THE WORKPLACE HAS EVOLVED: ARE BUSINESS SCHOOLS TEACHING INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP TECHNIQUES TO ACCOMMODATE AN INCREASINGLY DYNAMIC WORKFORCE?

by

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**Abstract**

There are trends in the workforce focused on hiring groups of individuals with disabilities. Inclusive leadership is important when considering these new hiring trends. These trends are aimed at hiring disabled individuals and especially individuals with autism spectrum disorder. Young adults with ASD state that employment is their biggest challenge. Are managers educated to understand the needs of individuals with disabilities? What are business schools doing to educate management students on inclusion and inclusive leadership? The outcome of my proposed session is to establish a list of recommendations targeted toward business school educators and administrators for use in establishing inclusion training for future managers and educational opportunities aimed at inclusion. This will help to ensure that management is prepared to handle the changes in the evolving and dynamic workforce that they will be responsible for leading.

Keywords: Management education, inclusive leadership, work trends

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**Introduction**

I am approaching this topic as the parent of two handicapped children ages 15 and 20, former educator trained in inclusion and inclusive techniques, a small business owner, and a doctoral business student with an MBA and a disability. I have background with disabilities that include my education and a personal understanding., but I received none of that from my business school management training. New hiring trends geared toward hiring the disabled seem wonderful on the surface, yet they cause me to worry.

 The workforce is evolving, and this new workforce is technologically advanced. They know what they want, and they know how to get it. This has made the workforce increasingly dynamic. The definition of work has changed to something that you do and not a place that you go. Workers are increasingly diverse, and many have chosen to disclose their disability. With these changes, are managers equipped and trained to handle the issues that can arise when guiding an inclusive team?

The purpose of this proposed session is to bring attention to the lack of training and coursework provided during business school education on the topics of inclusion and inclusive leadership. First, the past treatment of the disabled at work will be introduced. This will be followed by a discussion of these new trends and initiatives in the workforce pertaining to the disabled. Next, inclusive leadership techniques will be introduced. This will be followed by a brainstorming session to produce an actionable list of recommendations for business school implementation of inclusive leadership education and training to accommodate and tap a dynamic workforce. Finally, I will conclude with a look at how far management education has come and how inclusion training can reshape management education. The outcome of the session is to establish a list of recommendations targeted toward business school educators and administrators for use in establishing inclusion programs.

**Theoretical Foundation and Background**

Inclusive leadership is aimed at accepting the differences in individuals. An inclusive leader is open, available, and accessible (Deloitte Insights, 2016). This type of leadership can create a more accepting environment. Research has shown that employees are more willing to speak up and that team performance is increased when leaders are practicing inclusive leadership (Qi & Lui, 2017). Inclusive leadership can produce a caring, ethical climate. A climate in which employee differences are valued.

In David Walsh’s article, Putting Autism to Work (2016), the author highlights a man with autism, that according to Walsh, is having his talents wasted due to his issues with autism. This individual has multiple degrees, a high IQ, and is very skilled. He can also be very awkward socially. Employers may overlook individuals like this and select more social candidates.

 Although, candidates with disabilities offer many great skills, they can present a different set of challenges for managers. Individuals with disabilities and the neurodiverse can have behaviors that others may find atypical or different. Some disabled employees may require assistance or accommodation. This means that management must be trained to understand the rights, challenges, and strengths of the disabled and neurodiverse. This adds to the need for inclusive education and the development of inclusive leaders.

The history of the disabled is a troubling one. In the 1800’s, a person with a disability may be found as a circus act or considered a family tragedy. As time progressed, they found themselves victim to forced sterilization and institutionalization. They were hid away and not mainstreamed or included. After World War 2, veterans pressured the government to provide training and rehabilitation. In 1972, the Rehabilitation Act was passed, and the act included people with disabilities. The Education of All Handicapped Children Act was passed in 1975 and was renamed IDEA in 1990. The IDEA furthered the road toward inclusion. That same year the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed. This act provided equal access to employment and equal treatment of people with disabilities. Businesses were required to accommodate. This was a step in the right direction but individuals with disabilities still face prejudice and bias (Anti-Defamation League, n.d.). We have come a long way since the attitudes and practices of the 1800’s, yet we have a long way to go.

Employees with disabilities tend to be persistent, committed, and disciplined. Just like any other employee, they possess necessary talents and abilities. It is vital that we remove the challenges they face and create opportunities. Inclusive leaders can insure that everyone gets heard, and empower all employees, and ensure that every member of the work team feel safe sharing their ideas. A new trend in hiring has surfaced. Employers are interested in hiring employees with autism spectrum disorder (Bernick, 2016).

