

Course Name: Organizational Behaviour: Individual Dynamics in Organization

Professor Name: Prof. Dr. Abraham Cyril Issac

Department Name: School of Business

Institute Name: Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati

Week – 02

Lecture – 09

Lecture 9: Ableism and inclusion

Hello students. Welcome back to the course on Organizational Behavior, Individual Dynamics in Organization. We move to the lecture 4 of the module 2 where we discuss more on diversity. Now if you recollect, we have started with what diversity is specifically. In this module we have looked into what diversity is defined as, what it is understood as. We have also seen how diversity has emerged over the period.

For example, how diversity is different from inclusion. Understanding diversity in paper does not reflect necessarily inclusion in an organization. We have also seen how diversity can be different in terms of demographic diversity, in terms of cognitive diversity, how organizations generally undermine the relevance of cognitive diversity. So, these are some of the inputs what we obtain in lecture 1 to 3.

So today we will take up a totally related topic which is known as ableism and inclusion.

I am Dr. Abraham Cyril Issac, Assistant Professor at the School of Business, Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati.

Straight away moving into our lecture today. Let us start with this thought.

The person who uses a wheelchair is not disabled by paralysis but by building design, rigid work practices and the attitudes and behavior of others. I repeat the person who uses a wheelchair is not disabled by paralysis but by the building design, rigid work practices and the attitudes and behavior of others. This theme is what we will try to address throughout this lecture today. Let us focus on the first part.

Let us understand what ableism is.

Ableism is something which is very subtle in every organization. Ableism in workplace refers to discrimination, prejudice or bias against individuals with disabilities. Now let

me take a very crude example. Let me take an example of your organization where you have a different distinguished parking space for a differently abled individual. Now you see that every day, every day there is some other person who is parking his vehicle there or her vehicle there. This is ableism. This is the discrimination. This is the prejudice or the bias against individuals with disabilities. I hope that crude example makes things clear how I am bringing in the discrimination into picture at this place.

Let us look into ableism as unfair treatment with persons with disability intentionally or unintentionally.

So sometimes it happens that you just have to park your vehicle and it happens that that was the only free slot but that could happen unintentionally without even seeing that that was a parking slot prescribed for a particular person or somebody like that. So, this is something which we have to understand. At times it happens unintentionally but many a time it is intentional behavior of the individual within the organization. It creates barriers that prevents individuals with disabilities from fully participating and benefiting from the workplace. This is where I like to recall the discussions that happen in terms of self-actualization where you actually realize the potentialities which you have, the entire set of potentialities which you have. In this place you are not given the fair ground. You are not given the level playing field where you can excel in yourself. You can bring in the best game. You can bring in the A game and perform well. Your handicap is being reflected again in a more pronounced manner and this is specifically ableism. This is what we would like to address today.

Now let us look into the modes of disability. Basically, there are three overarching models of disability by Olkin 2002 and the first one is moral model. Let us look into moral model as a mark of wrongdoing or a sign of honor. Many a time we see that individual lamenting, individuals actually saying that okay I had done something wrong because of that this has happened to me or maybe sometimes we also see the corollary of that that people tend to see that okay I did something very well so this could be a result of that. So this moral compass, this moral gauge, the moral instrument actually guides the disability. This is the first aspect in the moral model.

There is a second model which is known as the medical model. Medical model is a model which looks into a medical system where an impairment in a body system or function that is inherently pathological. So, whatever happens with respect to disability is having a pathological interpretation, is having a pathological explanation. It could be cured only through medical intervention. The reason is a medical aspect and the cause is a medical aspect, the result is also to be done by medical diagnosis and further medical intervention. So, this is the medical model where the diversity in itself, the disability is essentially made and or is focused and is restricted under the umbrella of the medical field.

Now the third one is the social model. Now this is more interesting. It results from the mismatch between disabled person and the environment. When I am talking about the environment, I am meaning both social as well as physical. Now this is the key part. This is what is very critical when it comes to organizational behavior, the social model. There is a mismatch between the person's actual skill set or actual availability or actual strengths and the requirement of the job. This is where the physical and social environment both comes into picture. So, it could be such a way that there is actually a physical disability and the organization is not facilitating the way for actual good movement for the individual or there could be some attitudinal barriers. The group might not be accepting it. In the previous class we had a discussion on heterogeneity and homogeneity in the group. Homogeneous groups are easy to be maintained.

