

Unit II:

Interpersonal Leadership Skills

4. Valuing Diversity

The demographic makeup of U.S. society has changed dramatically in the last twenty-five years, and it will continue to change. Consequently, valuing diversity is a key competency for leaders in today's communities. If it is not part of leaders' skills, they may discover that they are less effective as a leader and create a negative community and organizational image.

In order to value diversity, you must build a capacity for trust within your everyday interactions, which involves understanding the impact of culture and diversity on communications, assumptions that one makes about a person's character, and learning. Ensuring that everyone in the community or organization is valued and can make contributions is another strategy for valuing diversity. People from many different diverse groups have contributed to the greatness of this society, so being exposed to achievers from cultures other than your own is an important step in learning how to value diversity.

This publication provides an overview of the concept of cultural diversity and how to value it. The information covered here can help you

- increase your awareness of the various dimensions of diversity;
- examine your own cultural identity and how that identity affects your relationships with others;
- become more aware of your own attitudes, perceptions, and feelings about various aspects of diversity; and
- make a commitment to increase your understanding of diversity issues.

What Is Diversity?

Just what is “diversity”? Let’s start with the short answer: differences. Human diversity means differences among people. It’s each of us in our rich and infinite variety.

Why Be Concerned About Diversity?

In recent years, diversity has become a popular topic. Starting in the 1980s, Fortune 500 corporations, government agencies at all levels, and large and small nonprofit organizations have been doing “diversity work.” Today, units on diversity are being added to elementary and secondary school curricula, and courses that focus on diversity are being offered—and required—on many college campuses.

Three powerful trends in our society have made diversity an important issue. First, the global market in which U.S. corporations do business became highly competitive. Second, the makeup of the U.S. population began changing dramatically. Third, individuals began celebrating their differences instead of compromising their uniqueness to “fit in.” Let’s take a closer look at each of these trends.

Trend 1: The Global Market

We have all heard the expression that our world is shrinking. To a large extent, the strength of our economy depends on our ability to do business with countries in other parts of the world. To stay competitive in the world market, the United States must design products that meet the needs of people from other cultures. In addition, we must develop strategies for marketing those products to other countries. Such activities bring diverse people to the planning and negotiating table. If we want to sell our products and make profitable business deals with people from other countries, it only makes good business sense to develop an understanding and

appreciation of their cultures—their languages, needs, wants, and customs.

We cannot afford to make mistakes like Chevrolet made when it first tried to sell the Chevy Nova in Spanish-speaking countries. In Spanish, “Nova” means “it does not go.” Needless to say, the Nova never sold well in Spanish-speaking countries. Similarly, when Pepsi started marketing its products in China a few years back, the Chinese translated the slogan “Pepsi brings you back to life” quite literally. The slogan in Chinese really meant “Pepsi brings your ancestors back from the grave.”

Currently, countries with the biggest growth potential are the developing nations of Asia. RJR Nabisco and Eli Lilly are building plants in China; Owens-Corning Fiberglass and IBM are doing it in India; and AT&T is building facilities in Indonesia, to name a few. Other Asian places with growing economies include Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, and Thailand. Ford Motor Company and Chrysler Corporation build right-hand driver models of the Taurus and Neon for their customers in Tokyo. It is important to note that today four out of every five new jobs are a result of foreign trade.

Trend 2: Changing Demographics

■ Yesterday, three in four Americans were white. Today, 30 percent of the U.S. population is people of color. The increase is primarily due to trends in immigration and birthrates. Today, whites represent about 70 percent of the population. Currently in California, our most populous state, whites account for less than 50 percent of the state’s population. The fastest-growing race groups will continue to be the Asian and Pacific Islander population. The Hispanic/Latino population will be the largest-growing group.

- Between 1998 and 2008, 70 percent of new workers entering the labor force will be women and people of color. Fifty percent will be women of all races and ethnicities; 16.5 percent will be African Americans; 16.2 percent will be Hispanics/Latinos; 9 percent will be Asians, American Indians, and Alaska Natives. Thirty percent of new entrants into the workforce between 1998 and 2008 will be white males.
- By 2010, the public school population will be 40 percent minority and the faculty will be 95 percent white.
- African Americans and Hispanics/Latinos will be the majority population in more than one-third of the nation’s fifty largest cities and five of the nation’s states.
- Our nation’s population will grow by an estimated 72 million people between 1995 and 2025:
 - The Asian population will be the fastest-growing population and will more than double in size.
 - The Hispanic/Latino population will be the largest-growing population and will account for 32 million of the 72 million additional people (or 44 percent of the total growth of the nation).
 - African Americans will be the second slowest-growing group, representing about 16.5 percent of the total population growth.
 - Whites will be the slowest-growing group in the nation. During this thirty-year period, the white population will decline by 9.5 percent. This will be due to net population losses for whites in twelve states.

