

Avoid Divisive Concepts in Workplace Training

How companies can teach respect, prevent discrimination, and build strong teams without assigning guilt, privilege, or moral status according to race, sex, religion, or other group identity.

8-minute read • Workplace • Updated July 2026

WHY IT MATTERS

Employee training can shape how coworkers understand one another and how managers make decisions. Training should equip employees to recognize unlawful discrimination and treat others with dignity. It should not classify people as oppressors or victims, assign guilt or responsibility by identity, or make agreement with disputed social theories an expectation of employment.

The Core Principle

Companies may train employees on nondiscrimination, respectful conduct, legal obligations, and professional collaboration. For purposes of the Viewpoint Diversity Score, concern arises when workplace instruction moves beyond conduct and presents contested claims about race, sex, religion, power, privilege, or oppression as institutional positions employees are expected personally to affirm.

A sound policy distinguishes between preventing unlawful discrimination and requiring ideological agreement. Employees should be judged by their conduct and performance, not by assumptions attached to their demographic or religious identity.

These recommendations reflect Viewpoint Diversity Score criteria and workplace-policy principles; whether a particular training practice raises legal concerns depends on its content, application, employment consequences, and applicable law.

What the Index Evaluates

The Viewpoint Diversity Score Index examines whether workforce training and workplace-related materials avoid teaching or advocating divisive concepts that disparage or classify people according to religion, race, or sex. The review considers whether company materials:

- Assign employees the status of oppressor, oppressed, privileged, biased, inferior, or morally responsible solely or presumptively because of race, sex, religion, or other group identity;
- Attribute racism or sexism to employees because of their race or sex, including claims that such racism or sexism is inherent or exists regardless of an employee's conscious beliefs or conduct;
- Assign personal responsibility or guilt for historical wrongs or state that employees ought to experience guilt, discomfort, or psychological distress based on race, sex, religion, or other group identity;
- Disparage employees because of sincerely held religious beliefs about family or sexuality, or characterize the mere holding of such beliefs as hateful or bigoted, while distinguishing those beliefs from conduct subject to lawful workplace standards;
- Present concepts such as privilege, allyship, unconscious bias, intersectionality, systemic oppression, microaggressions, or antiracism as required institutional viewpoints or personal commitments rather than subjects employees may examine, discuss, or question; or
- Use required training, manager instruction, workplace resources, speakers, or recommended materials to advance these ideas.

The Index generally evaluates workforce materials published or put into effect within the past five years to reflect a company's current workplace policies and practices. The Index evaluates materials directed to the company's own workforce. Public campaigns or customer-facing education are assessed separately.

What Counts as a Divisive Concept

The concern is not the appearance of a particular word by itself. Meaning, context, and application matter. A concept becomes relevant when company materials use it to classify people, assign identity-based duties or blame, or present disputed theories as settled workplace expectations.

CONDUCT-BASED TRAINING

Clear rules against discrimination, threats, targeted harassment, retaliation, and unprofessional conduct. Employees are evaluated by what they do and how they treat others.

IDENTITY-BASED INSTRUCTION

Training that assigns privilege, bias, oppression, guilt, or responsibility according to race, sex, religion, or another group category, or expects employees to affirm a contested theory.

What the Index Does Not Count as Divisive Concepts

- Ordinary training on federal, state, or local nondiscrimination requirements;
- Clear rules against threats, unlawful harassment, retaliation, or discriminatory employment decisions;
- Voluntary discussion of contested ideas when participants remain free to disagree;
- Historical or legal education that presents competing interpretations fairly;
- General commitments to dignity, civility, inclusion, or equal opportunity without identity-based blame or compelled affirmation; and
- Materials directed only to customers, communities, or other external audiences.

What the Evidence Shows

Corporate reports and policies often describe employee courses without publishing the complete training materials. These disclosures can nevertheless show which concepts a company has chosen to teach, promote, or require. The examples below illustrate the types of workforce programs the Index reviews. A quoted term should be considered in context, including whether the training was mandatory, leadership-directed, or tied to workplace expectations.

The examples below illustrate workforce programs evaluated under the VDS framework. The legal considerations applicable to any training program depend on its specific content, context, and application.

Flagstar Financial

Concepts identified: anti-racism, unconscious bias, upstander culture, gender identity

"[Building Teammate Inclusion & Upstander Culture is] required for all teammates ... We believe that an anti-racist environment is vital for organizations to succeed ... [T]eammates are encouraged and provided with tools for taking positive actions to support racial equality ... [My Role in Diversity & Inclusion Awareness is] required for all teammates ... [W]e all have biases and work through strategies to interrupt and neutralize them." (ESG Report 2023, DEI Training Programs, p. 26, accessed 05/01/2026).

Why it matters: Required training presents anti-racism and universal-bias concepts as company-directed workforce instruction and encourages employees to take action consistent with those concepts.

[View evidence](#)

Twilio

Concepts identified: anti-racism, oppression, power, inequity, allyship

"Twilio began the process of actively educating and empowering all Twilions to identify and eliminate bias in the workplace, because ... actively opposing oppression and bias will promote equity for all Twilions. Through ... 'Living into Anti-Racism,' people managers ... undertook the work of understanding their own personal journeys and the potential impacts of bias, power, and inequity on their colleagues ..." (Twilio 2022 Impact and DEI Report, Our journey, p. 22, accessed 04/30/2026). See also "We ... continue our anti-racist and anti-oppression learning opportunities through employee resource group specific programming and events." (Twilio 2022 Form 10-K, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, p. 10, accessed 04/30/2026).

