

# EXPLORING IDENTITY FACTSHEET

Institution of  
**MECHANICAL  
ENGINEERS**



Improving the world through engineering

# EXPLORING IDENTITY

## An Introduction

Our identity plays an important part of how we belong in different areas of our lives, whether that be with our friends, our family, work colleagues, membership organisations or beyond.

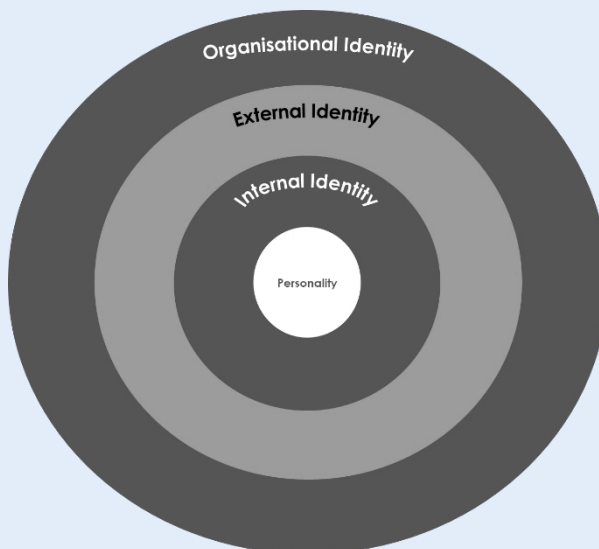
Understanding what identity is, what influences it and how it affects our belonging is an important part of feeling like we belong.

Identity refers to our qualities, beliefs, personality, the way we behave, talk, respond and engage with others. It defines us as people and as groups of people,

Identity is multi-faceted and can be things we are born with and things we are influenced by external factors as we move through our lives.

## Four Layers of Diversity

The 'Four Layers of Diversity' model was developed by Gardenswartz and Rowe and highlights the complexity of each of us and how we identify. Let's break them down to understand them better:



## **Personality**

Means our values, beliefs, likes and dislikes, shaped throughout our lives, but mostly in our early years and is also influenced by the other layers throughout our lifetime.

## **Internal Identity**

Internal identity (or internal diversity as the model initially refers to it) is related to what a person is born into or with (however, some can change throughout our lives), such as our:

- Race
- Ethnicity
- Age
- National origin
- Sexual orientation
- Cultural identity
- Assigned sex
- Gender identity
- Physical ability
- Mental ability

## **External Identity**

The term external is used to describe things that are related to a person but aren't characteristics that a person was born with and tend to be aspects that we can change and often do over time.

External identity is also heavily influenced by other people, the environments we live in, work in and generally surrounded by and especially in our very early years are not things that we tend to have a choice about:

- Personal interests
- Education
- Appearance
- Citizenship
- Religious beliefs
- Location
- Familial status
- Relationship status
- Socioeconomic status
- Life experiences

## Organisational Identity

Refers to the identities that we have at work and how that differentiates us from others we work and collaborate with and most are assigned to us by our organisation. Examples are:

- Employee or member
- Functional level
- Work content field
- Division/dept/unit/group
- Seniority
- Work location
- Union affiliation
- Management status

## Worldview Identity

This identity whilst not on the model above is an important one as this is something that changes over time and looks at the way we conceptualise the world differently to other people. Our new lived experiences, what we learn and who we work/socialise with help to flex our worldview. Examples of worldview identity are:

- Political beliefs
- Moral compass
- Outlook on life
- Epistemology

So, as you can see we each have various layers of diversity and identity and is one of the things that make us so wonderfully complex as humans, however, it can also be the reason we can find that we don't always feel like we belong, or unintentionally make others feel like they don't belong as our identity can lead others to make assumptions about us and vice versa.

*Want to learn more about this topic? Head over to your inclusion pack now and try out the identity task to learn more about your identity and how you can support greater belonging at the IMechE through understanding others' identity.*