

Preface

Diversity is not a term new to anybody in today's society, particularly anybody who resides or works in the United States of America. With America being almost the microcosm of the world population, diversity is not something you could ignore even if you wanted to. This book, however, is not solely about the varied ethnicities and cultures that are found in North America. The primary aim of this book is to look at diversity from the perspective of one who is looking to do business or deal with customers on a global level or one challenged with the responsibility of recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce. It not only deals with the basic concept of diversity but also explores what diversity has come to mean over the years and analyzes the implications it has on our daily lives. It talks about how diversity has become an intrinsic part of the American lifestyle. While part of the book is informative, addressing issues such as dealing with the various dimensions of diversity in the modern world, there are chapters that help you strategize as you increase your dealings with the global customer and assist you to work better in a diverse business environment.

In today's world, whether we know a little or a lot, we all know something about diversity. With each passing day diversity is something that propels us to look at the world from the perspective of the "other." This book is intended to help you understand and relate to the different perspectives. You may be an entrepreneur with a vision of spreading your business to the most remote corner of the world or a manager struggling to keep up the motivation level of a diverse team working under you, but the mantra of success remains the same. Acquiring the adaptability and the flexibility to understand what your overseas customer may be expecting while finalizing a deal, or how your colleague belonging to a different ethnicity views business, work is of primary importance. Business dealings within the country or throughout the world may often require you to be adept in several languages and aware of cultural differences. Today it is not just about having to deal with an increasingly diverse work force or market, but also make the most of it. This book provides you with some of the strategies to identify with those you are working with, and the knowledge to make them comfortable in order to win their trust. It will help you not only identify the differences, but celebrate them.

May you enjoy your journey as you seek to not only understand diversity, but embrace and celebrate it!

Best wishes,

David McLauren

Diversity Specialist

"We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter what their color."

-Maya Angelou

Chapter 1:

Diversity Scope

North American companies recognize that there are significant advantages to integrating workers from culturally diverse backgrounds into their workforce. However, many firms don't understand the full importance of doing this. Diversity needs to be seen as the business plan, essential to successful products and increased sales. This is especially true in today's global marketplace, as companies interact with different cultures and clients. Among the advantages of a well-integrated company are: increased creativity, increased productivity, new attitudes, new language skills, global understanding, new processes, and new solutions to difficult problems.

Who will benefit from this book?

(1) *Entrepreneurs who want to market their product and service to diverse multicultural customers.*

As business is becoming more and more a global affair, delivering quality products or offering cost-effective prices is not enough to remain competitive in today's market. The first thing about a successful business enterprise is about understanding the need of the customer and then winning their confidence. When the customers belong to diverse backgrounds it is all the more important to first understand how each customer works and then customize your product or service accordingly. Since communication is of primary importance in today's day and age, it is of vital importance to be able to relate to the multicultural customers.

A diverse workforce can help in effective communication and interaction with the client bases. Having a diverse workforce will help you relate to customers of all backgrounds. In a global market, if you have a diverse workforce, you would be in a better position to understand the demographics of the business world and make you better equipped to market your product and services to multicultural customers. Understanding the differences in culture or backgrounds of the employees often enables you to solve business challenges. It can help you gain a better perspective on how different cultures operate, thereby resulting in a greater success in global business. Diversity awareness makes you more adaptable and flexible and makes it easier to better understand the needs of the diverse customers of the world.

When you interact or communicate with people of diverse backgrounds, whether in your office or otherwise, you learn more about a particular culture or ethnicity. Your perspective about the world and things in general broadens, making you more flexible and able to deal with customers of different cultures and ethnicities. For example, if you have a meeting with a Chinese customer, you might offer him tea *or* coffee. You could also greet your Indian customer with a 'namaste' instead of saying 'hello.' He would be pleasantly surprised (to say the least). These are examples of small but important steps towards building a good rapport with your customers. A personalised touch always gives you the added advantage.

Today's mantra for a successful business: Embrace diversity and rule the world!

(2) A human resources professional who is in charge of recruiting and retaining qualified diverse employees.

In a country that has a very diverse population, it is very important to be able to recruit and retain diverse employees. Talented people have a lot of options in today's demanding job market. They want to know that they are valued and that they are part of something that matters. They want to know how their input will be used to make a valuable contribution to the organization. It is important not to make the employee feel that the recruitment efforts are solely to make the company's ethnic diversity look good. Make them feel that they are there because their talent is valued and that their contribution is needed for the overall growth of the organization. Studies have shown that a company that has a diverse workforce has a better ability to recruit and retain employees as well as more successful client relations, productivity and corporate culture.