If current trends continue, by the year 2050, approximately 50 percent of the U.S. population will be nonwhite.

Shortly thereafter (by 2056), there will be no single majority group in this country. The United States will be composed of multiple minority groups. Let's take a closer look at other dimensions of our current population.

- When different types of impairment groups are taken as a whole, people with disabilities make up the largest minority group today at 15 percent of the U.S. population.
- An estimated 2 to 10 percent of the population is gay/lesbian.
- The fastest-growing age group are those seventy-five years and older. Between 1995 and 2025, the number of elderly is projected to double in twenty-one states. The median age of the population will continue to rise as the Baby Boomer generation (people born after World War II between 1946 and 1964) grows older. As the Baby Boomer generation reaches retirement age after 2010, the percentage of the population that is elderly will increase rapidly. Between 1998 and 2008, there will be a 48 percent increase in workers age fifty-five and older.
- One in every six Americans speaks a language other than English at home.
- Consumer buying power among the four primary U.S. minority groups—African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, and American Indians—nearly doubled in the 1990s and grew at a far faster rate than overall U.S. buying power.

Trend 3: The Changing Concept of America

Traditionally, our society's approach to diversity has been assimilation. The United States has been called the "melting pot" society. Newcomers to this country were expected to adapt their "old world" values and culture to fit the values and lifestyles of the "new world." Cultural differences were

metaphorically placed into a big pot where they were "melted" or blended together. In theory, the melting pot would result in one culture, language, and lifestyle for everyone in this country. The problem with this approach is that it equates difference with deficiency.

Today, the terms "mosaic" society and "tossed salad" are replacing the "melting pot" concept. In a mosaic society, individuals maintain their own cultural patterns, such as language, lifestyle, and religious practices. Differences are valued and appreciated, as when countless colored stones join together to form a mosaic, or when carrots, lettuce, cucumbers, green peppers, and tomatoes maintain their shapes, color, and taste in a tossed salad. As a result, individuals can be proud of their cultural heritage and uniqueness instead of being ashamed of their differences.

In fact, with the wide variety of people now living in this country, it is difficult to identify a single distinctive American culture. It may be more appropriate to think of the United States as having a giant multicultural.

Dimensions of Diversity

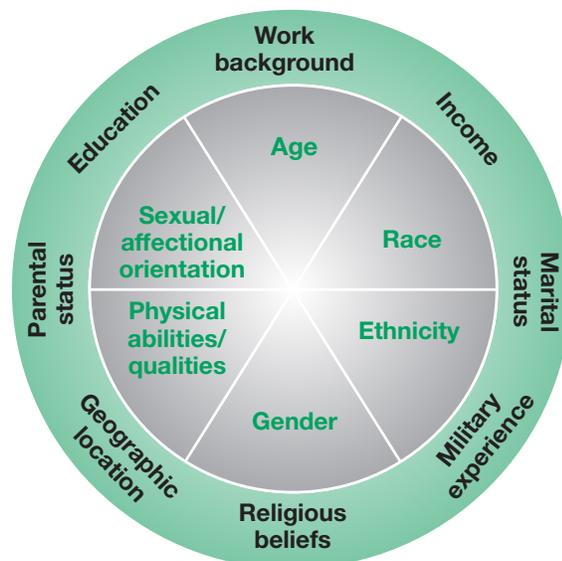
Diversity includes everyone because people differ from one another in many ways. In other words, diversity

has many dimensions, such as the following:

- Age
- Education
- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Geographic location
- Income
- Language
- Marital status
- Occupation
- Parental status
- Physical and mental ability
- Race
- Religious beliefs
- Sexual orientation
- Veteran status

As you can see, diversity is very broad in scope and includes all of us. However, some dimensions of diversity have more impact than others on the opportunities people have. The major dimensions of diversity can be categorized as primary and secondary dimensions.

The primary dimensions are unalterable and are extremely powerful in their effect. The secondary dimensions are important in shaping us, but we have some measure of control over them.



How Important Are Various Dimensions of Diversity?