Why it matters: Twilio places anti-racism, anti-oppression, and concepts of bias, power, and inequity within company-directed employee and manager education rather than merely describing them in external advocacy.

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Apple

Concepts identified: unconscious bias, race, gender, justice, allyship

"All of our employees complete unconscious bias and inclusion training, and can access expert-led courses on race, gender, justice, allyship, and more. ... Apple's more than 15,000 managers are trained in unconscious bias and inclusive leadership." (2022 Apple ESG Report, Training and resources, p. 25, accessed 04/27/2026).

Why it matters: Apple makes unconscious-bias training part of required workforce and manager development while also offering courses on race, gender, justice, and allyship.

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KeyCorp

Concepts identified: mandatory training, unconscious bias, privilege, racial justice, allyship

"Course 1: 'Building Bridges' ... is mandatory for all employees ... [and] teaches teammates how to identify and mitigate unconscious bias. ... Course 3: 'Crossing the Bridge' discusses racial justice and allyship, covering topics such as tackling racism at work, understanding privilege, and addressing racial and affinity biases." (KeyCorp 2023 Corporate Responsibility Report, Diversity, equity, and inclusion training for teammates, p. 50, accessed 03/17/2026).

Why it matters: KeyCorp places unconscious-bias instruction in mandatory employee training and includes privilege, racial justice, and allyship within its broader DE&I curriculum.

[View evidence](#)

Capital One Financial

Concepts identified: systemic inequality, racial bias, unequal outcomes

"[W]e launched an immersive education program for all U.S. executives which deepens understanding of underlying historic and systemic issues that create unequal outcomes for Black and Hispanic communities ... 89% of participants report having a better understanding of the history and impacts of racial bias and inequity." (Capital One's 2021 Global Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging Report, Executive Education, p. 30, accessed 04/29/2026).

Why it matters: The program places historic and systemic explanations for racial disparities within an executive education program for all U.S. executives.

[View evidence](#)

M&T Bank

Concepts identified: unconscious bias, systemic racism, microaggressions, allyship

"[W]e offer a robust suite of trainings focused on various topics across DEI, available to all employees. These include ... Unconscious Bias Awareness[,] ... Systemic Racism in Banking[,] ... Addressing Microaggressions in the Workplace[,] and] ... Allyship at Work." (2022 Environmental, Social, Governance & Sustainability Report, Educating our colleagues and leadership, p. 66, accessed 04/24/2026).

Why it matters: M&T incorporates unconscious bias, systemic racism, microaggressions, and allyship into its workforce education offerings.

[View evidence](#)

Potential Workplace Risks

- They can replace individual assessment with assumptions based on race, sex, religion, or another group identity.
- Employees may be assigned moral status, blame, privilege, or vulnerability according to demographic categories rather than conduct.
- Required participation may make disagreement professionally risky, especially when dissent is interpreted as bias, fragility, complicity, or harm.
- Managers may carry contested assumptions into hiring, evaluation, promotion, discipline, and team assignments.
- Training may blur the distinction between respectful conduct and ideological affirmation.
- Intended beneficiaries may face stigma when coworkers question whether recognition or advancement reflects merit or identity-based preferences.

What Companies Can Do

- Focus training on conduct, professionalism, civil-rights obligations, and equal treatment;
- Review course slides, facilitator guides, videos, readings, exercises, and recommended resources, not only course titles;
- Remove claims that assign guilt, privilege, oppression, bias, or responsibility solely according to identity;
- Present contested theories as perspectives for discussion rather than conclusions employees must affirm;
- Avoid requiring personal statements, confessions, advocacy commitments, or identity-based role assignments unrelated to legitimate job requirements;
- Provide a process for employees to request religious accommodation or raise other good-faith concerns;
- Evaluate training vendors and speakers under the same standards applied to company-authored materials; and
- Measure training by improved conduct and compliance rather than ideological agreement.

A Five-Step Training Review

1. Inventory the materials. Identify required and optional courses, manager programs, onboarding modules, discussion guides, speakers, videos, reading lists, and external training vendors.

2. Review substance, not labels. Search for direct and substitute language involving privilege, bias, oppression, allyship, power, systemic inequity, microaggressions, and related concepts.

3. Separate conduct from ideology. Retain clear rules against discrimination and harassment, but remove claims that attach guilt, status, or duties to employees based on identity.

4. Protect disagreement. Make clear that employees may respectfully question contested theories without adverse treatment merely because of their disagreement, while remaining accountable for lawful nondiscrimination, anti-harassment, and professional-conduct standards.

5. Publish the commitment. Adopt a public training-neutrality policy and provide a clear process for employees to raise good-faith concerns without adverse treatment for using that process.

Frequently Asked Questions

Does every diversity or inclusion training program contain divisive concepts?

No. Many programs focus on lawful nondiscrimination, respectful conduct, accessibility, anti-retaliation rules, or better management practices. The concern is with training that assigns status, blame, duties, or moral judgment according to identity or requires employees to affirm disputed theories.

Does mentioning unconscious bias, privilege, or allyship automatically affect VDS scoring?

Not necessarily. The Index reviews context, including how the term is defined, what employees are taught, whether participation is required, and whether disagreement is permitted. A title or isolated word may justify further review, but the surrounding substance determines the concern.

Can a company teach employees about discrimination and historical injustice?

Yes. Companies can address law, history, and documented discrimination. A sound workplace approach distinguishes legal obligations and documented facts from contested theories and avoids assigning personal guilt or moral responsibility to employees because of race, sex, or religion.

Source note: This resource reflects the 2026 Workforce Training Avoids Divisive Concepts benchmark. Company examples are based on the cited public materials and should be linked to the underlying evidence in the published version.

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