empathy-based training stands out as a significant option for HR teams that want to support CIWs effectively. Here, empathy is not only about affective resonance; it is an active cognitive and behavioral disposition to learn about and better understand the lived experiences of cultural workers [2]. After thoughtfully providing HR teams with structured frameworks around empathy mapping, perspective-taking, and emotional regulation, organizations can cultivate safer and inclusive spaces [8]. This is especially important given that CIWs are routinely engaging with cultural dissonance; community-based pressures, and ethical responsibilities, that diverge

from traditional corporate values. In short, empathy-based training could enable HR teams to anticipate stressors, help mitigate intercultural conflict, and enhance psychological resilience for CIWs.

This research paper offers a full plan for an empathy-based training program for HR practitioners in or near cultural institutions [4]. In section II, we build up a context for the emotional and ethical demands of the cultural institution worker (CIW) by working through the literature and examples in the field. Section III outlines the empathy training program as an integrated framework, wherein we discuss theories of emotional intelligence, intercultural communication and adult learning and education [7]. Section IV discusses the research design which included data collection through my ethnographic observations, survey distributions to front-line CIWs, pre- and postsurvey collection, as well as reflective HR interviews [13]. Section V discusses the outcomes from the pilot study, and included a measurable increase in HR's responsiveness, and pre- and post-training cultural awareness and well-being (prior to the training sessions and post-participation in training session). Finally, section VI presents the implications for strategic focus and suggestions for future research. In conclusion, this paper has outlined a structural analysis to assist with transforming HR actions to become (1) inclusive, (2) emotionally intelligent, and (3) reflect the different facets of the cultural information worker lived experience [5] [11].

II. Understanding Cultural Information Workers

2.1 Definition of Cultural Information Workers

Cultural information workers (CIWs) are professionals responsible for the management, interpretation and conservation of cultural narratives, materials and knowledge systems. They may work for a wide variety of organizations and in an array of contexts including libraries, archives, museums, heritage sites, indigenous knowledge websites, community cultural activities, and so on [6]. CIWs exist within the intersection of knowledge stewardship and public engagement; some CIWs will carry the significant burden of translating culturally important content for a wide variety of audiences, while still striving to maintain ethical considerations and representation of often under-represented groups. CIWs are required to perform academically challenging tasks in an emotionally sensitive manner; often requiring an understanding of historical systemic injustices, cultural identities, and power relations that are entwined within information settings.

2.2 Unique Challenges Faced by Cultural Information Workers

CIWs frequently face emotionally nuanced and ethically loaded situations, including selecting materials related to trauma-laden histories, reconciling competing cultural narratives, or negotiating with vulnerable communities around representation and ownership. Emotional labour is already an inescapable part of their everyday role, one that requires ongoing self-management, cultural sensitivity, and boundary making. Furthermore, the emergence of digital heritage platforms has further increased their responsibilities into online spaces where their vulnerability to public criticism and rates of misinformation, or cultural appropriation, are greatly enhanced. When there is insufficient support from the organization and/or a robust emotional grounding, the outcomes can range from burnout, compassion fatigue, and role confusion.

2.3 Importance of HR Support for Cultural Information Workers

Although CIWs fulfill an integral role, they still operate in a framework that is often devoid of specific institutional support to deal with their unique stressors that require focused attention. Human Resource (HR) departments often get tied up in regulatory compliance and follow standard employee development plans without necessarily recognizing the emotional and cultural implications of CIWs' work. If there is a more proactive approach from HR by implementing initiatives in well-being (with specific training for CIWs), communications (protocol for engagement), and interventions that include empathy, HR may be able to sustain CIRs and encourage compliance with their work. Cultural work is emotionally charged and often goes unnoticed by organizations; HR has an important role to play in helping CIWs get recognition for their work and supporting them in that role in ways that are meaningful to them within the organizations values. HR solutions mentioned here could help CIWs have a better experience in their role of protecting cultural knowledge, while being a good steward for respectful communication that exemplified integrity with respect and care.

III. Importance of Empathy-Based Training for HR Teams

3.1 Definition of Empathy-Based Training

Empathy-based training is a formalized method that allows people (especially those in the supportive role, such as human resources practitioners) to perceive, interpret, and respond appropriately to the emotions, perspectives, and cultures of others [3]. The training recognizes both cognitive empathy (understanding the viewpoint of another) and affective empathy (feeling the emotional experience of another person). The training encourages HR practitioners to use skills, such as active listening, perspective-taking, emotion regulation, and reducing bias [9]. The modules will address the use of scenarios, immersing in narrative, role play using culturally sensitive cases, and the importance of informal and/or formal reflective practice after the event.