So many a time people tend to take themselves and form homogeneous group. But this is where the social model becomes all the more relevant. This is where the social model becomes the critical aspect where you tend to understand disability from a social perspective. Now let us look into the social model disability in terms of barriers and this is what I will call as the key aspect or the key outcome of French and Swain 2011 and this is the paper if you want to refer to that. So, they look into different barriers namely structural barriers, environmental barriers and attitudinal barriers.

Let us look one by one. Structural barriers. Structural barriers are all about underlying norms and ideologies of organization and institutions. So based on the normality that exists in this particular organization many a time you venture you can compare you can introspect with your organization and an organization which your friend works. So many a time you have heard your friend telling that in our organization things are looked like this, people frown upon such differently able people. All these types of aspects we are hearing. This is what makes it the structural barrier based on the judgments of normality sustained by the hierarchies of power whereby this is to be done in this way and the instruction comes from the top whereby you are not actually even if you want to include somebody with a differently able person or different ability you are not because there is serious restriction coming from the top. So, in this top-down approach you are actually being made a victim of the structural barrier and if you have a disability, you are essentially part of this structural barrier that has come up as part of this top-down management approach. Now this is one aspect.

The second could be environmental barriers. When I am talking about environmental barriers, I essentially mean physical barriers within the environment. So, the structural barriers within the environment could be anything like steps, holes in the pavement and lack of resources for disabled people. Now lack of resources is critical. Many a time organization tend to undermine the very existence of physically disabled people or differently able people for the ease of communicating it in an exact way the disability is

being pictured like this. Otherwise, they are always differently able people. Let me make it very clear from the beginning that there is nothing called as physical or mental disability. It's just a case of differently able people out there.

So when you are looking into environmental barriers if the organization is not keen in actually making physical spaces more good to, more ease to or if the organization is not making the physical environment a good space for the people to move on, a good space for people to interact then it is essentially an environmental barrier. Ways things are done which may exclude disabled people for example the way meetings are conducted and the time allowed for the task. So, there could be some tasks which actually are bit stringent or strenuous. In those tasks differently able people might require some more time. Now it's common it's a fact that differently able people might require some time.

Now we have to be very much prone or very much considerate about their demands and is the organization not looking into that demand rather the top management is very stringent on the deadline that all the task should be completed at 5 p.m. If that is the case then it is actually environmental barrier. It is coming from the organization where the task is important rather than the people. It is coming from an organization which is inconsiderate which is not at all aware and you know influenced by the sensitivity towards the disability part. So, this is something which is very critical in terms of environmental barrier

And the most important aspect is the third one which is attitudinal barrier. The adverse attitudes and behavior of people towards persons with disability. So, in our context of organizational behavior as a course attitudinal barrier happens to be the most vital and the most critical aspect to be discussed and this is the theme of the lecture today. This is the theme of the lecture whereby I said that you know many a time people who are in wheelchair are not disabled by the paralysis. This is the theme. They are disabled by the lack of sensitivity. They are disabled by the lack of availability of ramps, availability of spaces where they can move easily. They are many a time you know blind people. They are not disabled by their blindness or visibility part. They are disabled by the lack of braille. They are disabled by the lack of large phones, cluttered workspaces, very much of isolated office spaces. So, these are the disability.

Now let us look into this from a totally different angle. Let us look at from an angle whereby if you are making an office space, imagine your office space is made in accordance to the need and requirement and here I take the support of Finkelstein's thought that if your office is made according to the requirements of let us say a differently abled person. Let us say according to the wheelchair requirement the height of the doors is just half of what you have in the office. It will be a restriction. It will be a constraint to the normally abled people. Normally again it is a very debatable word. So,

this is what I would like to mention. If as a worker, as an employee your specific requirements are not considered by the organization, if your specific demands are not met by the organization then it is obviously a situation of handicap. Being a normal person, it will be very difficult for you to sustain in such an environment.

So I repeat again if the organization is not looking into the requirements of the general workforce and the specific workforce together it is going to actually make one set of people alien, no doubt about it. Now this is what is the thought of or the basic underlying theme of today's lecture of attitudinal barriers and the social model is very clear on these aspects.