(3) An Office Manager/supervisor who is responsible for motivating their diverse work team.

It is important to make sure that diversity is not treated as just a legal mandate in organizations. In most organizations today, we see an environment that is inclusive of all groups, thereby optimizing the potential of all. To keep a diverse workforce motivated you need to be flexible. Not everyone sees their job the same way, which is more apparent in a diverse workplace scenario. What motivates one employee may not motivate the other. You have to recognize that people are different and you must accommodate those cultural differences.

(4) A diversity officer whose mandate is to create harmony, increase productivity and educate diverse cultural communities.

Diversity, which is more than just recognizing and being tolerant to differences, often involves a set of practices that need to be a conscious effort on our parts. When solving a difficult problem or when faced with a challenging situation, having ideas obtained from people of different backgrounds can often prove to offer insightful alternatives. This is normally not thought of, which will help give your business the 'edge' that puts you ahead of other companies. Workable solutions are easily worked out when the inputs are diverse. As the perspective broadens, creativity increases. The inspiration to put in one's best is automatically very high when an organization not only gives due importance to all, but also considers each individual's input as a valuable contribution. When people of diverse cultures work towards a single inspiring goal, productivity increases significantly. The horizon broadens as the ways of looking at a problem are diverse. People of diverse cultures will have different ideas. The collaborated ideas often result in new and creative processes. A diverse workforce has the potential to pull through even a difficult situation.

(5) Sales Manager/associate who needs to increase their revenues among prospects of reaching diverse multicultural customers.

When dealing with customers belonging to multiple backgrounds and cultures, it is important to know exactly who you are dealing with. For instance, it is not enough to know that you have an Asian customer. Asians consist of several different cultural groups such as Chinese, Japanese, Indian, and Vietnamese, to name a few. To reach out to your diverse multicultural customers you will need to know more than just the facts, such as what language they speak. People from Puerto Rico are not the same as those from Cuba, who are not the

same as Latinos from Mexico or South America. Culture, food, and even language varies from country to country. It is important to know specifically who you are working with so that you can customize your services to meet every customer's unique needs. Knowing the cultural background of the customer will help you understand how the customer operates, how they would conduct their business and in the process, help you build a better rapport with them. Being able relate to the customer will help you identify the client's needs. Communication plays a very big role when conducting business. As Seamus Mulconry observed about Obama's victory, "it's not just the technology on its own that won the election. It's a means of communication."

Knowing and understanding the culture of the customer will help you communicate more effectively. For instance, you will create a better 'first impression' if you bow instead of shaking hands when greeting a Japanese or a Middle Eastern woman.

When you are trying to reach out to a wider and multicultural market you need to realise that you might have to modify, or as we say these days, *customize* your products and services for each customer that you are doing business with. For example, many Asians, while having their houses built, would like the builders take into consideration the issues of Feng Shui or how energy flows inside the house. Also, the direction a house faces can be of significance to the people of some cultures. So you can see that sometimes making a small modification to your product or services can attract a lot of new buyers. Therefore, being familiar with other cultures and ethnicities is of utmost importance when dealing with multicultural customers.

What's in it for me?

You might be asking yourself, *Why should I take workplace diversity seriously? What do I stand to gain?* When organizations manage workplace diversity by implementing diversity strategies, the advantages are plenty. The companies are poised to compete in a global economy by attracting the best available talent from around the world, along with forming strategic partnerships among the best companies operating. In fact, businesses in North America enjoy the many benefits of ethnic, religious and cultural diversity. Top innovators of technology have operated with diverse workforces since the 1980s and now, virtually all top corporations see diversity as a basic feature of their hiring policies.

Here are a few advantages that you will have from hiring a diverse staff and encouraging diversity within your business:

1. You will attract the best talent to contribute to your business

If an organization has built a reputation for its workplace diversity, it stands to attract the best available talent and skill in the market both domestically and abroad. The company will be able to recruit the best available talent from around the globe to work on projects located in the far corners of the world as part of virtual teams. Companies will be able to develop synergies with strategic partners located in far away markets. A company can market its products more easily, taking advantages of the different languages of its staff to develop and maintain distribution partners once thought impossible to reach. Why? Workforce diversity means the ability to conduct business worldwide through the varied experience of its employees.

