

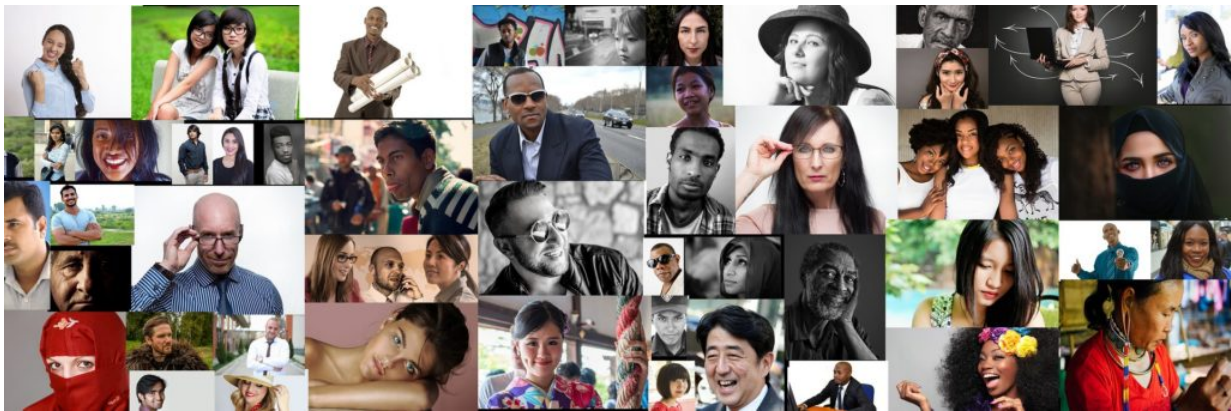
1.6.11: Why It Matters- Social Diversity in the Workplace

Why learn about social diversity?

America is a nation of immigrants; its first inhabitants are believed to have traveled across the Bering Straits, a land bridge connecting Asia and North America, over 15,000 years before the New World was “discovered” by Christopher Columbus in 1492. From the early days of European immigration through the present, America was viewed as the land of opportunity, a place where it’s possible to transcend perceived limitations or persecution based on one’s birth or beliefs. These ideas form the basis of the so-called “American dream.”

However America has historically and systemically fallen short of these ideals. This nation—largely settled by immigrants seeking economic opportunity and religious freedom—is incredibly divided over issues of equality, or rather, we are divided over the debate about who should benefit from equality. From our founding to the present, there has been debate and division over the appropriate position on a range of fundamental human rights issues from slavery to suffrage, and more recently, diversity in its myriad manifestations.

Those who already benefit from the systematic inequality of our society often frame actions and policies that drive equality as a threat to our social fabric, prosperity, and stability. However, the struggle for equality is, in truth, a struggle between our ideals and our self-interest, the haves and have-nots, the past and an emergent future.



What do immigration, diversity and equality—arguably social or political matters—have to do with business? As we will see in this section, it’s increasingly important—in many industries, a competitive imperative—for businesses to cultivate diversity and an inclusive culture. Equality remains the foundation of our belief in opportunity and a key factor driving engagement in our social, business and political process.

Indeed, surveys indicate that both consumers and employees expect businesses to take a stand on and be transparent in their performance relative to social diversity issues. Finally, as technology and globalization accelerate the pace of change, companies are often replacing government in shaping policy and practice with regards to diversity, equality and other issues—not only internally, but throughout their supply chain and society broadly.

It is—perpetually!—a brave new world. Let’s explore it!

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