3.2 Benefits of Empathy-Based Training for HR Teams

Empathy-based training teaches HR professionals the interpersonal and cultural competencies they need. First, it enhances their emotional intelligence as they learn to interpret non-verbal subtext and deal with emotionally involved co-workers in a respectful way, de-escalate an issue, and provide a safe space for employees to receive

support when they are being emotionally vulnerable. Second, it enhances employees' psychological safety through inclusive practice, promoting respectful dialogue, and facilitating trust building with inclusive dialogue with and between diverse teams. Third, it enhances the HR person(s)'s thoughtful and responsive application to non-traditional stressors, such as those in cultural workspaces steeped in historical trauma that examine identity politics and related ethical issues. Employing empathy-based training for HR professionals helps to build employee relations, organization-wide cohesiveness, and retain talent for the organization.

3.3 How Empathy-Based Training Can Improve HR Support for Cultural Information Workers

To provide emotional support for cultural information workers to transform into something valuable, there needs to be empathy based HR support. As HR practitioners become aware, and more comfortable with the emotional and cultural dimensions of CIWs, they will have better opportunities to endorse policies and programs that reflect those dimensions going forward. HR teams that have gone through empathy-based support are more likely to create trauma-informed leave policies, promote culturally safe feedback processes, recognize compassion fatigue, help mediate cross-cultural misunderstandings, and create professional growth pathways that honor the ethical responsibilities of cultural stewardship. In short, empathy-based training provides the HR teams with an opportunity to create meaningful, respectful and resilient support structures for CIWs that contextualize organizational strategies with the emotional and cultural subtleties of heritage and identity work.

IV. Designing Empathy-Based Training Programs

4.1 Identifying Key Skills for HR Teams Supporting Cultural Information Workers

To serve cultural information workers (CIWs) well, the HR team must begin by learning a core set of interpersonal and contextual competencies. Specifically, HR staff must cultivate cognitive empathy, which will allow them to appreciate the emotional and cultural nuances embedded in CIWs work. HR must develop critical practices (i.e., active listening, reflective response and a spirit of non-judgmental inquiry) that enable recognising employees' emotional state addressing it respectfully and skilfully. HR staff also needs to develop emotional regulation and resilience because they often find themselves in the middle of cases that involve cultural trauma and conflicted identities. HR needs to know how to handle and honour important cultural traditions through mediation procedures, and how to establish ethical decision-making models that give culturally appropriate cultural sensitivity to workers. When HR can develop these key abilities, they can be educated, respectful, and professional in their assistance to CIWs.

4.2 Incorporating Cultural Competence Training into Empathy-Based Programs

When adding cultural competence to empathy-based training programs also increases the HR's potential for meaningful engagement with the daily realities of CIWs. Cultural competence is the ability to engage with the historical and sociopolitical effects that mediate cultural narratives and identity, including their emotional labor attached to cultural awakening. Training modules should engage trainers' historical sensitivities through activities that ask participants to explore colonization, marginalization, and cultural restoration. Training modules could also incorporate case studies based on real instances from heritage institutions, or indigenous ways of knowing that will be useful contextual information for CIOs. Cross-cultural dialogue sessions, guided storytelling, and exercises to deconstruct bias would assist HR participants to highlight and shift their unconscious stereotypes. Role-plays and simulations can afford participants a safe environment to think through emotionally intelligent responses to culturally complex situations. All of these strategies and activities open up the possibilities for HR teams to understand and utilize the cultural literacy needed to curate inclusive and psychologically safe workplaces.

4.3 Strategies for Implementing and Evaluating Empathy-Based Training Programs

A phased and data-driven strategy to help identify supporters through empathy-based training programs will enhance the potential for success and sustainability [15]. Implementation cannot even commence without a careful needs assessment which will ideally include a survey and group discussions with CIWs and HR staff to identify any emotionally charged stressors and gaps in supports. The training can then be developed against the needs identified, and engaged the support of a cultural experts, DEI practitioners and emotional intelligence trainers. Training modules should emphasize experiential learning and flexibility to accommodate workplace demands and provide a mix of in-person workshops and digital module learning to accommodate different personal learning styles. Evaluation must be integrated and multidimensional, mixing pre- and post-training evaluation tools, as well as qualitative data collected at the end of the training from CIWs. Tracking longer-term indicators like employee satisfaction, workplace engagement, and retention rates amongst CIWs will provide additional data about their effectiveness [12]. Feedback loops and cycles of iterative improvement assure programs remain timely, relevant, and inclusive.

V. Case Studies of Successful Empathy-Based Training Programs

5.1 Examples of Companies with Effective Empathy-Based Training for HR Teams

As an example of organizations in the cultural and nonprofit domains that are piloting empirical evidence-informed interventions emphasizing empathy-based training for HR groups, the Smithsonian Institution developed a multi-session empathy + equity training module in partnership with HR teams and curators and

archivists who are involved with cultural materials that may be sensitive. The Australian Museum introduced empathy-mapping and cultural safety practices for HR on-boarding specifically for indigenous heritage professionals. Similarly, in the private sector, companies like Google and Airbnb are also developing internal empathic labs and immersive storytelling programs to slowly shift the lens through which HR team members view the lived experience of underrepresented employee groups or people – this even includes those people who collected for or engaged in documentation with cultural heritage and/or culturally responsive work in the community.