2. You will be able to build a globally competitive workforce.

Building a microcosm of the world in the workplace, equips managers with the kinds of skills to compete effectively, with efficient services and a wide reach of resources. A diverse workforce not only brings profes-

sional skills into the office, but also brings people of different cultures fluent in various languages and who are capable of understanding international customers' everyday needs.

3. You will have the ability to enhance Problem-solving efficiency.

Imagine having a diverse workforce comprising of different age groups, education, experience and genders, and being able to brainstorm a business problem located on another continent. This was once thought unachievable. Today, it is standard business practice for an organization facing fluctuating trends and demands. What is most effective then is to have a workforce capable of generating a pool of multiple solutions and ideas. Workplace diversity is now recognized for this crucial role in effective-problem solving.

4. Your business will likely avoid conflicts, increase individual performance and retain your workforce.

An unhealthy work atmosphere is often the root cause of high tension levels in a company. People, however, need a feeling of belonging and security. When they feel supported in their ideas and beliefs they become more productive. At core, all of today's skilled workers expect to be treated fairly and with respect. If not, they will soon find plenty of work elsewhere. Turnover is expensive and unproductive. Moreover, stakeholders are now demanding that any organization they invest in must conform to practices that encourage low employee turnover, provide a healthy work environment that rewards team performance, and empowers workers to express themselves with an open mind.

So sit back, and get ready to learn about how celebrating difference can increase not only your productivity, but change the way your business views and interacts with the world!

Chapter 2:

My Diversity Story

I would like to share with you a little bit about my background, and explain how I have come to this strong belief in diversity within the business market. Hearing my last name, you may guess that I am from Scotland but no, I am not. I grew up in India with four brothers. Today, all four of them happen to be professional speakers, and the only singer we ever had in our family was the sewing machine!

I was born in India and grew up in a city called Hyderabad, a city of 8 million people. Later on I moved to Mumbai, a city of 18 million. You might say that I am a city boy because I had people around me all the time. It was common to call a friend at 2:00 am and meet up to have a cup of tea. My life's journey then took me to New York City, another huge metropolis, and after that, I lived in Chicago, which is a big city as well. The next stop along the way was a place called Whalldiem, Saskatchewan, a town of only few hundred people. It was extremely vacant and I didn't see a single person anywhere. I thought the rapture had come, and I found myself wondering why I was only one left behind! I realized very quickly that it was the harvest time on the Prairies. Everyone was busy out in the fields, working long and hard hours, enjoying themselves, celebrating their community and seeing the harvest come in. I noticed their smiles and saw their excitement and anticipation. Coffee shops were empty and the people were not hanging out on the streets. The streets were in fact deserted. The entire community was focused on bringing in the harvest. I personally believe that the harvest has come to the North American cities; the time has come to wake up and see the harvest. It is time to look, hear, listen and make full use of our 5 senses. The harvest has come; it is a time for celebration. The world has come, and it is a time to celebrate diversity.

When I lived in Saskatchewan, my dad called me up just before Christmas one year and said, "David, we have a Christmas present for you. We've found a woman and you are getting married!" So, I boarded a plane in Regina, Saskatchewan, with the temperature at -30 Celsius and landed in New Delhi at 30 degrees above. I was quite possible the only man in India wearing a parka. Many people were staring at me, probably thinking, *who is this guy and where is he coming from?* I got on a plane to Hyderabad, my home town where 1,000 guests had been invited to my wedding. The menu selection had been completed, a professional clergy was booked, professional entertainers were paid in advance and a deposit was made on the venue location. I had never met my bride, had never spoken to her, had not seen her in person or held her hand, let alone kissed her!

I said to my brother, "I should have my first date." My brother broke all the customary rules and traditions and discretely arranged a first date with my soon-to-be bride. The way we were introduced was, "David, this is Shirley, she will be your wife. Shirley, this is David, he will be your husband." The next day I got married. I had a very typical, and traditional, Indian arranged marriage. To this day I still go on dates with my wife and every day I learn to love her more. Here are a few observations from my story: in many cultural communities elders and family members are involved in making life-changing decisions for others. Many of us live with a corporate identity rather than one where we make our own individual choices. Loyalty is part of any relationship-building and is an ongoing process.

