



Lesson A

Cultural Diversity and its Value in the Workplace

Description: This module and lesson presents key aspects of variations and differences in the cultures of individuals with regard to values, beliefs, attitudes, expectations and behavior. It summarizes the effect these variations and differences may have on the workplace.

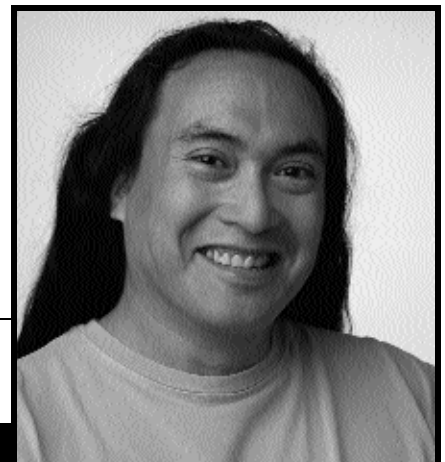
The concept of cultural diversity in the workplace is a recognition of the great variety of differences among workers (e.g., race, culture, age, sex and disability) and the inherent value of these differences. Cultural diversity implies that differences must be recognized, respected and promoted as a positive fact of the work environment.

Objectives: Upon completion of this module and lesson, you will be able to recognize that:

- Diversity means more than race and gender.
- Cultural differences influence behavior.
- Cultural diversity can thrive in the workplace.
- Diversity has value for the workplace.
- Appreciation of diversity positively affects the work environment.

Listed below are the **topics** associated with this lesson.

- Topic 1 Understanding Cultural Differences
- Topic 2 Valuing Cultural Diversity in the Workplace
- Topic 3 Working Together





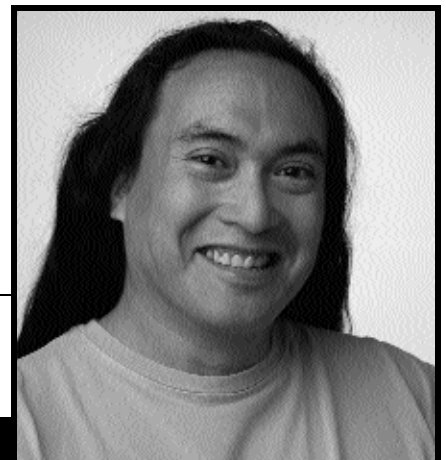
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Lesson: Cultural Diversity and its Value in the Workplace
Topic 1: Understanding Cultural Differences

A **cultural group** is defined as people with common origins, customs and styles of living. The group usually has shared language, history and experiences that shape the group's values, goals, expectations, beliefs, perceptions and behaviors from birth until death. When we think of or describe a cultural group, we tend to describe the "norms" that are characteristic of the group. These norms are generally developed within the group and shape their members' attitudes and behavior. Among these are:

- Sense of self
- Concept of time
- Personal space
- Communication and language
- Food and eating customs
- Personal relationships/friendships
- Work and learning styles
- Work habits and practices
- Operating styles

Because as many variations exist **within** a cultural group as **across** different cultural groups, no one should assume that most or all members of any cultural group will think or operate in the same way. Rather than pigeonhole employees by cultural identification, fellow workers should respect individual differences equally emphasized.





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Lesson: Cultural Diversity and its Value in the Workplace
Topic 1: Understanding Cultural Differences

Example

Characteristics of a Culture

Sense of self and space

Some cultures stress formality while others are more relaxed and comfortable.

Communication and language

Some cultures favor explicit and direct communication while others place the emphasis on content and meaning.

Dress and appearance

Some cultures have an ideal or an accepted way to dress for different kinds of activity, while other cultures have a wide range of accepted dress.

Food and eating habits

Some aspects of culture emphasize whether we are eating out of necessity or eating as a social event.

Time and time consciousness

Some cultures place different values on how we spend our time.

Relationships, family and friends

Some cultures stress teamwork, others stress independence. Some cultures place a high value on the nuclear family; others value the culture of the workplace. Some cultures place a high value on youth while others respect age as a sign of valuable experience.

