

1.2: An Introduction to Workplace Diversity

1. What is diversity?

Diversity refers to identity-based differences among and between two or more people 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 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 organizations 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. **Inclusion**, which represents the degree to which employees are accepted and treated fairly by their organization, 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 1.2). **Surface-level diversity** represents an individual's visible characteristics, including, but not limited to, age, body size, visible disabilities, race, or sex. 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. **Hidden diversity** includes traits that are deep-level but may be concealed or revealed at the discretion of individuals who possess them. These hidden traits are called **invisible social identities** and may include sexual orientation, a hidden disability (such as a mental illness or chronic disease), mixed racial heritage, 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.

| 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 non-observable 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. |

Table 1.2 (Attribution: Copyright Rice University, OpenStax, under CC-BY 4.0 license)

CONCEPT CHECK

1. What is diversity?
2. What are the three types of diversity encountered in the workplace?

1.2: An Introduction to Workplace Diversity is shared under a [not declared](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.