

Career Success and Satisfaction of People with Disabilities: The Role of Management

Educators

Abstract

As more students with disabilities enter colleges and pursue educational paths that are likely to render them employable, colleges and workplaces are not fully equipped to receive them and include them. There is a need for faculty to look beyond reasonable accommodations mandated by Section 504 and think intentionally about specific ways in which students with disabilities can be supported in college, so they have positive career outcomes after they graduate. In this session, we discuss what the extant literature says about the causes of low career success and satisfaction among people with disabilities and share findings from our own research on some of unique character strengths persons with disabilities that help them achieve and be effective in leadership positions. We then open the session and invite faculty perspectives on how to coach students with disabilities to be successful in college, highly competitive job markets and the workplace.

Keywords: Disability, Career Development, Diversity

According to the 2015-16 data compiled by the National Center for Educational Statistics (2019), about 20 percent of undergraduate students in the USA reported having a disability. This is more than three times the numbers from the mid-1990s. While it may be heartening to see that a greater number of people with disabilities (PWD) are successfully entering higher education, most faculty do not know how to effectively guide and mentor these students to transition to the workplace and be successful in their chosen careers. As a result, employment opportunities tend to be severely restricted for PWDs. According to the latest report available from the World Health Organization (2011), employment rate among PWDs in the USA is only at 38%, which is little over half of the rate of the overall population at 73%. Unsurprisingly, according to the same report, poverty rates are considerably higher among PWDs. Even when PWDs are employed, they are more likely to be underemployed (Colella & Bruyère, 2011) and having significantly lower job satisfaction than their able-bodied peers (Uppal, 2005).

Work is an integral and central part of the life of most adults. It is important not only because of its role in the earning of a livelihood but also because it helps in providing meaning and significance to our lives. It is no wonder then that people define themselves by the work they do in the society (Blustein, 2008), and PWDs are no exception. Productive work and financial security that a stable income provides can be especially beneficial to the health and well-being of people with disabilities (PWDs), because PWDs often experience higher levels of social isolation, stigma and additional financial burden than people without disabilities. PWDs are also found to show higher levels of mental health problems such as depression, as a result of unemployment (Turner & Turner, 2004).

Unfortunately, the field of management and human resource management has viewed disability from a very narrow perspective (Foster, 2007) of how best to employ and manage

workers with disability so that the organization does not get into legal trouble for being discriminatory. At colleges and universities also, disability is viewed from a similar narrow perspective, whereby faculty provide recommended accommodations (such as extended time and testing in a quiet environment) to stay compliant with Section 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). However, rarely do we see concerted efforts on the part of employers and educators to invest in PWDs so that they can be experience short and long-term success in their chosen careers. This does not necessarily happen because employers and educators do not care at all about PWDs. Instead, discrimination may be implicit or subconscious (Dovidio, Pagotto, & Hebl, 2011). Employers and educators may also feel unequipped to address the needs and aspirations of PWDs. The purpose of our proposed roundtable is to discuss with management educators the possible barriers that prevent them from fully investing in the career goals of students with disabilities and the solutions to this problem.

Targeted Audience

The target audience for our roundtable discussion are faculty who have had students with disabilities or anticipate having them in their classes. The discussion will also be of interest to researchers who work in the areas of careers, leadership development, resilience, diversity, and social justice.

Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications

The goal of our proposed roundtable is threefold. First, it aims to create awareness among management educators about the challenges faced by PWDs in higher education and the workplace. We will borrow from the disability and special education literature to inform our participants about these challenges. We will also share results from one of our own research

studies, where we examined the challenges that PWDs face in acquiring and retaining leadership positions in organizations.

The second aim of our roundtable is to invalidate some of the common stereotypes that people (including management educators) have about PWDs regarding their competence, motivation and productivity. We will do this by examining the extant empirical literature on the topic and by sharing the results of our study on PWDs in leadership positions. We will also discuss some of the psychological mechanisms through which these implicit stereotypes may be formed—such as the just world hypothesis that presumes that PWDs are responsible for their disability (Lerner, 1980), similarity-attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971), and response-amplification theory (Katz & Glass, 1979) among others—so that educators are more immune to the dangerous stereotypes about PWDs.

While the first two aims of our roundtable focused on sensitizing management educators to the strengths and challenges of PWDs, the final aim of our session is to go beyond mere sensitization training and discuss practical solutions to the education and workplace problems associated with PWDs. Specifically, our aim is to empower participants with certain perspectives and skills that can help them be more effective with students with disabilities in preparing them for the competitive job market and workplace environments. Some of this discussion will be rely on extant research on the topic (e.g., Lyons et al., 2018; Zhu, Law, Sun, & Yang, 2019). However, since research on the topic is scant, we will elicit participants' critical and creative viewpoints to collectively gain deeper insights about the effective inclusion of PWDs in the classroom and workplace.

Session Description

Below is a broad overview of our proposed roundtable:

Description of the Activities	Approximate Time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will start our session with a formal presentation providing an overview of the challenges faced by PWDs. 	10 minutes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will ask the participants to share their experiences of some challenges encountered by PWDs. 	5 minutes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will ask participants to share their thoughts on what they think are the biggest barriers on the career paths of PWDs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will discuss if these barriers are related to negative stereotypes about PWDs. • We will share our research findings on the character strengths of PWDs in leadership positions that invalidate some of these stereotypes. 	10 minutes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will discuss how well-intentioned anti-discrimination laws aimed at protecting employees with disabilities might contribute to PWDs losing out on employment opportunities. The following question will be used to elicit discussion: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) What advantages or disadvantages do you foresee if you were an employer hiring a PWD in your organization? • We will brainstorm on what educators can do to minimize the negative impact of these laws. 	10 minutes

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will brainstorm, discuss and share the steps that educators can take to help PWDs be more successful and satisfied in college and their future workplaces. Some of the leading questions that we will use for this discuss are as follows: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) What can management educators do to enhance participation and success of PWDs in their classrooms? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. What supports, training and information do faculty already have and what is lacking? b. What are the laws applicable to educational rights of college students with disabilities? c. Where can faculty get the knowledge and support they need to include students with disabilities in their classrooms? 2) What can management educators do so that PWDs in their classroom are more likely to be successful in finding desired employment? 3) What can management educators do to prepare PWDs to be effective at the workplace? 4) What can management educators do to help PWDs have higher career satisfaction? 	<p>20 minutes</p>
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