

Diversity Definitions

The following definitions of terms are provided to assist users with the general understanding of issues related to diversity management. The definitions come from various sources which are credited following each explanation. Language related to diversity management is complex and frequently undergoes transformation into new words, phrases, terms, concepts, and understandings.

Aboriginal Peoples: The descendants of the original inhabitants of North America. They consist of three groups: First Nations, Inuit and Métis. These are separate peoples with unique heritages, languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs. (Indian and Northern Affairs. 2001. *Aboriginal Place Names.*)

Afrocentricity: Placing African ideals at the center of any analysis that involves African culture and behaviour. (Asante, Molefi. 1987. *The Afrocentric Idea.*)

Anti-Racist Education: An approach to education designed to eradicate racism in all forms and denounce social, economic, and educational inequities to which ethnocultural groups are subject. (Ontario Multicultural Association. no date.)

Anti-Semitism: An adjective describing a discriminatory thought or action directed against Jews.

Bias: A subjective opinion, preference, or prejudice, without reasonable justification which is detrimental to a group's or an individual's ability to treat ideas or people objectively.

Bigot: An obstinate and intolerant believer in a religion, political theory, etc.

Black People: People originally of Black African heritage. Because of a long history of

colonialism and migration, Black people now come from all parts of the world, including Canada. (B'nai Brith Canada. no date. *Yom ha-Shoah Holocaust Memorial Day Teachers Guide*)

Blind: A word used to describe people who cannot see at all. (CNIB. no date. *School Activity Package.*)

Culture: Societal cultures are formed when a group of people living in the same place during the same time share common values, beliefs, and assumptions that they transfer from one generation to the next. Each societal culture develops a framework for making sense of the world. Within this framework are prescribed behaviours that reflect the societies values and beliefs. There are accepted behaviours, expected behaviours, and eventually traditions. (NSHRC, 2004, July. *Participants Handbook, Diversity Training Train the Trainer.*)

Deaf: In recent years, the capital D, Deaf has emerged as the name preferred by people who identify with, and belong to, a group with a culture distinct from that of non-Deaf people. Like any cultural group, Deaf people have a language and set of social norms, behaviours, and folklore which reflect the values of their group. (Government of Nova Scotia. 2003. *Human Resources Management Manual: Manual 500.*)

deaf: When written, small-d , deaf is becoming more accepted as a reference to a hearing deficit only. It does not refer to any culture and/or language. Deaf (capital D) represents a social-cultural perspective, and the other (small-d) a medial-pathological view. (Government of Nova Scotia. 2003. *Human Resources Management Manual: Manual 500.*)

Disabled: The word disabled is an adjective, not a noun. People are not conditions. Use people with disabilities; do not use the disabled. (Canada. Human Resources and Development. 2006. *A Way with Words and Images.*)

Disability: This is a functional limitation. (Canada. Human Resources and Development. 2006. *A Way with Words and Images.*)

Discrimination: Unfavorable treatment and/or denial of equal treatment of individuals or groups because of race, gender, religion, ethnicity or disability. Making a distinction, intentional or not, that imposes burdens, obligations, or disadvantages not imposed on others. (Ontario Multicultural Association. no date.)

Diversity: Diversity is the difference in abilities, age, culture, ethnicity, gender, physical characteristics, religion, sexual orientation, and values.

Diversity Management: Diversity management is the planning, developing and managing of human resources, while acknowledging and valuing the similarities and differences all employees bring to the workplace. The primary principle of diversity management suggests that organizations will enhance their strategic and competitive advantage through assisting all employees to work and develop to their full potential.

Dominant Culture: The most powerful cultural grouping: in most parts of Canada, the dominant culture is composed of white, English-speaking, middle-to-upper income, Christians. (Canadian Council for International Development. 1998. *Diversity Development Kit.*)

Duty to Accommodate: The duty to accommodate refers to the obligation of an employer, service provider, or union to take steps to eliminate disadvantage to employees, prospective employees or clients resulting from a rule, practice, or physical barrier that has or may have an adverse impact on individuals or groups protected under the Canadian Human Rights Act, or identified as a designated group under the Employment Equity Act. (Canadian Human Rights Commission. 2006)

Employment Equity: It is a mechanism to combat discrimination in the workplace. Employment equity means ensuring that all individuals receive fair employment opportunities.