Now how does ableism affect the organization? This is very critical. When you look into ableism as a part of discrimination it can happen in terms of environment as we have seen. It can happen in terms of the problems created or problems emanating as a result of the attitudinal dispositions, the problems with the attitude of the people, lack of not considering the physically or differently able people into their group. This is what you face.

Reduced employee engagement. You tend to get people alienated from your workforce. You are not trying to engage people rather you are trying to send them away. You are being repulsive. You are not taking them into your group, into your organization, into your theme you are actually making it a lost cause.

They will lose out on actually contributing and even if they are contributing if it would be a halfhearted contribution. You can always see how you work in an environment which is in an adverse condition. In a disadvantageous position always your productivity will be at a record low. No doubt about it. This is what is specific with respect to ableism.

Let us look into another aspect. Increased turnover. When you are not welcome, when you are not treated well, when your requirements or demands, unique requirements are not met, you are not having the sense of belongingness with the organization. You tend to move out from the organization. This essentially if you recall the previous lecture, diversity also brings a lot of creativity into picture. Diversity brings a sort of; I am talking here specifically with respect to cognitive diversity.

The way they can think is different from the people who are otherwise not diverse. The homogeneity is not what is being, what should be the way but if you look into diversity, they have the different predispositions whereby they can bring in different ideas, different thought process running in their mind which can lead to a very creative solution. If you are not in a position to actually accept and acknowledge the ableism will in fact increase the turnover from the organization and also be the core reason for talent loss.

Now the third aspect is negative organizational culture and reputation. Now many a time you have seen that organizations taking a negative hit mainly because of the lack of sympathy, the lack of sensitivity towards the workforce. Now this if it happens in a consistent manner again and again over years it can take a toll on the organizational culture. People tend to be reluctant to work. I am talking about the people who are otherwise not disabled, who are otherwise not differently able. Those people will also tend to lose interest because they have seen the lack of sensitivity of the organization in close quarters. They have seen how the top management is insensitive to the demands and requirements of the people who actually need them. So this is where negative organizational culture and reputation can creep in and can compound and become detrimental to the organization as such.

Now let us understand very quickly what do you mean by equity and equality. Are the two words same? Many a time we tend to use it wrongly in a synonymous fashion, but let us understand equity and equality. When you are talking about equality you see the size, you see the size of the block they are getting. So, all these individuals have to see outside the fence. So, if they want to see outside the fence in equality, they are all given the same size blocks not seeing to the fact that they are all people with different heights. This is just figurative. This is to make you understand that without taking their unique demand, their unique requirement equality talks about a situation whereby they are all given the same facility. They are all given the same use of things. They are all given the same aspects, same resources, same human manpower or same technical resources or technical support. Everything is same. This is equality.

But the thing is when you are not considering the unique demands of the people you tend to fail because somebody will be definitely seeing over the fence, but somebody who is not actually up to that level he might or she might not be able to see across the fence.

But when you come to equity you are actually giving the resources as per the requirement, as per the demand of the individual. So, this is what is more critical, more vital in an organizational context. You have to address the elephant in the room. You have to address the very fact that equality is not what is required. You might be thinking that equality will make the space more equal to everybody. But having equal resources does not mean that you are going to excel. You need what you actually need. You want to have certain resources which will give you the maximum realization of your potentialities and this can happen only when it comes to equity. So, this is a critical difference between equality and equity and what we want is equity in an organization.

Now let us look into equality and equity as in detail. Everyone receives the same resources as I have already mentioned or opportunities. Let us not discount equality and look only into resources. We also see that along with resources something that comes in are the opportunities regardless of their individual needs or circumstances. So, you tend

to get these opportunities to grow, everybody has. So, the organization is very well claiming that we are giving everybody the same opportunity. But that does not make any sense if you have an inherent disability, if you have a little bit of issue which is not that common within the organizational workspace.

Treating all employees regardless of their background or characteristics with the same policies, benefits and opportunities without considering the unique requirements, without considering the unique predispositions of those individuals. If you are claiming that you are an equal organization giving equal resources, equal benefits, same policies, same opportunities, you are not doing the fair deal. You are not giving the fair deal when it comes to equality. But as I already mentioned in terms of equity, resources or opportunities both are distributed according to individual needs to ensure that everyone has an equal chance, everyone has an equal chance to participate and access the benefits.