Beliefs and attitudes

There are cultural differences regarding authority, social order and the manner in which one expressed one's opinion.

Some are egalitarian (fair and treating all as equals), some might be authoritarian, others might encourage challenging authority. Some might believe that individuals control their destiny; others believe that the future is predestined. Some cultures stress gender equity while others exist in a state of inequality.

Work habits and practices

Cultures place different values on what motivates us. Some cultures might stress intrinsic values; other might emphasize productivity rates; and still others might emphasize how valuable (money/payment) our services or products are considered to be.





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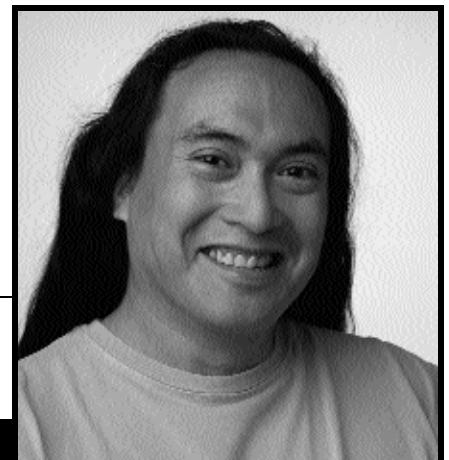
Lesson: Cultural Diversity and its Value in the Workplace
Topic 1: Understanding Cultural Differences

Exercise

Understanding Norms Across Cultures

Are the following statements true or false?

- _____ 1. Perception is a passive and neutral process.
- _____ 2. Close interpersonal distance can be perceived as essential by one employee or undesirable by another.
- _____ 3. Failure to maintain eye contact during a conversation indicates a weak personality.
- _____ 4. A significant percentage of our communication with other people has nothing to do with written or spoken words.



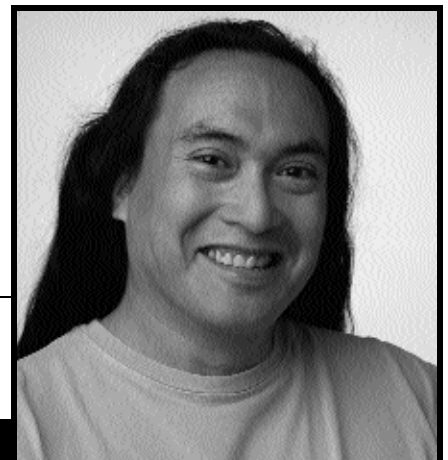


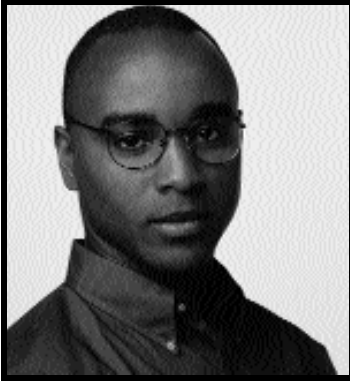
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Topic 1: Understanding Cultural Differences

Exercise Answers

1. **False.** Perception is an active process. We actively distinguish between the important and unimportant. Some objects are perceived actively and clearly, while others are ignored or only partially perceived. What a person perceives often stems from the person's cultural background and current environment.
2. **True.** In some cultures, close interpersonal distance may be perceived as highly desirable, whereas in other cultures it is undesirable. For example, in Arab cultures, the distance between two persons can be six to 12 inches, whereas it is 12 to 18 inches in Hispanic cultures. In a typical American business setting, the recommended distance is 18 to 24 inches.
3. **False.** In most Western cultures, the use of direct eye contact symbolizes listening and attention. However, direct eye contact is seen as unfavorable by various Asian cultures. The length of the eye contact is also a cultural variable. If extended, eye contact might be perceived as aggression, or if too brief as a lack of interest.
4. **True.** Much of our communication with other people has nothing to do with words. We depend, instead, on a silent communication medium called nonverbal communication. Dr. Loren Dickinson, a professor of communications, has found that, in certain situations, up to 90 percent of the information we gather from others is in nonverbal form.





