Diverse Teams

A diverse workplace might ultimately create better results.

A study, detailed by NPR, looks at the work of scientific researchers and finds that papers written by multicultural teams were cited in other research more often than those written by homogenous groups. In the world of research, citations are seen as a metric of quality. Ethnic diversity wasn't the only harbinger of success. The same study also found that groups with members from several geographic areas—perhaps three cities in the same country—also created better papers than those with members from the same place.

The principle isn't an entirely new one. The idea that different perspectives result in better work has been explored from a more macro-economic perspective, as research shows that diverse cities experience more economic growth. The idea is also at play in research showing that companies with females on their boards financially outperform those that don't.

However, building multicultural teams does put a premium on the manager. For instance, it's worth exploring recent research from Harvard. That work, spearheaded by organizational behavior professor Roy Chua, finds that multicultural teams bring many benefits to an organization—provided the workplace is harmonious. However, rifts between members of different cultures can cause even those team members not directly involved in the conflict to produce lesser work, Chua's study shows. Chua suggests that managers of culturally diverse teams should encourage practices to keep potential friction low.

More/Less Privileged Groups

One key concept to keep in mind is that people in a group don't have equal power. This does not just refer to supervisory power, but also the access to power and resources throughout each person's lifetime. The Diverse Teams Worksheet provides a way to "tallying" the ways in which people might find themselves at an advantage/disadvantage because of their relative power or privilege.

Some Key Concepts About Power, Privilege and Group Dynamics
(Source: Kathy Obear, Ed.D., Alliance for Change Consulting, http://drkathyobear.com/):
- Not always about numbers
- Includes both Visible and Invisible; Innate and Chosen
- People may be members of multiple groups
- Not always about individual behaviors or feelings
- You didn't ask for it and you can't give it back

Groups with more privilege	Groups with less privilege
〉 Greater access to power and resources 〉 Make the Rules 〉 Define what is "normal," "right," the "Truth" 〉 Assumed to be the leader; smarter, competent 〉 Given the benefit of the doubt	〉 Less access to power and resources 〉 Often seen as less than, inferior, deficient 〉 Often assimilate, collude, abide by the rules, try to fit in 〉 Track the indignities they experience; aware of oppression

Groups with more privilege	Groups with less privilege
〉 Often unaware of dominant group membership & privilege 〉 Less aware about uninclusive and discriminatory treatment of subordinated groups 〉 More comfortable with people from subordinated groups who share similar behaviors, appearance, and values 〉 Hold to dominant cultural beliefs, often without examination 〉 Collude, and if challenged, risk being ostracized/punished 〉 Focus on "how far we've come"	〉 Punished if challenge the status quo 〉 Have their truth & experiences questioned and invalidated 〉 Need to know the language, behavior norms, and everyday reality of dominant groups to survive 〉 Often struggle with finding a balance between who they are and who they are told they need to 〉 be to be "acceptable" 〉 Struggle with finding their voice and speaking up 〉 Focus on "how far we need to go"

Diverse Teams Worksheet

Review the list of features that typically categorize the relative power of individuals in society. Add up how many correlate with your status. Compare your total number to each other (note that some people may not wish to reveal their responses) and consider how someone might feel being an "outsider" and how it might be reflected in group work. [Adapted from several training worksheets]

Often more power/privilege		Often less power/privilege
30's to early 50's	1. Age	Younger; older
White	2. Race	Person of Color
Male	3. Biological Sex	Female; Intersex
Fit into the gender binary system– either masculine OR feminine	4. Gender Identity & Gender Expression	Gender Variant; Gender Queer; Ambiguous; Androgynous; Transgender
Executive leaders, managers, managers, supervisors	5. Hierarchical Level	Don't supervise others; Classified staff; Student staff; students
Heterosexual	6. Sexual Orientation	Gay; Lesbian; Bisexual; Queer
Upper class; upper middle class; middle	7. Class	Working class; Living in poverty class
Graduate or college degree; private	8. Educational Level	High school degree; Public schooling; 1st schooling generation to college
Protestant; Catholic	9. Religion/ Spirituality	Muslim; Jewish; Buddhist; Hindu; Mormon; Jehovah Witness; Agnostic; Atheist
U.S. born	10. National Origin	"Foreign born;" Born in a country other than the U.S.; undocumented
People who are "able-bodied"	11. Ableness	Disability; People with physical, mental, emotional and/or learning disability; People living with AIDS
"American;" Western European heritage	12. Ethnicity/Culture	Puerto Rican; Native American; Mexican; Nigerian; Chinese; Japanese; etc …
Fit society's image of attractive,	13. Size/ Appearance	Perceived by others as too fat, tall, short, beautiful, handsome, athletic, unattractive, not athletic
Proficient in the use of "Proper" English	14. Use of English	Not proficient in use of English; have an "accent"
Legally married in a heterosexual relationship	15. Marital Status	Single; divorced; widowed; in a same-sex relationship partnership or marriage; in an unmarried heterosexual partnership
Parent children within a 2·parent heterosexual marriage	16. Parental Status	Single parent; do not have children; LGBT parents
More experience on campus	17. Experience	New; little experience on campus
Very athletic	18. Athleticism	Not very athletic
Suburban; valued region of the U.S.	19. Geographic region	Rural; urban; less valued region of the U.S.
Light skin; European/Caucasian features	20. Skin color; physical	Darker skin; African; Asian; Native American characteristics features
	TOTAL FOR EACH COLUMN	