

# The Role of Diversity

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## WHAT'S COVERED

This lesson introduces diversity and the role that it plays in a team. You will be able to identify what categories are impacted by diversity, the benefits of a diverse team, and why personality is considered an element of diversity. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Diversity Defined
2. Diversity vs. Homogeneous Teams
3. Personality

## 1. Diversity Defined

Diversity can span a wide range of areas. Many people think of it as just ethnicity and culture. Diversity includes sexual orientation, gender, personality, culture, abilities and disabilities, education, spirituality and religion, age, and language.

A diverse team is open to differences in any or all of these areas without allowing diversity to impact the hierarchy or any judgments. Tolerance for diversity does not mean ignoring the aspects of diversity or pretending that everyone is the same. It means embracing what is different and integrating it into your team values and goals. When a person ignores or pretends that there is no difference between the people on a team, miscommunication, trust issues, and a weaker overall team is the result.

If there is an area where there is intolerance for diversity, there are some things that you can do to help it change. These things can include open communication, integrating diverse perspectives, recognizing value, attending diversity training, and upholding zero tolerance for discrimination.

## 2. Diversity vs. Homogeneous Teams

Take a look at two different teams: One that is diverse and one where the team members are all the same, or homogeneous.

Diverse Teams	Homogenous Teams
Open to different approaches	Entrenched thinking
Increased creativity	Less productive
Increased productivity	Decreased problem solving techniques
Conflict resolution	Decreased conflict resolution skills
Effective team value creation	Hesitant to offer alternate perspectives
Debate regarding methods	

It's important to note that research indicates that diverse teams are more productive and effective than homogeneous teams. Part of the reason for that is, when you have people with different backgrounds and personalities, there are many different viewpoints to incorporate into your team goals, your organizational goals, and your company at large. This results in a stronger overall perspective for everyone involved in the team. Diverse teams tend to think more creatively. With more perspectives, there's more chance for creativity.

On the other hand, homogeneous teams tend to be a little more entrenched in their thinking. Like-minded individuals produce like-minded ideas. The diverse team is more open to different approaches. This means different approaches to problem solving, different approaches to creative solutions, creative ideas. The homogeneous team is a little more hesitant to alternate perspectives, or they may not *have* alternate perspectives.

Handling conflict is a little tougher for the homogeneous team. The diverse team understands how to handle conflict because having a diverse team may lead to more conflict because of the varying perspectives. If it's handled well, the entire team thrives. Some type of conflict and debate is healthy for a team. This is where solutions are usually born.



THINK ABOUT IT

Why would a diverse team be better at handling conflict?

Most teams tend to argue or have conflicting ideas about what the team goals, role goals, and values should be. This can generally be destructive. For a homogeneous team, that could be something that negatively impacts the team, whereas a diverse team is more able to handle it. With many different perspectives, the creation of team values is generally constructive.

For both teams, debate around techniques, processes, methods, approaches, problem solving--all of these areas are encouraged and inevitable. Efforts should always be made to align to the team's goals and values. With various perspectives, diverse teams seem to be able to handle this a little better.

### 3. Personality

As you're thinking about problem-solving techniques, you'll need to think about personality. Generally, when people talk about diversity, personality isn't usually the first thing that comes to mind. However, everyone is unique in the way that they approach problem-solving techniques, their emotional reactions to communications within a team, and their behavior.

This element of diversity is not as obvious as cultural, age, or gender diversity. However, it's so important when determining team success. As with all diversity, raising awareness is key. It increases the openness of team members to accept other ways of thinking and communicating with each other.



#### THINK ABOUT IT

A team composed entirely of introverts is unlikely to generate much debate, problem-solving, or brainstorming. On the opposite side of that, a team comprised entirely of extroverts likely wouldn't be successful either.

One way to improve awareness of personality differences is through group activities. These activities usually involve personality testing. Team members learn about each other and their different personality types. Then they openly discussed what is most beneficial for that personality type. It's a neutral environment to discuss differences without the pressure of deadlines.

What's great about these activities is that they usually focus on the context of how to communicate with each other, how a person likes to be managed, or how a person should manage that type of personality. It covers all the aspects of each team member. All the differences are openly addressed.

The most common personality test is the Myers-Briggs. Used by the majority of Fortune 100 businesses, it examines four areas:

- extroversion versus introversion
- sensing versus intuiting
- thinking versus feeling
- judging versus perceiving

All of these aspects are weighed, balanced, and the person is placed into one of 16 different personality types, each of which is represented by a four letter acronym. People generally take the exam to find out what their personality type is so they understand how to communicate with people even outside of the professional arena. Many other personality tests embrace and describe differences and approaches that people have. They've been adopted for the purpose of improving communication on teams and increasing conflict resolution so teams can be more successful. One of those personality tests is the Big Five, also known as the Five Factor model.

This personality test tests five factors to evaluate the person's degree of each characteristic. This is really trying to find out what their tendencies are in regard to:

- conscientiousness
- openness to experience
- neuroticism
- extraversion
- agreeableness

This model can be used for internal purposes. Managers may use it to actually create more diversity in a team. But it's less likely to be shared with the public or shared openly in the team or with the company to avoid value

judgments associated with many of these factors.



## SUMMARY

**What is Diversity?** It is the whole span of culture, gender, age, sexual orientation, and personality. There are benefits to having **diverse vs. homogeneous teams**. Research is finding that diverse teams are much more productive, and they can handle conflict resolution at a higher level than homogeneous teams. **Personality** is part of diversity because people are unique with their cognitive approaches, their problem-solving skills, and their methods. It's an important thing to consider for each member on a team.

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