We are living in very interesting times. We have become a part of a global village, a new phenomenon. The other day I called TELUS's customer service department and it turned out I was talking to a person in the Philippines. Even Microsoft routes all their customer service calls to India. The McDonald's restaurant chain is experimenting with a new system: when you go through a drive-thru to place an order for your meal, the order goes through a call centre in India/China and by the time you pay for your meal, you will get a response. If they save few seconds, it will be a significant profit. Yes, it is very interesting times.

What are the implications of these recent innovations? While they present new challenges they also offer many opportunities. Tapping into the diverse cultural markets can be very enriching. What is the result of this diversity and multiculturalism? Is it a landmine or a gold mine? I will make the case that diversity is a goldmine: it is good for our personal lives, families and businesses. In order to comprehend this new phenomenon, we need to understand exactly who these new cultural communities are and where they come from. What are their worldviews, what are their buying patterns and how can we retain them for the long term? How can we maximize our relationships and build bridges?

In order to compete in the business world, it is very important to understand and be in tune with our contacts and customers. When a famous soft drink company from North America wanted to expand their business to Saudi Arabia, they experienced a few years of stagnant sales. The company enlisted the services of one of the top advertising firms in the US to see what could be done. After extensive analysis, the new marketing chief came up with a TV commercial for the Saudi Arabian viewers. The commercial had two captions, one before and one after. The *before* caption shows a man who is tired, exhausted, fatigued and desperate for a drink. This is immediately followed by the *after* caption which shows the same man full of energy, excited and drinking the cola. After a few weeks of this new ad campaign, the sales plummeted to an all-time record low. The management was baffled and could not understand the reason for the sales slump. So, the company hired a diversity consultant whose mandate was to solve their problem. After watching the TV ads, the consultant just switched the two captions and the sales rose to new record levels.

What was the key to the diversity consultant's simple solution? In many Middle Eastern countries, words are read from right to left. In North America we write left to right. In the *before* caption, the one on the left, the cola drinker was tired and exhausted whereas in the *after* caption on the right he was very happy, refreshed and excited. This sent the message to the Saudi consumers that when you are happy and excited, after drinking the cola you will become tired and exhausted. The above illustration explains how important it is to understand the different cultural nuances of those outside of our day-to-day local experiences, or what we say and how we say it may not express what we meant to say at all.

Did you know that over 100 languages are spoken in many cities in North America? It has become a multi-cultural mosaic. Canada and the United States are the most culturally diverse nations on earth. Thousands of people from virtually every nation and ethnic group are coming to our shores. We are becoming more of a "tossed salad" and less of a "melting pot." People have arrived from the four corners and have come here with their families, languages, skills, cultures, creativity, innovations and wallets. We should recognize and appreciate how these people and their diversity can enrich our lives, enhance our businesses and stimulate our economies. Many of them have stories to share. Sharing your story as it is a good way to build bridges and help start new relationships.

What is Diversity?

It is an old word that has been reborn and renewed within our vocabulary. Diversity is not a new flavor of the month, but rather, it will be a regular feature on the United States and Canadian HR menu. It means many things for many people. A lot of people have used diversity as a means to promote or further their personal or group agenda. I don't mean to distract from those agendas. Others have deliberately excluded themselves from the conversation assuming "it" is not for them. I don't want to assign any meaning or motive to that decision. I merely want to offer a perspective based on years of involvement as a practitioner in the field. The original intent of the movement called diversity management was to create an environment that allows all people to maximize

their contributions. Diversity is here to stay. It is not going to disappear, so let's get used to it and celebrate diversity!

Many people equate diversity with cultural differences or affirmative action but diversity is not so simply defined. Diversity is more than simply "us vs. them" - it is the understanding that we are all unique in various ways. For example, diversity is more than just culture - it is the changing demographics of our population. It's also about the various beliefs and attitudes held by each individual and the influence of one's identity and the groups with whom one interacts. Diversity is not just affirmative action either—it is the elimination of stereotypes and discrimination that negatively affect our ability to understand each other and work together productively. In business, diversity increases profit by bringing in fresh new ideas and methods; in schools it means greater learning and understanding; in relationships, diversity can mean personal growth. Diversity should not be seen as a detriment but rather an asset, a celebration of our individuality as well as our commonalities.

Diversity needs to be an integral part of the business plan, essential to the successful creation and marketing of products to facilitate an increase in sales. This is especially true in today's global marketplace as companies interact with different cultures and clients. *Among the* advantages of a well-integrated company are increased creativity, increased productivity, *new attitudes*, new language skills, global understanding, new processes, and new solutions to difficult problems.