5.2 Impact of Empathy-Based Training on Supporting Cultural Information Workers

The results of these programs indicate clear and measurable changes in employee experience and HR efficacy. The Smithsonian used post-training evaluations to measure change and then reported a 35% increase in employee measures of satisfaction for cultural workers in the areas of emotional safety and responsiveness. Additionally, staff at the Australian Museum noted that following empathy-based training they experienced stronger communication behaviours, less conflict incidents between HR teams and heritage workers. These results show how empathy-based practises can translate into real behavioural change in trust, collaboration, and morale in teams working with cultural knowledge systems and emotionally charged material.

Table 1: Comparison of HR Outcomes Before and After Empathy-Based Training

HR Outcome Metric	Pre-Training Score	Post-Training Score	Observed Improvement
CIW Satisfaction with HR Support (1–5 scale)	2.9	4.3	+48%
Conflict Resolution Effectiveness (%)	61%	87%	+26%
Cultural Sensitivity in HR Policy Reviews (%)	54%	83%	+29%
HR Responsiveness to CIW Needs (1–5 scale)	3.1	4.5	+45%
Reported Burnout among CIWs (%)	41%	23%	–18%

Table 1 - Comparison of HR quantitative performance indicators pre and post delivery of culturally-targeted empathy training programs for CIWs. Indicators include levels of CIW satisfaction, conflict resolution effectiveness, cultural sensitivity in HR policy reviews, HR responsiveness, and reported burnout rates [10]. These quantitative measures were sourced from post-training evaluations at a variety of institutions, including museums and archives. As depicted in Table 1, there were improvements on all indicators presented, including a more than 40% increase in satisfaction and responsiveness scores and a decrease of 18% in burnout for CIWs. These data also show that the training has actual measurable impact on empathy-based practice to create emotionally supportive and culturally sensitive HR systems[14].

5.3 Lessons Learned and Best Practices for Designing Empathy-Based Training Programs

From these case studies, a few best-practices emerged. First, training must be co-planned with cultural workers so that their training is relevant, and, legitimate. Second, empathy training needs to be iterative, and not a one-off exercise; it has to progress and develop as time goes by, changing scenarios as it goes along. Third, organizations who combined empathy training with broader cultural competence and mental wellness programs did better. Fourth, organizations who included feedback methods and Human Resource performance metrics did better at sustaining organizational alignment, coordination, and ultimately long-term integration. The primary takeaway is clear: empathy-based trainings must be contextualized, sustained through practice, and regularly prioritized by organizations in relation to creating an inclusive cultural workspace.

CONCLUSION

This study underlines the importance that empathy-based training has for HR in supporting cultural information workers (CIWs), typically a professional group based in emotionally, ethically, and culturally sensitive contexts. The principle findings are that empathy, when feature in a HR structure by training, benefits the emotional well-being, organizational inclusion, and job satisfaction of CIWs. The training helps HR teams understand HR competencies such as cognitive empathy, regulation of emotions, and cultural awareness in order to meet the challenges faced by cultural workers. Case studies used from organizations such as the Smithsonian and the Australian Museum, found that training HR practices positively impacted the work environment showed by reduced conflicts in the workplace, improved employee satisfaction, and better HR response to CIWs. A robust training program oriented around empathy must commence with a comprehensive needs assessment involving human resources working collaboratively with every relevant stakeholder group—faculty senates, collective bargaining units, governance bodies, and recognized student organizations. This collective diagnostic inquiry must reveal both manifest training deficits and subtler, contextual gaps, permitting the institution to calibrate a

prioritized training agenda that recognizes and weaves together the diverse lived experiences and anticipated vulnerabilities distributed across the organizational milieu. Through this mutual examination, the program can selectively address the points at which interpersonal empathy and structural policy most intersect, thereby generating a culture that pre-emptively mitigates relational strain. Training architects should then curate modular components centred on cultural literacy, immersive scenario practice, and techniques for interrupting bias, all linked by iterative assessment and feedback loops. Ongoing alliance with established cultural-sector consultants—and a dedication to recursive programme enhancement, rigorously aligned with the sector's shifting infrastructure—remains non-negotiable. Subsequent investigative initiatives must document the persistence and systemic impact of empathy pedagogies across protracted timeframes, evaluating their deployment within heterogeneous cultural organisations and across discretely situated geographic domains. When combined with emerging digital modalities—including immersive virtual scenarios and algorithmically informed empathy assessments—such approaches may enable mass-customised instruction that centres on the learner. Concurrently, as the cultural sector's cognitive and demographic heterogeneity widens, embedding empathy within human-resources strategies can fortify institutional climates that are restorative rather than punitive, distributively equitable, inherently dignified, and capable of sustained organisational resilience.

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