Ethnic: An adjective used to describe groups which share a common language, race, customs, lifestyle, social view, or religion. Everyone belongs to an ethnic group. The term is often confused with minority. Ethnic, however, refers to those traits which originate from racial, linguistic, and cultural ties with a specific group. (Nova Scotia Public Service. no date. *Valuing Diversity in the Public Service. Glossary of Terms.*)

Ethnocentrism: Characterized by, or based on, the attitude that one's own group is superior. Ethnocentric habitual disposition is to judge foreign peoples or groups by the standards or practices of one's own culture or ethnic group. (Ontario Multicultural Association. no date.)

Eurocentrism: Reflecting a tendency to interpret the world in terms of western, and especially European, values and experiences.

Equality: Being equal.

Equal Access: Absence of barriers to admittance, such as those motivated by cultural or racial discrimination, to the institutions of a society. This includes access to services, programs, and employment. To facilitate equal access, an outreach program is often needed to inform people of what is available.

Equal Opportunity: Opportunity to compete on equal terms, regardless of sex, race, etc.

Equity: Fairness. Principles of justice used to correct or supplement the law.

First Nation: A term that came into use in the 1970's to replace the word Indian which some people found offensive. Many aboriginals use the term First Nation to replace the word band when speaking of their community. (Canada. Indian and Northern Affairs. 2001. *Aboriginal Place Names.*)

Gender: Refers to women's and men's roles and responsibilities that are socially determined. Gender is related to how we are perceived and expected to think and act as women and men because of the way society is organized, not because of our biological differences. Gender derives its meaning in terms of an individual's relationship with all other individuals. Gender encompasses complex political, economic, psychological and social relations between women and men in society. (World Health Organization. 1998. *Gender and Health Technical Paper.*)

Genocide: Deliberate decisions and actions made by one nation or group of people in order to eliminate, usually through mass murder, the entirety of another nation or group. The term has also been used to refer to the destruction of the culture of a people, as in cultural genocide. (B'nai Brith Canada. no date. *Yom ha-Shoah Holocaust Memorial Day Teacher's Guide.*)

Harassment: Comments or conduct which is intimidating, annoying, hurtful, or malicious.

Hard-of-hearing: A person who is unable to follow a conversation between three or more people without the assistance of a hearing aid. (Government of Nova Scotia. 2003. *Human Resources Management Manual: Manual 500.*)

Hate: Intense hostility and aversion usually deriving from fear, anger, or sense of injury. Extreme dislike or antipathy.

Hearing impairment: A diagnosed auditory defect ranging from mild to profound that may not respond to medical intervention or amplification, and results in functional limitations in one or more areas of daily living. (Government of Nova Scotia. 2003. *Human Resources Management Manual: Manual 500.*)

Hate Crimes: Hate crimes are criminal actions intended to harm people because of their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion or other minority group.

Homophobia: The hatred or fear of homosexuals. It is characterized by negative attitudes and behaviours toward gays and lesbians, and is expressed in a variety of ways from insulting remarks and humour which reinforces stereotypes, to discrimination and violent behaviour. (2-Spirited People of the First Nations. 1998. *We are part of a tradition.* Univ. of Guelph publication)

Human Rights: Human rights are freedoms that are enjoyed by all people, simply because they are human. Human rights are supposed to apply equally to all people regardless of characteristics such as age, race, or gender. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights extends these rights to all people around the world. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms and The Canadian Human Rights Act protects these rights in Canada. (Canada and Government of Alberta. *Understanding Canadian Diversity Edukit.* Glossary. no date.) The Nova Scotia Human Rights Act protects these rights in Nova Scotia

Immigrant: Canadians born outside of Canada, or first generation Canadians. The word, technically, means people who have moved to a country with the intention of settling. This meaning which would exclude refugees.

Individual Racism: Learned behaviour taught through socialization, manifested in attitudes, beliefs and behaviours.

Institutional Racism: Conscious or unconscious exercise of notions of racial superiority by social institutions through: policies, practices, procedures, organizational culture and organizational values. ([American] National Association of Area Agencies on Aging. Glossary of Key Diversity Terms. no date.)

