

5.4.1: An Introduction to Workplace Diversity

exploring managerial careers

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Dr. Tamara Johnson's role as assistant chancellor for equity, diversity, and inclusion at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire involves supervising and collaborating with various campus entities to ensure their operations continue to support the university's initiatives to foster diversity and equity within the university community. Dr. Johnson oversees the Affirmative Action, Blugold Beginnings (pre-college program), Gender and Sexuality Resource Center, Office of Multicultural Affairs, Ronald E. McNair Program, Services for Students with Disabilities, Student Support Services, University Police, and Upward Bound units and leads campus-wide initiatives to educate and train faculty, students, and staff about cultural awareness, diversity, and institutional equity.

Dr. Johnson's journey to her current role began more than 20 years ago when she worked as a counselor for the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs at the University of Illinois. Her role in this office launched her on a path through university service—Dr. Johnson went on to work as the associate director for University Career Services at Illinois State University, the director for multicultural student affairs at Northwestern University, and the director for faculty diversity initiatives at the University of Chicago. As faculty at the Chicago School of Professional Psychology, Argosy University, and Northwestern University, Dr. Johnson taught counseling courses at the undergraduate, master's, and doctorate levels.

Dr. Johnson's work at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire involves developing a program and protocols to ensure all faculty and staff across the institution receive baseline diversity training. In addition, one of her goals is to include criteria related to diversity factors in the evaluations of all faculty/ staff. A primary issue that she seeks to address is to increase the awareness of the challenges experienced by underrepresented students. This includes individuals who may come from backgrounds of low income, students of color, first-generation students, and other marginalized groups such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students. Dr. Johnson understands the importance of creating initiatives to support individuals in those groups so their specific concerns may be addressed in multiple ways. As you will learn in this chapter, when leaders proactively create an inclusive and supportive climate that values diversity, benefits are produced that result in positive outcomes for organizations.

What is diversity?

Diversity refers to identity-based differences among and between two or more people¹ that affect their lives as applicants, employees, and customers. These identity-based differences include such things as race and ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and age. Groups in a society based on these individual differences are referred to as **identity groups**. These differences are related to discrimination and disparities between groups in areas such as education, housing, healthcare, and employment. The term **managing diversity** is commonly used to refer to ways in which organizations seek to ensure that members of diverse groups are valued and treated fairly within organizations² in all areas including hiring, compensation, performance evaluation, and customer service activities. The term *valuing diversity* is often used to reflect ways in which organizations show appreciation for diversity among job applicants, employees, and customers.³ **Inclusion**, which represents the degree to which employees are accepted and treated fairly by their organization,⁴ is one way in which companies demonstrate how they value diversity. In the context of today's rapidly changing organizational environment, it is more important than ever to understand diversity in organizational contexts and make progressive strides toward a more inclusive, equitable, and representative workforce.

Three kinds of diversity exist in the workplace (see Table 5.4.1.1). **Surface-level diversity** represents an individual's visible characteristics, including, but not limited to, age, body size, visible disabilities, race, or sex.⁵ A collective of individuals who share these characteristics is known as an identity group. **Deep-level diversity** includes traits that are non-observable such as attitudes, values, and beliefs.⁶ **Hidden diversity** includes traits that are deep-level but may be concealed or revealed at the discretion of individuals who possess them.⁷

These hidden traits are called **invisible social identities**⁸ and may include sexual orientation, a hidden disability (such as a mental illness or chronic disease), mixed racial heritage,⁹ or socioeconomic status. Researchers investigate these different types of diversity in order to understand how diversity may benefit or hinder organizational outcomes.

Diversity presents challenges that may include managing dysfunctional conflict that can arise from inappropriate interactions between individuals from different groups. Diversity also presents advantages such as broader perspectives and viewpoints.

Knowledge about how to manage diversity helps managers mitigate some of its challenges and reap some of its benefits.

Table 5.4.1.1 : Types of Diversity

Surface level diversity	Diversity in the form of characteristics of individuals that are readily visible including, but not limited to age, body size, visible disabilities, race or sex
Deep level diversity	Diversity in characteristics that are nonobservable such as attitudes, values and beliefs, such as religion
Hidden diversity	Diversity in characteristics that are deep level but may be concealed or revealed at discretion by individuals who possess them such as sexual orientation

concept check

- What is diversity?
- What are the three types of diversity encountered in the workplace?

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