In her book *The Four-Minute Sell* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984), Janet Elsea lists the nine most important things noticed about people in our society in order of importance:

- Skin Color
- Gender
- Age
- Appearance
- Facial expressions
- Eye contact
- Movement
- Personal space
- Touch

When we see another person, we notice, make assessments, and make decisions about how to interact with that individual based on these nine factors. These reactions, based on split-second assessments of others, influence our relationships.

Take a few minutes to think about your own community or workplace. Consider each of the following dimensions of diversity. How important is each of these differences to the people in your community or workplace? Are people treated differently based on these factors? Are decisions made about people based on these factors?

- Age
- Education
- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Geographical location or region
- Income level
- Occupation
- Physical and mental limitations
- Physical makeup (appearance)
- Religion
- Sexual orientation

The Past/The Future

We tend to have a natural affinity for people who share many of our own dimensions of diversity. Likewise, we tend to feel less comfortable with people who have few dimensions in common with us. When you think about your closest friends, are they similar to you or very different from you?

In the past, it was pretty likely that the people who lived in our neighborhoods, the children with whom we went to school, the people with whom we worked and did business, and the people with whom we worshipped were people who shared many of our own dimensions of diversity. In most aspects of our lives, the people with whom we interacted were very similar to ourselves.

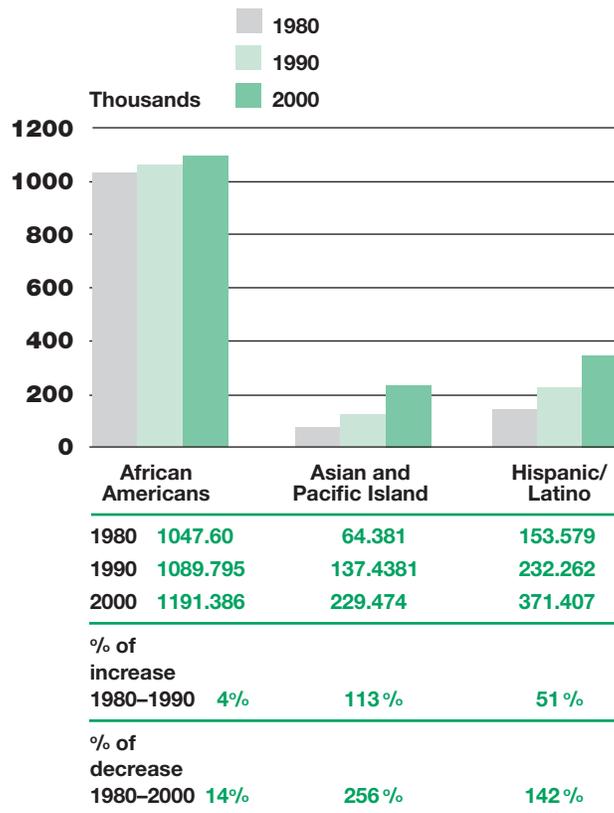
However, as our communities become increasingly more diverse, understanding the perspectives of diversity will become more important. Some of the changing demographics in Pennsylvania are summarized below.

Between 1980 and 2000 in Pennsylvania

- The African American population in Pennsylvania increased by 14 percent.
- The Hispanic/Latino population increased by 142 percent.
- The Asian/Pacific Islander population increased by 256 percent.

Between 1995 and 2025 in Pennsylvania

- The African American population will increase by 31 percent.
- The American Indian population will increase by 68 percent.
- The Asian population will more than double (130 percent).
- The Hispanic/Latino population will more than double (129 percent).
- The white population will decrease by about 2.7 percent.



The population in your community may not be undergoing dramatic changes. However, today's youth are more likely than previous generations to face the challenges of interacting and working with people different from themselves. It may happen when they go to college or join the armed services. Perhaps the job that best meets their needs will not be located in their home community—it could even be in another part of the world. The ability to accept and value human differences will help us relate more effectively with others in almost any circumstance.

Culture

Having a discussion about human diversity is difficult without including the concept of culture, which is the totality of values, beliefs, and behaviors common to a large group of people. A culture may include shared language and folklore, communication styles, and ideas and thinking patterns—the “truths” accepted by members of the group. Members of a culture have similar expectations of life.

Culture can be further defined as the body of learned beliefs, traditions, principles, and guides for behavior that are shared among members of a particular group. Culture serves as a road map for both perceiving and interacting with the world. Another way we can define culture is to say that culture is the behavioral software “that programs us all.”

