



Unit 1

Understanding Workplace Diversity

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Describe what diversity and its related terms mean
- ✓ Explain how changes in the world have affected you and your view
- ✓ Identify your stereotypes
- ✓ Use terms that are politically correct and avoid those which are not

Unit 1

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Defining Diversity

Defining the Terms

What is diversity?

The Oxford English Dictionary defines diversity as, “A diverse range; a variety.” Well, if you look around the classroom, you will definitely see a diverse range of people; after all, we’re all individuals with unique qualities.

Diversity is about more than just differences. It’s about recognizing those differences, accepting them, and allowing them to change our perceptions.

What are some advantages to a diverse culture or workplace?

Are there any disadvantages?

Defining Related Terms

Let's discuss some terms we might hear in relation to diversity.

Affirmative Action

Assimilation

Bias

Equal Employment Opportunity

Prejudice

Sexism

Stereotype

How Does Diversity Affect Me?

Changes in My World

What diversity changes have you noticed in your time of employment?

What changes have you noticed in other places that you have worked?

Think about changes that have happened in response to the community growing more diverse.

What are the benefits and challenges that have resulted from these changes?

What have you found most difficult to adapt to?

Self-Awareness Inventory

Inventory

If you have not completed the pre-assignment, do so now by filling out the questionnaire below. If you have completed the pre-assignment, skip to the scoring on the next page.

For each statement, rate yourself on a scale of one to five:

- 1 indicates something that you never do or something that you never feel
- 3 indicates something you sometimes do or feel
- 5 indicates something you always do or feel

Statement	My Rating
I try to look for similarities between people instead of differences.	
I know that I have biases and I am aware of them.	
I am interested in learning more about diversity and try to seek out information whenever I can.	
I like being in new situations and trying new things.	
I try to look for the positive aspects in situation and people.	
I follow the platinum rule: treat others the way they want to be treated.	
I try to be an effective communicator.	
I try to practice empathy and put myself in other people’s shoes.	
I know that diversity and discrimination can mean different things to different people.	

Statement	My Rating
I enjoy travelling to different places and experiencing new cultures.	
TOTAL	

Scoring

If you scored between **50 and 41**, you have an excellent attitude about diversity. You'll find this course helpful in increasing your knowledge and finding ways to help others become more diverse.

If you scored between **25 and 40**, you have a pretty good attitude about diversity. This course will give you some additional things that you can do to celebrate diversity in the workplace.

If you scored between **10 and 24**, there are some significant behavior changes that you might want to consider making. This course will introduce you to some new behaviors and help you consider the benefits of making changes to your outlook.

Test your knowledge

What things am I currently doing to encourage diversity?

What changes could I make in my life to celebrate diversity more?

What is my next step?

Identifying Stereotypes

Finders

Find someone who looks as if he or she...	Person's Name
Enjoys writing	
Enjoys reading	
Likes to play sports	
Is good with words	
Is an interesting conversationalist	
Is intelligent	
Writes for a living	
Likes crossword puzzles	
Doesn't enjoy reading	
Is a good editor	

About Stereotypes

One of the biggest barriers to diversity is stereotypes. Stereotypes can be so subtle that we don't even realize we're applying them.

The human mind thinks in categories, and we need these categories to help us organize all that we experience as we go through daily life. Without categories, our brains would be filled with a jumble of disconnected facts, impressions, sights, sounds, thoughts, ideas, and sensations. The categories help us make sense of the world we live in and give us a shorthand way to respond to people and events.

The categories in our minds contain not just facts and data; they also contain meaning and evaluation. Our categories are not neutral. We usually have feelings about categories. These feelings may be positive or negative. Mention of a category often triggers an instant reaction, almost a reflex.

For instance, how do you feel when the following words are mentioned to you?

- Tattoos
- Body piercings
- Women
- Blondes
- Athletes
- Mercedes
- Scientists

As you can see, your reactions are rarely neutral. Most of us have judgments, opinions, and feelings about most categories of things. This is appropriate and normal.

While categories are not a problem in and of themselves, they become a problem when we cannot distinguish between the characteristics of a category and the characteristics of an individual item, or individual person, within that category. Put another way, the category turns into a stereotype when we can no longer see an individual tree, but only see the forest. When we assume that all trees within a forest are identical, and cannot see that each individual tree has some characteristics in common with the others, that is when our category turns into a stereotype.