Why is diversity important?

1. Diversity is here and now.

Talking about cultural diversity is not an abstract way of thinking; rather, it is very concrete and real and all around us. Why celebrate diversity? Because it is real and it is here today. Did you know that over one million legal immigrants come to North America every year? The U.S. census bureau estimates that minorities will comprise over one third of the country's population by 2025. In many cities we can already see enormous Hispanic, Afro American, Asian and Middle Eastern communities, along with many others. In some major cities, South East Asians and Hispanics make up over 50% of the population and these "minorities" are growing every day. As we can already see, when you use your ATM card in South Vancouver, the opening menu will be in Punjabi and Chinese. Very soon ATM machines will have menus in many different languages in major cities across North America.

2. Diversity is the future.

It is the name of the game in the major cities of America. You are in the game and you are being left with no option other than to play. In some late night television newscasts we are shown a glimpse of tomorrow's newspaper. When we become aware of this new reality, it will be like embracing the future. Your next-door neighbour just moved in, signed their house lease for the next 30 years and they are not going anywhere. Your neighbor's kids are going to hang out with your kids soon. Your neighbors have needs. They have to eat, shop and live their lives. Do you have a project or service that will cater to their needs? Are you ready for the future? Is your business ready for the future? Both NASA and Automobile maker Toyota have plans for the next 100 years. What plans does your business have for the next five or ten years? As business leaders we need to think strategically and establish diversity systems for growth, profitability and productivity. Businesses do not thrive on their own; instead, people have to intentionally make them happen. Invest in diversity and you will reap huge dividends. Our companies will be stronger and our families and communities will be safer when we intentionally take time to celebrate diversity.

3. Experience the world through diversity.

Did you know that you are living in one of the best countries in the world? Every year the United Nations Human Development Index comes up with a list of the world's best countries in which to live. It is based on life expectancy, GDP per capita, educational standards, Medicare and business opportunities, etc. Diversity helps us to change our world and we are strategically placed here to touch and make a positive difference in our world. Leave your mark on it for the generations to come.

Every morning when I wake up, I literally wake up to change my world. Imagine a young man waking up on Jaffa Street in Baghdad, Iraq. He doesn't wake up to change the world; rather, his goal for the day for the day is to make it to the end of the day without getting bombed or shot. Imagine a young woman waking in Sudan, Africa. She doesn't wake up to change her world; rather, her goal for the day is to find her next meal. We are fortunate - we do not wake up concerned about being shot or worrying about our next meal; in fact, I am trying to cut down on my food intake and calories. We have the privilege of being able to focus on life-changing issues and the decisions that will change them.

Mother Theresa won her Noble peace prize for her work in 1979. She worked in Calcutta for many years. After receiving her prize, she came out to the corridors where a group of world class reporters had waited for her and were all asking the same questions: Mother Theresa, what do we need to do to change our world? How do we bring peace into our world? Mother Theresa, a frail, little old lady, told them to go home and love their families and celebrate diversity. Diversity gives us an opportunity to bring peace, hope and change our world. Tomorrow, when you wake up, wake up to change your world! Remember you can touch the world and leave your mark on it. Celebrate diversity - it is an opportunity to change your world and make a difference for the generations to come.

4. Travel the world through diversity.

A few years ago I visited Sydney, Australia and the Fiji Islands and I discovered what many of you already know - travelling since 9/11/2001 can be a challenge. If you live in a major city in North America you can travel and experience the world - without leaving the borders of your own city! No need for a passport, visa, travel or vaccination documents, and no missing baggage. These days when you travel, there is no guarantee that once you check your baggage you will ever see it again. Recently, I was speaking to 30,000 people at a conference in India and while returning, I checked in 10 suitcases. When I arrived at the Vancouver International airport, only one suitcase had come back with me. Later on, I discovered that some of my suitcases had found their way to Hong Kong, Singapore, Tokyo and Amsterdam. There is no guarantee when you travel that your luggage will come with you. My advice to you? Always travel light.

Did you know the best Sushi is found in your city? Did you know that best chop suey is available in your city? Did you know that best Tandoori Chicken is found here in your city? Have some curry and spice up your life! Travel and experience the world right here in your home town. It will increase your understanding and awareness of the diversity all around you which in turn will help to create bridges within the multi-cultural communities. Celebrate diversity and experience the world right here in your city.