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Cultural Diversity and its Value in the Workplace

Topic 2: Valuing Cultural Diversity in the Workplace

Valuing cultural diversity refers to the **appreciation of the backgrounds, identities and contributions** of all members of the work force. The valuing of cultural diversity in the work environment allows employees to expand their vision and values. Appreciation of diversity discourages people from thinking the same way or relying on models that have outlived their usefulness. Peter Senge defines mental models as the tendency to retain ways of working simply because "That's the way we've always done it around here."

Cultural diversity in the workplace encompasses three areas.

The **legal framework** includes laws and regulations established by legislation, court decisions, executive orders and/or policies to ensure equal opportunity without regard to:

- Race
- Color
- Sex
- National origin
- Age
- Physical or mental ability
- Religion
- Sexual orientation.

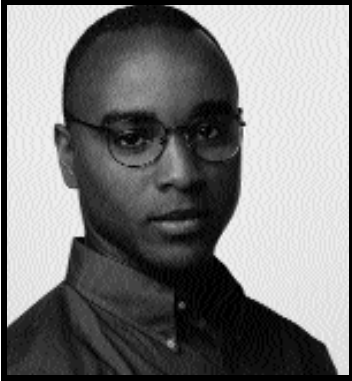
Employment programs and practices refer to strategies used by USDA managers to attract and retain qualified workers to whom USDA customers can relate. These employment programs should strive to attract qualified individuals who do not traditionally apply for certain USDA job opportunities.

Valuing diversity means recognizing and considering the numerous perspectives and styles that employees have developed from their rich variety of backgrounds and experiences. Many employers appreciate diversity in employees' operating styles, values, interests and personalities and value the positive contribution of these attributes in the workplace.

The value of diversity is directly proportional to the **commitment of management** and staff to the above principles, both in theory and practice. This commitment requires management to encourage the following:

- Open communication
- Inclusion
- Empathy
- Respect
- Patience
- Tolerance
- Suspension of judgments and assumptions
- Risk taking
- Openness to new ideas and approaches





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Cultural Diversity and its Value in the Workplace
Topic 2: Valuing Cultural Diversity in the Workplace

Example

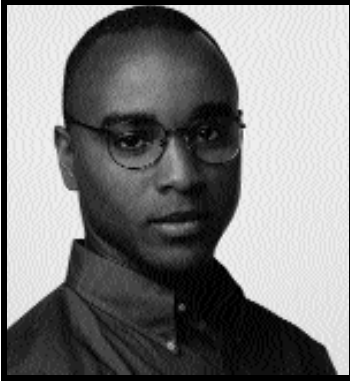
Generation XYZ

Sean recently joined his new employer, the Forest Service, as a trainee in the regional public affairs office. There are two units in the office: one for print and one for video. Although Sean had held part-time jobs throughout high school and had a good track record with each employer, he was concerned that his new supervisor would have difficulty accepting him as a person.

Sean was sporting blue hair streaks, an earring and a worn out Nirvana tattoo on his right forearm. But as he looked around his work area while completing assignments, he could not help but notice the diversity among the employees. There were older employees, Hispanic, Asian and African-American employees and even a few Gen-Xers like himself.

Joan, his supervisor, came over to his area during his break to see how things were going and to continue his orientation to the job. She complimented him on his employer references, noting the comments on his "politeness" and "willingness to help others out." Joan told Sean that this office worked in self-managing teams and that he would have the opportunity to learn almost every job in the public affairs office. She was very attentive to all of Sean's questions and patiently answered each one.





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Topic 2: Valuing Cultural Diversity in the Workplace

Exercise

Spheres of Cultural Diversity

Match the letter of a definition from the list on the right next to its appropriate term.

_____ Valuing diversity

A. Laws and regulations established by legislation, court decisions, executive orders and/or policies to ensure equal opportunity.