- Culture determines our behavior and attitudes.
- No one is culture free.
- Most cultural rules are never written.
- We interpret other people's behavior through our own “cultural software.”

What If You Belonged to a Different Culture?

Take a few minutes to imagine that you woke up tomorrow morning and found you belonged to another culture, another ethnic group, or some other dimension of diversity. You might be Hispanic, Asian, African American, or white. You might have a physical or mental disability. You might belong to a different religious group—perhaps you are Jewish or Muslim. You might be a teenager or a very elderly person. You might live in the Deep South or in Alaska. Consider the items below with your new culture/group in mind. These are just some of the areas in your life that might be affected.

- The friends with whom you associate
- The social activities you enjoy
- The foods you prefer
- The religion you practice
- The clothing you wear
- The neighborhood in which you live
- The job/position you hold
- The vehicle you drive
- The music you enjoy
- The language(s) you speak
- The political party to which you belong

Now ask yourself the following questions:

- What parts of my life would remain the same?
- What parts of my life would be different?

Are you surprised to see how many things in your life would change if your culture changed?

Where Did We Receive Our Cultural Programming?

Where did we learn our values, beliefs, attitudes, and patterns of thinking and acting? Each of us is born into a culture. Our beliefs begin with those of our family, but they continue to be shaped by all our experiences after birth. For the most part, family attitudes, beliefs, languages, and other behaviors are accepted without question.

Examples of Cultural Programming

What are some examples of your cultural programming? Think about the family or personal beliefs or values you hold, or rituals you perform based on the cultural programming you received. The following are a few examples that others have shared:

- “The marriage will be more successful if you say your vows while the clock is on the upside of the hour, not while it is on the downside of the hour.”
- “Your hair will grow back if you cut it on the full moon.”

Most of us can finish the statements below.

- You can't teach an old dog....
- Big boys don't....
- You can lead a horse to water, but....

These commonly recognized statements represent cultural attitudes that are, in some cases, inaccurate.

Cultural Filters—“On Automatic”

Because each of us is different, we see and interpret behavior through our own cultural filter. One effect of our cultural programming is that it puts us “on automatic.”

When we were children learning about the world, some of the messages

we received about people who are different from us were misinformation. Some of these messages came from our parents, friends, teachers, and others. These people did not intend to feed us misinformation; they were simply passing on the messages that had been passed down to them. Some of the messages we received came from people. Some of the messages came from media, such as television and textbooks.

Some of the misinformation constituted stereotypes, such as the sentences you finished a few minutes ago (“You can’t teach an old dog new tricks”). These stereotypes became “mental tapes” that affected what we thought and how we felt about people who were different from ourselves. Those tapes also affected how we responded to people who were different from us. Those responses became automatic. As adults, most of us are still on automatic.

When we stereotype, we place a person in a particular “mental file” not based on information gained through knowledge about or personal experience with the particular person. Rather, we assign the person to a mental file based on what we believe about a group to which the person belongs.

Once learned, those stereotypes are called up instantly by our brain’s reticular activating system (RAS). Stereotypes exist for every group of people imaginable. Even though we may not like to admit that we stereotype people, we all do it. Stereotyping makes it easier to function in a world filled with unknowns. Stereotypes help us organize our thinking and manage massive amounts of information. We classify the infinite variety of human beings into a convenient handful of “types.” Once in place, stereotypes are difficult to undo. It’s hard to stop being “on automatic.”

Developing Diversity Competence

To help us move off automatic and begin to value differences, we need to develop diversity competence. Diversity competence consists of four areas: awareness, knowledge, skills, and action or behavior.

Awareness

- Recognize differences as diversity rather than abnormal behavior or inappropriate responses to the environment.
- Respect the benefits of diverse values and behaviors to people and to the organization.
- Accept that each culture finds some values more important and some behaviors more desirable than others.
- Understand the effect that historic distrust has on present-day interactions.
- Have a clear sense of your individual culture.
- Recognize your own ethnocentricity—the ways in which you stereotype, judge, and discriminate—and your emotional reactions to conflicting cultural values.
- Understand how the culture of your organization affects those whose culture is different.
- Recognize the similarities that are shared across the human culture regardless of the differences that exist among individual cultures and groups. These include, but are not limited to, desire for safety, good health, education and well-being of our children, love and belongingness, self-esteem (feeling of worthiness), and the ability to pursue and achieve our potential.

