

Women and diversity in the workforce

[Sociology](#), [Women](#)



There is a growing and continuous interest in workplace diversity within management and organization studies. This interest can be traced back to Johnston and Packard's (1987) influential report, *Workforce 2000*, which alerted organizations to the dramatic demographic changes that were in the process of transforming the North American workforce. (Prasad, 1997).

Managing diversity at the workplace presents many dilemmas. Confronted with constant change, management, business educators, and organizational consultants continue to meet the challenges of a new and diverse workforce in a number of ways.

There are numerous ways in which to define diversity. Diversity includes all the ways in which people differ, and it encompasses all the different characteristics that make one individual or group different from another. It is all inclusive and recognizes everyone and every group as part of the diversity that should be valued. (Wentling, 1997). A broad definition includes not only race, gender, ethnicity, age, national origin, religion and disability, but may include sexual orientation, values, personality, education, language, physical appearance, marital status, lifestyle, beliefs and background characteristics such as geographic origin, tenure with the organization and economic status.

There is a significant increase in women and minority populations in the workplace; Americans continue to mature; an increasing number of minority youths are becoming part of the workforce; gay men, lesbians, and bisexual individuals are becoming an important part of the workforce and marketplace; people with disabilities are also increasingly entering the labor force; and more business is becoming global. (Wentling, 1997).

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Nearly half of all workers will be women, and more than a quarter will likely be members of minority races. About 40% of the work force will be over 45 years of age and only about 15% of new entrants will be the young white males (Labich, 1996). And yet another statistic, the Hispanic population is quickly becoming the largest minority group in the United States and the fastest growing ethnic faction in the civilian labor force (Forst, 1997). With these changes marching forward ever so rapidly, it is no wonder that management must battle to stay on top of diversity issues.

Having a diverse workforce and managing it properly is perceived as a competitive strategy that can not only help attract diverse customers but also employees who have different perspectives that can contribute to the creativity of the organization (Wentling, 1997). Researchers have found that an important reason for implementing diversity initiatives in organizations is to improve corporate productivity and profitability (Wentling, 1997). A diverse workforce catalyzes more organizational creativity and productivity because workers are drawn from a larger more democratic, gene pool (Prasad, 1997).

When trying to diversify an organization, you can be assured that there will be resistance. Management must be able to implement change as necessary. No one series of workshops will be ideal for every organization, but the most effective training methods seem to revolve around the daily problems workers face. (Labich, 1996). " We are color and gender blind" is often heard throughout organizations in America. One of the biggest

challenges may be to retrain managers to recognize and value differences rather than disregard and dismiss them (Mor Barak, 1998).

You simply have to adapt your workplace to the labor force; ignore it, and you could be sacrificing quality and productivity (Labich, 1996). The point for management is understanding where the work force is at before you try to move it where you want. (Labich, 1996). Embracing diversity raises fundamental questions about how individuals in organizations define themselves, how they feel good about themselves, and how they experience and relate to others. If organizations are to embrace diversity, then they must find creative approaches to helping people become fully aware of the impact that social identity has on sense making and behavior (Prasad, 1997).

BankAmerica is an example of a corporation that gives people a higher level of comfort to pursue their careers, to find out about opportunities.

BankAmerica also focuses on mentoring programs and promotion practices (Brown, 1998). Yet another example of successful diversification is Liz Claiborne's \$2.4 billion-a-year fashion company which employs nearly 41% minorities. This is well above the average of 25.6% (Vinzant, 1998). Both companies have an awareness of the importance of diversification and thus make it a long-term goal.