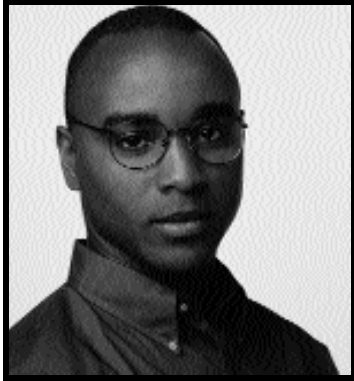
_____ Employment programs and practices

B. Strategies to attract and retain qualified workers to whom customers can relate, including potential employees not traditionally attracted to the USDA.

_____ Legal framework

C. Appreciation of the backgrounds, identities and contributions of all members of the work force.





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Topic 2: Valuing Cultural Diversity in the Workplace

Exercise Answers

C Valuing diversity

A. Laws and regulations established by legislation, court decisions, executive orders and/or policies to ensure equal opportunity.

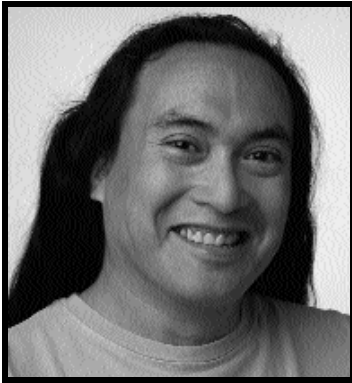
B Employment programs

B. Strategies to attract and retain qualified workers to whom customers can relate, including potential employees not traditionally attracted to the USDA.

A Legal framework

C. Appreciation of the backgrounds, identities and contributions of all members of the work force.





Lesson A

Cultural Diversity and its Value in the Workplace Topic 3: Working Together

There is a distinction between valuing and implementing cultural diversity in the workplace. **Valuing** diversity implies a philosophy; **managing** diversity involves incorporating those values into actions -- into a strategic plan.

An agency that encourages and respects a diverse work force is one that **actively monitors** its practices, such as recruitment, promotion and employee development policies, and takes action to ensure that those practices do not hinder, but in fact support, a diverse work force.

The management of workplace diversity involves the **translation of values** that ensure access and equitable treatment of all employees into workplace practices. Following are some examples of how values can be translated into workplace practices:

Values

Open Communication

Inclusion

Respect

Patience

Workplace Practices

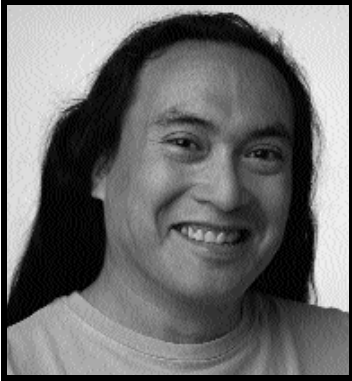
Avoid reprisals or negative consequences for staff who admit lack of understanding of assignments.

Provide regular opportunities for all staff to exchange news, ideas and progress reports.

Solicit staff involvement in planning for projects and practices that affect them.

Demonstrate your ability to learn from the staff member(s) whose ideas and work results you might dismiss or discount.





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Cultural Diversity and its Value in the Workplace
Topic 3: Working Together

Example

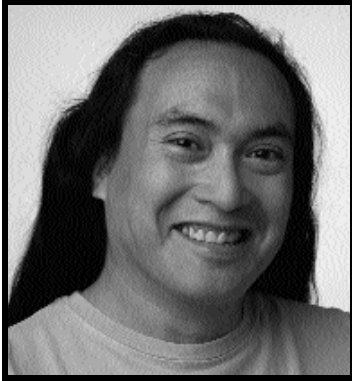
Albert Walking Eagle

An example of valuing cultural diversity is the federal government's annual observance of November as the Native American/American Indian Cultural Heritage Month.

Albert Walking Eagle, a member of the Nez Perce Indian tribe of Idaho and a highly regarded member of the USDA headquarters staff, usually dresses in fine suits.

For one November observance, Albert wore his Native American "ribbon shirt" to work. His shirt was covered with brightly colored ribbons which, he explained, members of his tribe wear on special occasions. Albert wanted to share this traditional custom with his co-workers as his contribution to his agency's celebration of American Indians.





