



Valuing Differences and Diversity in the Workplace

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When we talk about “diversity” in a group, the usual connotation is differences in race, age, or physical appearance of people. The idea of diversity is particularly evident in countries such as the United States, which has long been the melting pot of many different nationalities and races. In countries like the Philippines, however, diversity may seem to be a difficult concept to pin down. Given that approximately 90 percent of our employees are citizens of the same race, religion and culture, we might well wonder what constitutes a “diverse” Filipino workforce?

Diversity need not be limited to racial differences. It is true that diversity includes differences that are evident, such as age, gender, height, weight, and skin, eye, and hair color. We must remember, however, that there are other less-evident differences—such as personality, styles, abilities, motivations, goals, and cultural background. These, coupled with our distinguishing physical attributes, make us diverse and unique individuals.

Every employee brings his or her unique self into the workplace. It is important that this uniqueness is recognized, accepted, and valued by peers, leaders, and subordinates, just as it is important for an employee to value the uniqueness of others, too. These differences provide a range of skills and abilities that a

team can tap to become self-sufficient and successful. An organization needs new and different ideas to stay ahead of the competition and survive. In making decisions and finding solutions to problems, it is always important to look at situations from different perspectives. In short, valuing diversity is one of the keys to an organization’s success.

But take heed. As much as an organization can benefit from having a diverse workforce, it may also prove challenging if not handled properly. In fact, if workforce diversity is not valued and managed effectively, it may lead to unnecessary stress, low productivity and possibly even high turnover.

Knowing the importance and complications that come along with diversity in the workplace, how should we deal with diversity in order to maximize its advantages? Development Dimensions International (DDI) has devised a simple yet effective way to address this important issue. In **Valuing Differences**, a course in DDI’s *Techniques for a High-Performance Workforce®* learning system, participants are introduced to SAM. SAM stands for Styles, Abilities and Motivations. Since each employee has different styles, abilities and motivations, each has a different SAM. For any team to be effective, they must be able to accept and use the different styles, abilities and motivations of all the members.

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1. How you organize and complete work.
2. How you think.
3. How you learn.
4. How you respond to others.
5. How you view work.
6. How you view your role.

Your **ABILITIES** represent your knowledge, skills, and capabilities. They are what you know and what you can do. Some examples include:

1. Creating a budget.
2. Solving a mechanical problem.
3. Teaching a class.
4. Operating equipment.
5. Writing a speech.
6. Reading blueprints.

MOTIVATIONS represent the specific things that drive you to behave the way you do. They are your goals, values, wants, and needs. They excite, interest, and inspire you. Knowing what motivates you and others can help you identify the benefits and rewards of completing certain tasks or exhibiting certain behaviors. Following are examples of motivations and some of their characteristics:

1. **Achievement:** Likes challenges, and setting and working toward goals; wants to be known as an expert.
2. **Helpfulness:** Likes helping others and making people feel comfortable; is naturally empathetic.

3. **Independence:** Likes working independently and being one's own boss.
4. **Leadership:** Enjoys making decisions, influencing others, and giving advice.
5. **Order:** Likes stable routines, goals and systems for accomplishing tasks.
6. **Visibility:** Likes public recognition and attention.

Using a series of learning tools such as inventories and self-assessments in **Valuing Differences**, participants are able to understand their personal SAMs, as well as appreciate and value the SAMs of others. By learning how to apply the concepts, they are able to improve decision-making (through seeking and considering diverse approaches), reduce conflict, and increase morale and teamwork (by accepting and appreciating differences).

In OPAL® (Online Performance And Learning), a web-based electronic performance support system created by DDI, tips and techniques are presented to help individuals contribute to an organization's efforts in promoting diversity in the workplace. Here are some quick tips to help you in your own efforts to value differences among your peers and colleagues:

Recognize the value of all contributions and the people who make them. Remain open-minded. Place your organization's and team's agenda above your personal agenda.

Encourage open and honest discussion of differences. Acknowledge diverse SAMs and the benefits or problems that might arise. Ask for ideas about how to enhance the benefits and counteract the problems that result from differences.



Make a conscious effort to include people with different ideas and approaches.

Consciously seek out others with whom you might not ordinarily come in contact. Control the impulse to exclude people who are known for being difficult or complex. Recognize that sometimes it is not a single idea that provides a solution, but a single idea enhanced and expanded by many others.

Support alternative ideas and approaches.

Allow people to express their complete ideas or thoughts before asking questions about them. Show you are listening by maintaining eye contact and nodding. Take notes if necessary. Don't view differences as either superior or inferior.

Valuing differences strengthens an organization by providing it with a variety of resources that can be tapped and maximized. Having people with a variety of styles, abilities, and motivations provides room for flexibility, creativity, and dynamic interactions. In today's fast-paced times, the organizations with the greatest competitive advantage are those that can make the most of their people's diverse SAMs. So, while we continue to appreciate our similarities, let us also celebrate, support, and value the differences that make us unique!

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