

Diversity in the Workplace

SUBMITTED BY: Knowledge@Wharton Summer Educator

SUBJECT(S): Management

GRADE LEVEL(S): 9, 10, 11, 12

≡ OVERVIEW:

The issue of diversity in the workplace has been a longstanding concern since the introduction of Affirmative Action and other civil rights legislation such as the American Disabilities Act (ADA). This and the following lesson will support students in thinking critically about issues of diversity in the workplace and guide them in becoming advocates for promoting an inclusive and equitable workforce. Further, students will become more aware of their own cultural strengths as a result of self-examination.

≡ NBEA STANDARD(S):

- Management, IV. Personal Management Skills
- Management, VI. Human Resource Management

≡ RELATED ARTICLES:

- [“The Conversation: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Business”](#)
- [“Robots Advance: Automation in Burger Flipping and Beyond”](#)
- [“Learning to Be Color Brave”](#)
- [“Is Bossy the Other “B” Word?”](#)
- [“How the Gig Economy Fits into the Future of Work”](#)
- [“Future of the Business World: Moniola Odunsi Fights for Racial Justice”](#)
- [“Exploring Immigration: Will the U.S. See Reform in 2019?”](#)

- “Educator Toolkit: Diversity and Inclusion in Life and Work”
- “Career Insight: Hope for Young Black Entrepreneurs”
- “Can Shaq Save the Papa John’s Brand?”
- “Business in 3: Cell Phone Forensics, Smart Homes and Wage Bias”
- “Advocate Eli Wolff: ‘The Disabled Athlete Is Still Siloed and Segregated’”
- “A ‘Zero-Generation’ American on What Shakes Him to the Core”
- “6 Takeaways from Wharton’s Discussion on ‘Race and the Entrepreneur’”
- “5 Questions for Amber Yang, Master of the ‘Space Debris Apocalypse’”

Common Core Standard(s):

- *Speaking & Listening*: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–10–11–12 topics, texts and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- *Speaking & Listening*: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely and logically in such a way that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, and the organization, development, substance and style are appropriate to the purpose, audience, and task.
- *Writing Standards*: Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes and audiences.
- *Writing Standards*: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating an understanding of the subject under investigation.
- *Reading Standards for Informational Text*: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support the analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- *Reading Standards for Informational Text*: Determine a central idea of a text and analyze it to provide an objective summary of the text.

Objectives/Purposes:

- Students will gain a general understanding of the role of human resources as a part of management.
- Students will explore what diversity encompasses in the 21st century.

- Students will become familiar with federal legislation that protects diverse populations and understand why this legislation exists.
- Students will self-examine the ways in which they are diverse beings and how this can be used as a strength in business.

Knowledge@Wharton Article: “Diversity in Corporate America: Still a Work in Progress”

Other Resources/Materials:

- A description of Affirmative Action: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Affirmative_action
- A description of Americans with Disabilities Act: see [Handout 1](#), and Federal ADA website: <http://www.ada.gov/videogallery.htm>
- A description of the Age Discrimination Act: see [Handout 1](#), and <http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/types/age.cfm>.
- A copy of a company’s statement on Affirmative Action/Anti-Discriminatory practices: see [Handout 2](#).

*Teachers might want to familiarize themselves with a few cases to supplement the legislation they will present on Affirmative Action, ADA, etc.

Additional information about laws pertaining to workplace discrimination may be found at: <http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/index.cfm> and <http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/other.cfm>

Activities:

1) Introduce the term “human resources” and have students offer ideas about what happens in this part of business management. Add to the generated list any areas that students might have missed (e.g., job classification, employee assistance programs, training, solving workplace issues such as harassment, policy enforcement).

2) Segue this introduction into talking about HR’s obvious role in hiring, which subsequently involves managing diversity recruitment and establishing a harassment-free workplace for all — both of which have been controversial issues throughout history. Before going further, ask the students about who they think falls under the “diversity” umbrella. What does this term imply, and which individuals come to mind? Use this discussion as an opportunity to talk about how diversity has expanded to encompass many more elements other than race and gender (e.g., sexual orientation, religion, age, people with physical disabilities, etc.). (6 mins)

- 3) Ask students to share what they know about the laws pertaining to the employment of diverse candidates. The teacher can fill in the knowledge gaps in this area by using the brief descriptions of three common laws included within this plan. Provide a few examples to clarify why these laws were enacted and how they have been used to help people gain access to various careers, professions, educational opportunities and even sports. The teacher should be prepared to clarify any misunderstanding of policies and terms such as Affirmative Action, as it is often a misinterpreted law (check the resources area for suggested website info). (10 mins)

- 4) Have students read the article: “Diversity in Corporate America: Still a Work in Progress.” As it is a long article, consider dividing it into sections and having small groups focus on different areas. Direct the students to underline and make notes in the margins of things that stand out along the way. (10 mins)

- 5) Have students discuss their takeaways from the article. (10-12 mins) The teacher may guide this discussion further through the following questions:
 - What are students’ thoughts on the state of diversity in the current workforce?
 - The article doesn’t say much about *why* achieving a diverse workplace is such a difficult task. What is not said?
 - What do you think about diversity as mere “representation”? What does this imply to you?
 - The author doesn’t really state why diversity is important other than achieving a “representation” of women and minorities, and suggesting that it is about “fairness and justice.” Is this enough to make a case for having a diverse workforce? What are your thoughts on the significance of a diverse workforce?

- 6) Wrap up the lesson with a summary of what was gleaned from the discussion. For an exit slip, have students record on an index card one new thing they learned about the topic of diversity in the workplace.

Tying It All Together: In the next segment, students will do a self-inventory of the ways in which they are culturally diverse and how these features may be strengths for a future employer. Have students brainstorm about this in advance for homework.

Practice Outside of the Classroom: For homework, make each student responsible for finding and reading an article on some element of diversity in the workplace. Students can do a show-and-tell of what they found in class. Further, you can create a bulletin board display of the articles so that students can read them again at their leisure.

Have students read the Wharton Global Youth Program article “[Embracing Differences: Companies Tap the Richness of Diversity.](#)”

What Worked and What I Would Do Differently: Diversity sessions are always somewhat difficult to navigate. When I set out to facilitate this lesson, I found that a segment of the students were a little reluctant to talk about this issue — leading me to think that things appear very different for their generation and that I might be pushing my own generational experiences on people who lived and saw things in a new way. I tried this lesson on a vocal group of mostly seniors, who I immensely enjoyed working with. There were a couple of brave African-American women who spoke up about their experiences with discrimination as young people when others in the room tried to dismiss racial tension and disparities as a bygone issue. There was another segment of the class that focused solely on the unfairness of the Affirmative Action policy — advocating that the only thing that should matter is “how qualified” candidates are for positions or admission to universities.

Although the discussion didn’t go quite the way that I had hoped it would, I definitely feel that students took something away from the commentaries offered by their peers, and perhaps my own questioning stance. One of the things I tried to underscore in the few times that I revisited the subject of diversity is that we must keep in mind differences aside from race and ethnicity. Diversity includes much more than these factors, but the conversation often continues to focus on black/white race relations. Although I did not get to spend as much time as I wanted to on looking at other aspects of diversity (e.g., age, disability, sexual orientation), the brief brainstorming session I facilitated at least expanded students’ thinking about these issues.

I should add that there was considerable debate around what constituted diversity (e.g., size, gender). In the future, I would break up the group to focus on the issues pertaining to various protected class citizens. Giving the students an opportunity to research these issues and then present their findings to the class would have made this session better (or the follow-up to it much stronger). However, program resources and design limited the types of activities that could be accomplished in the space and time allotted.

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