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Cultural Diversity and its Value in the Workplace
Topic 3: Working Together

Exercise

Values in the Workplace

Match the following practices with their complementary values.
Hint: Each Practice matches with more than one Value.

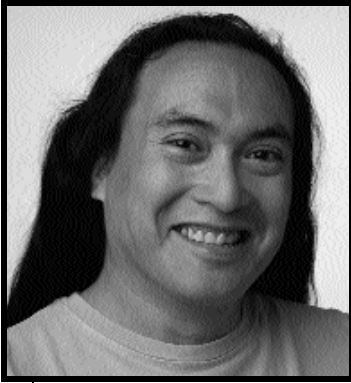
Practices

- a) Encourage staff to stretch into new skill or content areas and assign work accordingly. _____
- b) Use failures as opportunities for learning from mistakes and avoid negative consequences. _____
- c) Avoid reprisals or negative consequences for staff who admit lack of understanding of assignments. _____
- d) Provide regular opportunities for all staff to exchange news, ideas and progress reports. _____
- e) Take into account a change in staff member's current personal situation as it affects work performance. _____
- f) Share maximum information or a rationale for withholding information. _____
- g) Be willing to try others' ideas even when you are sure you are right. _____
- h) Solicit staff involvement in planning for projects and practices that affect them. _____
- i) Demonstrate your ability to learn from the staff member(s) whose ideas and work results you might dismiss or discount. _____

Values

- 1. Open communication
- 2. Inclusion
- 3. Empathy
- 4. Respect
- 5. Patience
- 6. Tolerance
- 7. Suspending judgments and assumptions
- 8. Risk-taking
- 9. Openness to new ideas and approaches





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Topic 3: Working Together

Exercise Answers

Match the following practices with their complementary values.
Hint: Each Practice matches with more than one Value.

- a) 7, 8, 9,
- b) 5, 6, 7, 8, 9
- c) 1, 5, 6, 8
- d) 2, 9
- e) 3, 4, 5, 6
- f) 2, 4
- g) 2, 7, 8, 9
- h) 1, 2, 4, 8, 9
- i) 5, 6, 7, 8, 9





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Lesson Summary

1. Cultural differences often shape social and workplace norms regarding: (Select all that apply.)

- A. Concept of time
- B. Communication and language
- C. Personal relationships
- D. Work habits and practices

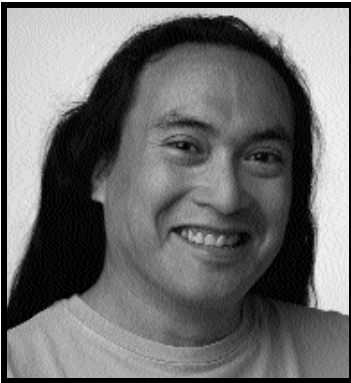
2. Cultural diversity in the workplace helps in: (Select all that apply.)

- A. Encouraging people to avoid thinking the same way
- B. Guaranteeing opposing viewpoints
- C. Satisfying quotas
- D. Representing the work force base

3. An agency that respects a diverse work force is one that: (Select all that apply.)

- A. Actively monitors its practices
- B. Assures that its practices do not hinder but instead support a diverse work force
- C. Requires management to translate a philosophy into goals and objectives
- D. Requires that all employees adapt to the cultures of all other employees





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Lesson Summary Answers

1. Cultural differences often shape social and workplace norms regarding: (Select all that apply.)

The correct answers are A, B, C and D. All of these social and workplace norms are shaped by cultural differences.

2. Cultural diversity in the workplace helps in: (Select all that apply.)

The correct answers are both A and D. Including employees who represent varied backgrounds, styles and experiences in the workplace can help management to consider all options and points of view before finalizing a policy or procedure. In addition, attracting and hiring employees who represent the work force enables the employer to keep abreast of cultural influences as they affect customer wants and needs.

3. An agency that respects a diverse work force is one that: (Select all that apply.)

The correct answers are A, B and C. An agency that respects a diverse work force is one that actively monitors its practices to ensure that policies and procedures are not based upon or carried out in any manner that devalues the culture, cultural traits or heritage of any employee.