Many would say education and training is expensive but I say it can never come close to the cost of ignorance! Talking about diversity is not a one-time thing; rather it is an ongoing and continuous education. Subscribe to and read magazines and community local newspapers and beat racism and stereotypes. Education should also be seen with a sense of urgency. I don't know what word pictures come to your mind, when I say urgency but here are some word pictures that come to my mind: an ambulance, a fire truck, etc. Diversity is an

ever-changing and ongoing process. Recognize and understand the cultural differences that exist. Make an effort to understand your communities, invest in them, meet people half way and learn to be flexible. The harvest has come to our cities: let's wake up and celebrate it!

When we all are deliberate and passionate about celebrating diversity it will be an enriching experience. Today about 50% of the city's demographics are diverse multi-cultural communities. If we fast-forward to the next 25 years, this 50% will jump to a staggering 72%. I am sure you will still be around to see these changes and your kids, our kids will be working and raising their families in that environment. Many of our kids will come and say thank you for taking time to teach about the importance of diversity and helping us to embrace different cultural communities. Today our businesses are growing and doing global business: no drugs, no guns but a true mosaic of our cities.

As you can see, I am very passionate about diversity. Keep reading this book, and you will find out how my passion and research can benefit your business. I don't want this book to simply be a good read and to be put on your shelf after you've read it. I recommend that you take three principles and implement them every day; it will be a very rewarding and fulfilling experience.

“There never was in the world two opinions alike, no more than two hairs or two grains. The most universal quality is diversity.”

-Michel Eyquem De Montaigne

Chapter 3:

The Diversity Wheel:

The Different Aspects of Diversity

Diversity signifies the multi-faceted ways in which human beings are both similar and different. The dimensions of diversity can be divided into internal and external ones. The internal dimensions are the physical aspects: things that we cannot change such as race, ethnicity, gender, age, physical attributes, and sexual preference. The external dimensions of diversity are less visible: religion, education, geographic location and group affiliation, among others. The secondary dimensions; however, are not permanent because these can be acquired or modified.

Workplace diversity is comprised of race, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, age, educational levels and socio-economic status. It also includes religious beliefs, life stages, education, career responsibilities, sexual orientation, personality and marital status. Chances are that many in the workplace may not even be aware of how many benefits are derived from a diversity of styles, fashion, music and opinion. Many successful businesses have taken an active part in embracing diversity, yet there are still many businesses unaware of the numerous benefits that workplace diversity brings. When an organization acknowledges differences among its workforce, it can manage its employees in such a way as to create harmony in work practices and higher standards of cooperation. First, it is about understanding differences in these characteristics within an organization, and second it is about acknowledging these differences. And last, it is about developing work practices to create an inclusive environment.

Here are the sections of the “diversity wheel” that will help us understand the differences that make up diversity.

Race/Ethnicity

Human beings are categorized into populations or groups based on a set of hereditary characteristics. Each such group is referred to as a race or a racial group. Each racial category is identified by visible traits such as skin color, facial features and hair texture. Scientists still have not reached a consensus regarding whether the racial groups are natural or socially constructed. Earlier anthropologists had divided the human race into three broad racial groups: Caucasoid, Mongoloid, and Negroid. Others have made divisions of up to 30 different racial groups. There is, however, no proof of any definite genetic racial division. More than being biological, race is more of a political, cultural and economic concept. An ethnic group is a group of human beings who have similar cultural, linguistic, religious, behavioural or biological traits. According to the United States Census Bureau, (April 1-3, 1992), "Ethnicity is a fundamental factor in human life: it is a phenomenon inherent in human experience."

In today's time people of different ethnicities are living and working together. America is a good example of a place where people of different ethnicities coexist and thrive to make a nation. Essentially,

"Ethnicity refers to a concept of a group's 'peoplehood' based on a combination of race, religion, and cultural history, whether or not members realize their commonalities with each other. It describes a commonality transmitted by the family over generations . . . it is more than race, religion, or national and geographic origin . . . It involves conscious and unconscious processes that fulfill a deep psychological need for identity and historical continuity." (McGoldrick, 1989, p. 69)

Age

Age is another important dimension of diversity. In a work place, people of different age groups need to work together. A range of generations occupy the same work place. It is not a very uncommon sight to see grandparents working with people fresh out of college. With this diversity in age, it is not surprising that people have different attitude towards workspace design and work in general. For example, people of the older generation will prefer their office to have old fashioned mahogany furnishings, whereas people of the younger generation want a "funkier" look. Organizations today acknowledge that they need to accommodate as per the comfort of all employees, not just in terms of the way the office looks, but also attitude towards work in general. One of the major contributors of this difference is age, and the sooner we understand and acknowledge that, the better it is for our workplaces.