Now this is where the organization can realize the true potential of every single individual within the organization. Accessible workspace and assistive technologies could be given to the people who actually need. As I already mentioned, let us not technically paralyze people with the lack of availability of workspaces which are actually accessible to them, which are actually the need for them. Let us give them the right level playing field whereby let everybody come in, work and excel together. That sense of belongingness comes in equity and not equality.

Now let us look into this particular case study of Best Buy. Founded in 1966 and headquartered in Richfield, Minnesota, Best Buy's company mission is to be a growth company focused on better solving the unmet needs of our customers and we rely on our employees to solve those puzzles. Now the company started as a standalone sound of music now known as the Best Buy store in Roswell and has grown to nearly 1200 stores in the US and globally and several subsidiary brands. It attracts employees and customers of all types and from very diverse background, one of its leading company goals is to make Best Buy a great place to work by having fun while being the best. The company's diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility, DEIA, efforts are a cornerstone of the company's commitment to creating a more inclusive future both inside the company and in the communities where Best Buy operates.

Individuals on the autism spectrum may find it challenging to get hired and also to retain jobs due to social differences or other factors. After hearing from multiple retail employees that training was needed to ensure Best Buy employees with autism felt fully included, the company's management contacted members of the autism focused affinity group, FACE, Facing Autism in a Caring Environment, FACE for Assistance. Now FACE, FACE partnered with the Autism Society of Minnesota and members of the Best Buy's corporate training team to develop a comprehensive e-learning course to educate

employees on ways to ensure autistic employees and customers feel welcome and included. Both Best Buy retail and corporate staff served on the e-learning development team including cashiers, finance team members and service agents. The co-chair of Best Buy's disability affinity group includes and two e-learning developers also served on the team. The team developed an e-learning software application at the cost of approximately 10,000 US dollars.

Best Buy management felt this initiative yielded a tremendous return on investment. Now when you actually give your best efforts to bring in disability to recognize and acknowledge and appreciate and to give them a level playing field this is what happens. The majority of employees who completed the e-learning module commented that they now get it and have learned to recognize certain behaviors that co-workers or customers may exhibit as part of being on the autism spectrum and work with them more effectively. It is also one of the highest rated e-learning courses among the thousands offered through Best Buy's learning launch program.

As a result of this success Best Buy packaged the e-learning module and made it customizable and it is now available through the Autism Society of Minnesota to any organization who is interested in using it. For Best Buy the lesson learned is that when you educate and create awareness you dispel myths and therefore lessen fears and stigma.

So, this is what you learn from the aspect of the case of Best Buy. Now interestingly we all come down to the basic theme of the lecture. Many a time we feel that ableism happens because of discrimination, because of stereotyping, because of lack of sympathy, lack of sensitivity to people who are actually physically differently able.

So such a spirit should not be running in your organization. Moreover, as I come back to the original theme of the lecture the disability is not caused by the paralysis. The disability of a person who is sitting in a wheelchair is not because of paralysis, it is because of the attitude of the people, because of the very insensitive approach of people not including him or her in the group, because of the lack of insensitivity towards him whereby not creating required ramps and moving spaces for the particular individual. Everybody has his or her needs. If you are trying to not meet any individual needs within the organization they feel left out

And this is the case which I already mentioned as a contradictory statement where you will see that if you are making an office space specific to the requirement of only differently abled people then being able in a normal sense might leave you, might lead you to a wrong situation altogether.

You might not find that the doors are of your size. You might find that the chairs you are sitting are not ergonomic because it is not fitting you properly. So, in an organization

which is designed otherwise you may feel left out. So, if as an organization, as the individuals who are working for the organization, the employees who are working for the organization are not taken in seriously, are not considered seriously, their demands are not met, their unique requirements are not met then the organization is not good in terms of diversity. The organization is not good in terms of considering people from different walks of life with different abilities.

That is all for today's lecture. Ladies and gentlemen see you in the next class with more on diversity. Thank you for listening to me patiently. Thank you. Bye-bye.