Inuit: Aboriginal people in northern Canada who live above the tree line in the Northwest

Territories, Northern Quebec and Labrador. (Canada. Indian and Northern Affairs. 2001. *Aboriginal Place Names.*)

Late deafened: Describes a person who becomes deafened later in life due to illness, accident, disease or the normal process of aging. (Government of Nova Scotia. 2003. *Human Resources Management Manual.*)

Learning Disability: A learning disability is a disorder that affects an individual's ability to process information. It is not related to intelligence.

The term learning disability is used to describe an "invisible disability" which encompasses a group of disorders that affect the way people receive, process, and express information. These disorders may be manifested by difficulties in attention or concentration, perception, coordination, memory, reasoning, and organization. Such difficulties extend to schoolwork and/or the workplace, and can impede learning to read, write, do math, or to function successfully in the workforce. Despite these difficulties, persons with learning disabilities do succeed when sound coping skills and strategies are developed. (Learning Disabilities Association of Canada. 2005)

Métis: Métis people are all of those with both Native and non-Native bloodlines. (Confederacy of Nova Scotia Métis. no date.)

Mental health: means striking a balance in all aspects of your life: social, physical, spiritual, economic and mental. (Canadian Mental Health Association. no date.)

Mental illness: This is the term used to refer to a variety of diagnosable mental disorders. Mental disorders are health conditions that are characterized by alterations in thinking, mood, or behavior (or some combination thereof) associated with distress and/or impaired functioning. Mental illness refers to significant clinical patterns of behavior or emotions associated with some level of distress, suffering, or impairment in one or more areas of functioning (school, work, social and family interactions). At the root of this impairment are symptoms of biological, psychological, or behavioral dysfunction, or a combination of these. (Canadian Psychiatric Association. no date.)

Mi'Kmaq: The original People of Nova Scotia. When Europeans first arrived in Nova Scotia, they were greeted by the Mi'Kmaq people. Theories of their place of origin vary widely, and conclusive evidence for any theory is yet to be uncovered. We can only state that the ancestral

home of the Mi'kmaq has always been Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and the part of Quebec known as the Gaspé.

Minority: A convenient, if misleading, word for non-dominant ethnic identities in Canada. While people with non-dominant identities are numerically in the minority in many parts of Canada, they are not numerically a minority in the world. (Canadian Council for International Development. 1998. *Diversity Development Kit*.)

Misogyny: Hatred of Women.

Multiculturalism: "Multiculturalism" in Canada refers to the presence and persistence of diverse racial and ethnic minorities who define themselves as different and who wish to remain so. Ideologically, multiculturalism consists of a relatively coherent set of ideas and ideals pertaining to the celebration of Canada's cultural mosaic. Multiculturalism, at the policy level, is structured around the management of diversity through formal initiatives in the federal, provincial and municipal domains. Finally, multiculturalism is the process by which racial and ethnic minorities compete with central authorities for achievement of certain goals and aspirations. (Canada. Library of Parliament. 1994. *Canadian Multiculturalism*.)

Overt Racism: It is frank and open, including graffiti, intimidations or physical violence, and legitimates negative racial stereotypes. Racial and ethnic slurs or so-called jokes are other examples of obvious racial discrimination. People often ignore racism because they do not know how to deal with it.

Pluralism: *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* defines pluralism as a state of society in which members of diverse ethnic, racial, religious, or social groups maintain an autonomous participation in and development of their traditional culture or special interest within the confines of a common civilization.

Power: Access to resources, position, status, wealth or personal strength of character which gives a person or a group or a system the ability to influence others. Power can be used to affect others positively or negatively.

Prejudice: To prejudge a person or group negatively, usually without adequate evidence or information to substantiate the position. Frequently, prejudices are not recognized as false or unsound assumptions. Through repetition, they come to be accepted as common sense

notions and when backed up with power, result in acts of discrimination and oppression.

(Canadian Race Relations Foundation. 2005)

Race: A social category used to classify humankind according to common ancestry or descent and reliant upon differentiation by general physical characteristics such as colour of skin and eyes, hair type, stature, and facial features. (Nova Scotia Public Service. *Valuing Diversity in the Public Service. Glossary of Terms.* no date.)

Race Relations: Interaction between diverse racial groups within one society.

