

## Instructional Unit

### Objective 2: Describe how diversity can benefit a workplace.

As technology and the global economy have connected people worldwide, we have been exposed to more diversity than ever. If you search the Internet using the word “diversity,” you will get hundreds of millions of results that discuss human rights as they relate to race, culture, age, and sexual orientation. If you search for “workplace diversity,” your results will be more focused on employment laws.

The most common results you will receive regarding workplace diversity include human resources and information on the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

The **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in employment, transportation, public accommodation, communications, and governmental activities. The ADA also establishes requirements for telecommunications relay services.

The **Equal Employment Opportunity Commission** protects employees and job applicants from employment discrimination due to race, age, national origin, sexual preference, religion, sex (including pregnancy), and disability.

In 2011, more than 21% of the United States workforce included people with disabilities. Twenty-one percent may not sound like much, but if you think about it, that is more than one out of every five workers who has a disability. A disability is not always visible, and the ADA defines it “a mental or physical impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.” One of those major life activities has to be considered significant and includes caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, seeing, hearing, eating, sleeping, walking, standing, lifting, speaking, breathing, learning, reading, concentrating, thinking, communicating, and working.

Diversity also includes more than what is apparent such as racial and cultural differences. Differences we do not often think of include communication styles, leadership styles, and socioeconomic status. When entering the workplace, you meet people from all types of skill and education levels, and people with different ways of thinking and different ways of doing things.

As human beings, we tend to gravitate toward people who are like us. In the workplace, you may find yourself thinking that if you work with people who do things the same way you do, tasks will be completed faster. To the contrary, falling into this way of thinking may cause you to miss out on valuable opportunities to learn new ideas from others. Diversity in the workplace actually allows for *greater* productivity, fosters more creativity, and creates better organizational and personal adaptability. Let’s complete an exercise to help you think more about diversity.

### Exercise: Connect the Dots

#### Procedure

Pass out copies of the “Connect the Dots” handout and pencils. Ask participants to try to complete the puzzle following the instructions on the handout. Give participants five minutes to work on the problem. Ask participants who know the solution not to share it with others. Everyone should remain quiet until the time has elapsed. Once the time limit has been reached, reveal the solution.

Connect all of the dots with four straight lines. Do not lift your pencil off the paper. Do not retrace any line. Lines may cross if necessary.