Knowledge

- Learn factual information about other cultures and groups with different backgrounds.
- Read an article or book about a cultural or social group different from your background. Compare your views with those of the author.
- See a movie about other cultural lifestyles. Compare how you live your life to what you’ve seen on film.
- Read about cross-gender differences in communication styles.
- Attend a cultural event, celebration, or holiday program of a different culture that you have not experienced. Compare the similarities and differences of this event/celebration to those of your cultural group. Find out the meanings behind the differences.
- Learn a new language.
- Interview people from different cultures to learn about their cultures. How did they grow up? What were the important messages passed on to family members? How are children viewed? How do they view older people?
- Explore your family history and background. Where did your ancestors come from before arriving in this country? What are the special customs and traditions that were shared from generation to generation?
- Interview an older member of your family.

Skills

- Take personal responsibility for the way you respond to difference.
- Make continued and sincere attempts to understand the world from other points of view.

- Develop skills in cross-cultural communication.
- Develop problem-solving skills.
- Develop skills in conflict management.
- Look for ways to work effectively with diverse groups of people.

Action/Behavior

- Teach others about cultural differences.
- Develop a mentoring relationship with someone from a different culture or identity group.
- Show more patience when working and interacting with people who have learning styles different from yours.
- Integrate diversity issues as an ongoing topic in staff meetings at work.
- Develop a personal plan for continued learning toward diversity competency.

The Challenge of Diversity

Dealing with diversity can be daunting. It will help to keep in mind the Seven Underlying Principles of Diversity (adapted from “Diversity: Just What Is It Anyway?” *Dimensions in Diversity*, 3 (1995): 3.)

1. Diversity is an inside job, meaning that diversity is not about “them.” Rather, it is about each person coming to terms with his or her attitudes, beliefs, and experiences about others and gaining comfort with difference.
2. Diversity goes beyond race and gender. The diversity tent is big enough to include everyone— young and old, homeless and affluent, immigrant and native, white and black, rural and urban, gang member and corporate professional.

3. No one is the target of blame for current or past inequities. All human beings have been socialized to behave in certain ways, and all of us are at times both perpetrators and victims of discrimination and stereotypes. The idea is to move forward in creating more opportunities.
4. Human beings are ethnocentric, seeing the world through their own narrow view and judging the world by their familiar yardstick. This is not bad in itself, but it can be a source of conflict if other ways of being are not accommodated and valued.
5. The human species resists changes, continuing to seek homeostasis. This makes the constant adaptation required by diversity difficult for people already overwhelmed by staggering transitions in today’s communities and organizations.
6. Human beings find comfort and trust in likeness. We have a tendency to seek the company of those most similar to us in a variety of ways (for example, age, gender, and ethnicity).
7. It is difficult for people to share power. History shows us that we rarely do it voluntarily. Understanding this last reality helps clarify why a backlash is sometimes associated with diversity from people who may believe they will lose in this experience.

All these truisms about the human species do not make people mean-spirited or cruel. It just makes us humans. Nevertheless, these realities make dealing with diversity a challenge.

For Further Information

Diverse Issues. This quarterly newsletter is a publication of Penn State Cooperative Extension. It may be accessed electronically at <http://diversityeducation.cas.psu.edu>.

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One of the most critical needs in Pennsylvania is strong local leadership for the future well-being of communities. This includes leadership for civic and nonprofit organizations, youth, the business community, elected officials, and citizens.

The *Learning Today, Leading Tomorrow* leadership curriculum was developed to help individuals develop and strengthen their personal leadership skills so they can play active and constructive leadership roles in their communities. The program focuses on developing and strengthening personal and interpersonal leadership skills, group and organizational leadership skills, and community leadership skills.

The curriculum is designed for use as a comprehensive, multiple-session leadership training program, taught by trained Penn State Cooperative Extension educators. Individual modules can also be used for stand-alone training within existing groups or organizations who want training on specific leadership or group process issues.

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- 3: Managing Conflict
- 4: Valuing Diversity

Unit III: Group/Organizational Leadership Skills

- 1: Productive Groups
- 2: Effective Meetings
- 3: Group Decisions

Unit IV: Community/Public Policy Leadership Skills

- 1: Dealing with Change
- 2: Public Issues
- 3: Understanding Pennsylvania Local Government
- 4: Active Leadership

For more information about the *Learning Today, Leading Tomorrow* program, contact your local Penn State Cooperative Extension office, or visit www.leadership.psu.edu.

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DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP POTENTIAL