In the past 20 years, the number of children diagnosed with autism has increased significantly (Hensel, 2016). One in 250 people have autism spectrum disorder, or ASD, in the United States. This is a large group of relatively untapped skill and ability.

The issue arises when employers and managers have not been trained to manage employees with ASD. ASD is characterized by issues with eye contact, delayed verbal responses, strange vocal pitch, bluntness, and extreme interest in one topic. One study stated that employment was the greatest issue facing young adults with high-functioning autism (Hensel, 2016). Individuals with ASD are focused, reliable, honest, and extremely tolerant of repetition and routine. Individuals with ASD possess strong logic, attention to detail, and accuracy (Employers guide, n.d.). With appropriate support, individuals with ASD have a great deal to offer organizations.

Diversity in the workforce is essential for growth and innovation. This makes inclusion vital for organizational success (Inclusive Hiring, n.d.). Neurodiversity can be a challenge and it takes a strong leader with understanding and training to ensure successful inclusion initiatives. Harvey Blume states that, "Neurodiversity may be every bit as crucial for humans as biodiversity is for life in general."(Comaford, 2017) There is a need for developing leaders prepared for the challenge of inclusion.

**Contribution to Effective Teaching and Learning**

I posed a question on an autism Reddit community. I asked what management could do to assist employees with autism. The answers were all very similar and included many of the same needs. The respondents stated that they needed clear instruction and wanted it in writing. The majority stated that they did not like instructions given verbally or in passing and dislike telephone calls. They preferred text and email. They also wanted the opportunity to respond in writing to give them more time to formulate their thoughts and overcome expressive language issues. They wanted their employers and managers to communicate clearly and not use sarcasm. They also wanted frequent feedback preferably in the form of email accompanied by a list of recommendations. They wanted clear, fair rules and expectations for all employees. This kind of information is valuable and can assist management in dealing with ASD and other disabilities. Information like this should be available to all managers when they are being educated. It should be used to develop recommendations and programs for making inclusion in the workplace successful.

During my MBA program, I received no training or course work pertaining to inclusion or disabilities. The closest my coursework came to this topic was a human resources lesson about the Americans with Disabilities Act and some discussion about law and liability. Therefore, I pose the question, what can business schools do to educate managers about disabilities, inclusion, their responsibilities, and inclusive leadership”.

**Session Description**

Roundtable Discussion 60 Minutes

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| Topic | Participant Format | Timeline |
| History of Disabilities at Work | Presentation by Angela Even | 5 minutes |
| Our Personal Background/ Training in Management of Employees with Disabilities-Inclusion  | Discussion All | 5 minutes  |
| Increase in Autism and Disability Diagnosis | Presentation by Angela Even | 5 minutes |
| Personal Feelings Toward Autism Works Initiative | Discussion All | 5 minutes |
| Tapping the Skills Available Within the New Workforce | Presentation by Angela Even | 5 minutes |
| Inclusive Leadership Defined  | Presentation by Angela Even | 5 minutes |
| Feelings Toward Inclusive Leadership and Management of Employees with Disabilities-Inclusion | Discussion All | 5 minutes |
| Brainstorming Activity- What can business schools do to educate managers in inclusive leadership and management of employees with disabilities-inclusion? - Speedstorming | All | 25 minutes |
| Closing, Wrap Up, Email Collection to send final list.  | Led by Angela Even | 5 minutes |

*Table 1:* Timeline and Activities: Illustrates the timeline and the list of activities planned for the roundtable discussion on educating management students in inclusive leadership techniques.

**What can business schools do to educate managers in inclusive leadership?**

Brainstorming session to produce an actionable list of recommendations for business school educator implementation. This will be accomplished by using modified speed storming. We will use a 1 sheet- 3-minute technique to produce a list of 3 recommendations. The papers are passed to new participants and they can add, remove, and change recommendations but may still only have 3 recommendations. These final 15 recommendations will be compiled and reduced to the top ten recommendations for reshaping management education to increase inclusion education. This will take 60 minutes but can be compressed to 30 minutes. I will conclude with reminding participants how far we have come in education and inclusion techniques.

**Conclusion**

The outcome of my proposed session is to establish a list of recommendations targeted toward business school educators and administrators for use in establishing inclusion training for future managers and educational opportunities aimed at inclusion. There is little to no training or educational course work on disabilities. There is a need to produce an actionable list of recommendations for business school implementation of inclusive leadership education and training to accommodate and tap a dynamic workforce. This will help to ensure that management is prepared to handle the changes in the evolving workforce that they will be responsible for leading. The inclusive leader can empower individuals demonstrating courage, humility, and accountability while creating an innovative, dynamic workplace in which all employees feel connected and supported (Catalyst, 2017).

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