A common defense is, “Stereotypes are sometimes true.” Stereotypes, by their very definition, cannot be true. For example, think of the stereotype that all African-American men are good at basketball. Some African-American men may be very good at this sport, but there are certainly African-American men out there who are not good at this sport. Therefore, for the man who is good at basketball, that is simply an attribute of his character, not proof that all African-American men are the same as he is. (Would you appreciate it if everyone assumed you could sing, just because your mother is an opera singer?)

Some Common Phrases and the Stereotype Behind Them

There are many phrases that connote stereotypes and are derogatory. One that I often hear directed towards women is, “Geez, it must be that time of the month!” This reveals two stereotypes: if a woman is menstruating, she must be cranky; and vice-versa, if a woman is cranky, she must be menstruating. No thought is given to the other possible factors, or even to the possibility that perhaps the female in question is being assertive and isn’t cranky at all!

Your Experience with Stereotypes

Group A

Think of a situation where you were seriously misjudged by the people around you. It may be that they underestimated your education, your experience, or your overall competence to make a contribution to whatever was being considered.

Respond to these questions.

What does it feel like to be stereotyped?

What did people say or do that gave you the impression that they didn't really appreciate your talents?

How did their behavior and your interpretation of it affect what you did or said?

Group B

Think of a situation when you had very strong, clear, but wrong beliefs about what another person knew, believed, or could do about a problem being considered.

Respond to these questions.

Why do we stereotype other people?

What did you say or do after you came to know more about the person?

How do you think your behavior influenced how the other person acted and how the whole episode unfolded?

Wise Words

Changing Times

In this day and age where people are celebrating their differences, it's hard to know what will offend people and what's acceptable. For example, paper on an easel is commonly referred to as a flip chart. This may be unacceptable in some places, as "flip" is also a derogatory word for a Filipino.

Some words are obviously unacceptable, particularly those that segregate based on race, religion, sexuality, or gender. Some other things that should be removed from our vocabulary include:

- Don't go postal on me! (this expression arose out of workplace violence in an American post office)
- Acting blonde
- Indian giver

Changing Our Language

Replace each term with a better alternative.

Instead of...	Try...
Black sheep	
Guys (when referring to a group with both males and females)	
Oriental	
Acting like wild Indians	
Bitching like a woman	
Girls (when referring to females over 16)	
Policeman	
Mailman	
Handicapped	
Retarded	
Gifted children	
Uneducated	
No culture	
Little woman or the wife	
Old people	
Bitchy	
White lie	
Flip chart	
Jew down	

Instead of...	Try...
Half-breed or mulatto	
Blacklisted	

(From The Diversity Advantage by Lenora Billings-Harris)

Going a Bit Too Far!

We do admit that in the attempt to be politically correct, things have gone a bit too far. A replacement word is of little use if no one knows what the new word means!

Can you figure out what these terms are supposed to mean?

Word	Meaning
Incomplete success	
Melanin impoverished	
Client of the correctional system	
Possessing an alternative body image	
Parasitically oppressed	
Economically exploited	
Sobriety deprived	
Processed tree carcasses	
Cerebrally challenged	
Motivationally dispossessed	
Involuntary undomiciled	

(From The Diversity Advantage by Lenora Billings-Harris)

Ground Rules

Let's go over a few ground rules that will ensure your speaking is politically correct.

Don't make fun.

If you're making a joke about a person's height or weight, it's probably not funny. Even if the person pokes fun about their own race, religion, gender, height, and/or weight, that doesn't mean it's acceptable for you to do so.

Ask what a person prefers.

If you're not sure what terms are acceptable, ask the person.

Don't include ethnic traits in a person's description unless necessary.

Let's say you're telling a story about your CEO and you describe her as Chinese. If she were another ethnicity, would you describe her that way too? If not, eliminate the descriptor.

Apologize if you goof up.

No one is perfect. If you goof up, apologize sincerely, and then drop it.

Further Reading:

- ✓ *Armstrong, Michael. Armstrong's Handbook of Human Resource Management Practice. Kogan Page, 2012.*
- ✓ *Billings-Harris, Lenora. The Diversity Advantage (3rd Edition). Oakhill Press, 2012.*
- ✓ *Carnegie, Dale. How to Win Friends and Influence People. Pocket Books, 1998 (Reprint).*