Racially Visible People: A term defined by race or colour only, not citizenship, place of birth, religion, language, or cultural background. The term applies to people who are Black, Aboriginal, Chinese, South Asian, South East Asian, Filipino and Latin American Canadians, and others. These terms are generally regarded as positive identities as opposed to Non-whites, minorities, visible minorities, or ethnics. (Nova Scotia Public Service. *Valuing Diversity in the Public Service. Glossary of Terms.* no date.)

Racism: The belief that a particular race is superior or inferior to another, that a person's better or worse judged by his or her inborn biological characteristics. Racism is a form of discrimination.

Refugee: A person taking refuge from war, persecution, or natural disaster.

Sex: Genetic/physiological or biological characteristics of a person which indicates whether one is female or male. (World Health Organization. *Gender and Health Technical Paper.* 1998)

Sexism: Stems from a set of implicit or explicit beliefs, erroneous assumptions and actions based upon an ideology of inherent superiority of one gender over another, and is evident within organizational or institutional structures and programs as well as within individual thought or behaviour patterns. Sexism, like racism, is a discriminatory act backed by power. Sexism is any act or institutional practice, backed by institutional power which subordinates people because of gender. (B'nai Brith Canada. no date. *Yom ha-Shoah Holocaust Memorial Day Teacher's Guide.*)

Social Class: The hierarchical order of a society based on such indicators of social rank as income, occupation, education, ownership of property, family, religion and political relationships,

etc.

Social Justice: This refers to the concept of a society that gives individuals and groups fair treatment and an equitable share of the benefits of society. (Public Health Agency of Canada. 2007)

Stereotyping: False generalizations of a group of people that results in an unconscious or conscious categorization of members of that group. Stereotypes may be based upon misconceptions about race, age, ethnic, linguistic, geographical, religious, marital status, physical or mental attributes, and gender. Is the tendency to lump together members of a group and to think of them as types rather than as individuals. All members of the group are falsely assumed to be alike, with exceptions being ignored or their existence denied. It is to generalize when we have an unpleasant experience with an individual belonging to a particular group. The resulting feelings of aversion and hostility, which may or may not be justified, are sometimes irrationally generalized to include all members of that group. (British Columbia. 1998. *Shared Learnings*. p.131)

Systemic Discrimination: A general condition, practice or approach that applies equally to the majority, but negatively affects opportunities or results for specific groups of people.

Two-Spirit: The Two-spirit person is part of the Native/Indigenous/First Nations traditions that believes in the existence of three genders: the male, the female, and the male-female gender, or what we now call the Two-spirit person. The term Two-spirit is used to describe people of First Nations/Aboriginal origin who display both characteristics of male and female. The concept of Two-spirit relates to today's designation of gays, lesbians, and bisexual and transgender persons of First Nations/Aboriginal origins. (Seneca College. *Positive Space Program. Glossary of Sexual and Gender Diversity*. no date.)

Undue Hardship: The employer's or service provider's duty to accommodate is limited only by "undue hardship i.e. the employer or service provider need not accommodate an employee or client if it can show that the accommodation would cause the employer or service provider to suffer undue hardship. Section 15(2) of the Canadian Human Rights Act states that it must be established that accommodation of the needs of an individual or a class of individuals affected would impose undue hardship on the person who would have to accommodate those needs, considering health, safety and cost in order for the accommodation to be considered too much of a burden (Canadian Human Rights Commission. 2006)

Visually Impaired: Is a phrase used to describe people who can only see very little. They see better with the assistance of technical aids such as magnifiers, telescopes, special glasses, and computers with special features such as large print. (CNIB. no date. *School Activity Package.*)

Values: Values are things which we believe have either a relative worth or insignificance in society. An example would be the importance assigned to religion in certain societies. Values change over time and they differ between and within groups. Some North American values include personal success, privacy, individualism, prestige and personal property. Other cultures and societies, and even persons or groups within North America society, may place a higher or lower importance on these North American values. A clash of values often leads to misunderstandings between, and within, groups of people. These clashes can lead to stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination.

White: The term used to denote people belonging to the dominant group in Canada, White people, too, face discrimination because of their ethnicity, religion, language and geographic origin, etc. (Canadian Council for International Development. 1998. *Diversity Development Kit.*)

Xenophobia: Xenophobia is hatred, resistance and negative prejudice against foreign people, and everything that is foreign.

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