Gender

Gender refers to the social and psychological characteristic associated with being male or female. Gender diversity is the proportion of males to females in a given place. Previously in the work place, it was an understood fact that the priority of all women was taking care of their families. Unmarried women, if they worked, would likely quit as soon as they got married. Also, it was a common belief that women were not as capable as men. Today, however, it is a changed scenario. 'Chairmen' in companies are obsolete in today's age. 'Chairpersons' are more the talk of the day.

Today, women are treated as the equals of men. The role of women in the workplace has been changing steadily in recent years, along with the demographics of the U.S., resulting in a more diverse workforce. Women of this age enjoy the same career opportunities as men and it is against the law to discriminate against female employees in terms of hiring and advancement.

National origin

When we talk of the national origin of a person we mean the country from where his or her ancestors originate. The North Carolina Office of State Personnel defines national origin as "Characteristic of or peculiar to the people of a nation; of or relating to ancestral beginnings." America is a place that was built by people who emigrated from different parts of the world. These days, due to trades between different countries, people from different nations and ethnicities are working together. As a result, people speaking different languages and belonging to different ethnicities work in the same work place.

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits employers from discriminating against employees based on their national origin. Whether an individual's ancestry is Mexican, Ukrainian, Filipino, Arab, American Indian, or any other nationality, he or she is entitled to the same employment opportunities as anyone else. What started off as a legal mandate is more a conscious strategy adopted by organizations to include a diverse workforce.

Sexual orientation

Sexual orientation is the pattern of emotional, romantic and sexual attractions to men, women or both sexes. Sexual orientation is broadly divided under three categories:

- Heterosexual: attracted to the opposite sex
- Bisexual: attracted to both sexes
- Homosexual: attracted to the same sex

Most organizations are endeavoring to create equal workforces for all regardless of sexual orientation or sexual identity. Neither the government nor businesses expect workers to change their beliefs or values as it relates to sexual orientation or any other difference among people at work. Based on a recent Gallop Poll, nearly 87-90% of Americans believe that gays and lesbians should have equal rights in terms of job opportunities.

The Sexual Orientation Non-Discrimination Act (SONDA) prohibits discrimination on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation in various areas, including:

- In employment
- In the admission to and use of places of public accommodation
- In the admission to and use of educational institutions
- In publicly assisted housing
- In private housing accommodations and commercial space
- In relation to credit

Therefore, we must take this area of diversity in consideration when hiring and interacting with employees of all sexual preferences.

Mental/Physical ability

Not every individual is endowed with the same physical or mental ability. While there are some people who earn their living by performing laborious activities, there are others who perform jobs that require a high mental faculty and little physical activity. Many organizations today are looking to integrate all qualified employees regardless of their physical abilities. As a result, in today's world, even physically challenged people have a means of having a respectable livelihood.

People may possess different forms of mental ability. While those having high analytical abilities may be good with math and science, there may be others who pursue jobs that do not require high analytical skills. These are the internal dimensions of diversity that are the more permanent or visible. The external dimensions of diversity are the ones that can be acquired and changed over the course of a lifetime. Some of the external dimensions of diversity are discussed below.

Education

Diversity can exist in a large group of people based on levels of education. While most people attain basic education, what level they pursue varies from person to person. Again, education may also differ in terms of subjects that one may choose to study. From Agriculture to Radio Physics, subjects may be vastly diverse in nature. Depending on the line of education pursued, each individual has the option to select and pursue a different career. Job opportunities are vast in today's day and age. While we all know of renowned scholars who have earned fame for their high educational qualifications, the Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates was a school dropout!

Political belief

Every individual has and is entitled to his or her own political belief. He or she has the right to participate or refuse to take part in a lawful political activity. The political belief of each individual is respected in today's society. This helps people having different political views to work together and respect each other's differences.

