

5.4.9: Summary of Learning Objectives

An Introduction to Workplace Diversity

What is diversity?

Diversity refers to identity-based differences among and between people that affect their lives as applicants, employees, and customers. Surface-level diversity represents characteristics of individuals that are readily visible, including, but not limited to, age, body size, visible disabilities, race, or sex. Deep-level diversity includes traits that are nonobservable such as attitudes, values, and beliefs. Finally, hidden diversity includes traits that are deep-level but may be concealed or revealed at the discretion of individuals who possess them.

Diversity and the Workforce

How diverse is the workforce?

In analyzing the diversity of the workforce, several measures can be used. Demographic measures such as gender and race can be used to measure group sizes. Measures of such things as discrimination toward specific groups can be analyzed to gauge the diversity of the workforce. Other measures of diversity in the workforce can include examination of differences in age and sexual orientation.

Diversity and Its Impact on Companies

How does diversity impact companies and the workforce?

The demography of the labor force is changing in many ways as it becomes racially diverse and older and includes more women and individuals with disabilities. Diversity affects how organizations understand that employing people who hold multiple perspectives increases the need to mitigate conflict between workers from different identity groups, enhances creativity and problem-solving in teams, and serves as a resource to create a competitive advantage for the organization.

Challenges of Diversity

What is workplace discrimination, and how does it affect different social identity groups?

Workplace discrimination occurs when an employee or an applicant is treated unfairly at work or in the job-hiring process due to an identity group, condition, or personal characteristics such as age, race, national origin, sex, disability, religion, or pregnancy status. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission enforces laws and legislation related to individuals with those protected statuses.

Harassment is any unwelcome conduct that is based on the protected characteristics listed above. Sexual harassment refers specifically to harassment based on a person's sex, and it can (but does not have to) include unwanted sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or physical and verbal acts of a sexual nature.

Key Diversity Theories

What key theories help managers understand the benefits and challenges of managing a diverse workforce?

The cognitive-diversity hypothesis suggests that multiple perspectives stemming from the cultural differences between groups or organizational members result in creative problem solving and innovation. The similarity-attraction paradigm and social identity theory explains how, because individuals prefer to interact with others like themselves, diversity may have a negative effect on the group and organizational outcomes. The justification-suppression model explains under what conditions individuals act on their prejudice.

Benefits and Challenges of Workplace Diversity

How can managers reap benefits from diversity and mitigate their challenges?

By approaching diversity and diversity issues in a thoughtful, purposeful way, managers can mitigate the challenges posed by a diverse workforce and enhance the benefits a diverse workforce can offer.

Managers can work to make sure that the efforts and initiatives they enact to increase diversity in the workplace come from a perspective that ensures and strives for equity and fairness, not simply one that will benefit the company's bottom line.

Using an integration-and-learning perspective strongly links diversity to the work and success of the firm by viewing cultural identity, different life experiences, skills, and perspectives from members of diverse cultural identity groups as a valuable resource.

Recommendations for Managing Diversity

What can organizations do to ensure applicants, employees, and customers from all backgrounds are valued?

Organizations should use objective and fair recruitment and selection tools and policies.

Leadership should make employees feel valued, be open to varied perspectives, and encourage a culture of open dialogue. Women and racial minorities can increase positive employment outcomes by pursuing higher levels of education and seeking employment in larger organizations. All individuals should be willing to listen, empathize with others, and seek to better understand sensitive issues that affect different identity groups.

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