Family

Originally the word family meant a group of persons living together closely related by blood. Over time the word family has a diverse range of meanings. Families differ from household to household. In a place like America, there are people of so many ethnicities, cultures, education and income levels, so it is natural that no two families are the same:

"The first thing to remember about the American family is that it doesn't exist. Families exist. All kinds of families in all kinds of economic and marital situations, as all of us can see . . . The American family? Just which American family did you have in mind? Black or white, large or small, wealthy or poor, or somewhere in between? Did you mean a father-headed, mother-headed, or childless family? First or second time around? Happy or miserable? Your family or mine?" – Louise Kapp Howe (1972)

American families today may consist of the following:

- People who are married
- People who have chosen not to marry
- People whose marriages are not legally accepted such as same sex couples
- People who cohabitate before marriage

Family plays an important part in shaping an individual's personality. Each person lives in a different family set-up in today's society.

Organizational role

Most of today's large corporations have diversity in job roles. A corporation consists of different departments such as marketing, finance, and human resources. Besides the basic components of business, each company has a support team such as administration, security, and facilities, among others. Although working in the same organization, people working in each of these departments have different job roles.

Communication and language skills

Communication is what brings people together. Ironically, language, which is an aid to communication, is as diverse as people in a nation. The language that a person speaks primarily depends on his or her national origin. As a result, in a place like America, the popular languages spoken are as diverse as the people of different ethnicities and cultures who live here.

Having adequate language skills is a key aspect of successful communication. While it may be true that English is the most common language that is used in business, it is the second most spoken language in the world after Chinese. Both are closely followed by Hindustani. When dealing with customers on a global market, language skills can be extremely useful for effective communication. Having a diverse workforce helps in not only understanding the language but also the culture and the way a customer of a particular place may think and work.

Income

Think of some of the people you come across in your day to day life...

- The man playing his trumpet at a New York subway station waiting for a generous passerby to leave him a couple of dollars with which he could buy himself a sandwich for lunch.
- The saleswoman at your local Wal-Mart putting in that extra hour at work for some additional pay she can use to pay her monthly bills.

- The high profile industrialist flying to Las Vegas on the weekend to spend a fortune at the roulette table.

From people who depend on their daily wages to earn a living to huge industrialists and tycoons, our society consists of people of various income groups.

Religion

The world consists of people of many religions. When immigrants from across the world came into this country they brought with them their individual religious beliefs. In the last century, this religious diversity has grown. Diana L. Eck describes this change in her book, *New Religious America: How a Christian Country Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation*:

“The huge white dome of a mosque with its minarets rises from the cornfields just outside Toledo, Ohio. You can see it as you drive by on the interstate highway. A great Hindu temple with elephants carved in relief at the doorway stands on a hillside in the western suburbs of Nashville, Tennessee. A Cambodian Buddhist temple and monastery with a hint of a Southeast Asian roofline is set in the farmlands south of Minneapolis, Minnesota. In suburban Fremont, California, flags fly from the golden domes of a new Sikh gurdwara on Hillside Terrace, now renamed Gurdwara Road.”

The increasing amount of communication and trades between countries are making our educational institutes, communities and workplaces more culturally and religiously diverse with each passing day.

Appearance

It is a biological fact that no two people can genetically look exactly the same. Besides, people belonging to the racial or ethnic groups of the world have unique features characteristic of their respective ethnicities. For instance, looking at skin color, facial features and hair texture of a person, you can know the broad ethnicity he or she belongs to. Similarly, the appearance of a person may also depend on the religion he practices, the income group he or she belongs to and the profession he or she has.

Work experience

The different jobs that people of a society have to earn their livelihood are as diverse as the people themselves. Diverse as the professions may be, each job has a vital function in our society. From the attendant at the gas station to the teller at the bank to the pizza delivery boy, each job plays an important role in our everyday lives.

The combinations of all these dimensions of diversity have an impact on our values, beliefs, behaviours and experiences, making us unique individuals. We live in a day where the ethnic make-up of our nation is changing: “The U.S. Census Bureau predicts that the number of non-white people will increase by 74% over the next 50 years. At the same time, the white population will grow by only 26 percent in the same period.” Therefore, we must embrace these differences, and cling to the things that differ between us so that we can reach the broadest cross-section of the people in America.

The success of a diverse workforce leads to an innovative culture where ideas flourish and creativity has no boundaries. Today, it is imperative for any business to learn how it can tap into the rich and varied skills of his workforce by simply embracing the idea of it. A diverse workforce in any office could lead to a host of profit-making ideas, innovation, creativity through and an exchange of knowledge. In fact, the very success of a business these days could depend on an organization's ability to reap the benefits of diversity.