**Stream Title:** Bringing Disability Leadership to the Forefront

**Stream Organiser**:

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**Stream Outline:**

The topic of “Authentic Leadership” is one that is written and spoken about at great length. There have been over 1000 studies in an attempt to determine the definitive styles, characteristics, or personality traits of great leaders1. However, when discussing leadership in a conventional context; disabled leadership is all too often forgotten about, often viewed as an aspect of a person that is to be put to one side. The medical model preferred to that of the social model. Many disabled employees, to overcome the unique barriers they face in the workplace, utilise skills that are thought essential for leadership. Yet, many disabled people find the term 'leader' daunting, and struggle to apply it to themselves2.

Disabled leadership is a topic that has been championed in the UK by disability rights organisations, in order to go beyond disability and towards an inclusive society. However, the concept of inclusive society has not been embraced and embedded fully in the workplace. In an attempt to address this disparity, Imperial College London ran a pilot leadership programme for disabled staff entitled Calibre in 2013. The programme enabled a safe space for discussion and for unique leadership strategies to be explored. The results were clear, given the time, space and directive support the participants blossomed into leaders in their own right.

As all organisations consider leadership for the twenty first century, it is essential that as a part of authentic leadership, disabled employees’ needs are not only met; but they are given the development they need to flourish in the workplace. This will enable them to become the leaders that they are and that they are entitled to be. How can organisations empower disabled staff members and what are best ways in which this can be activated?

**Areas to consider for this stream:**

* Social versus Medical models of disability
* The intersection of facets of disability, both visible and invisible and different leadership styles
* The hidden disabled leaders in the workplace
* The challenges faced by disabled leaders on a micro and macro level
* Daily micro aggressions in the workplace that hinder disabled people reaching their potential
* Organisations’ roles in developing disabled leaders and how this can be done in a sensitive fashion
* The case for disabled-only leadership development programmes
* Potential learning from other established leadership literature streams such as women in leadership, race and leadership and sexual orientation and leadership
* The disability rights movement and relevance to organisational leadership

**Key words:**

Disability, ableism, leadership, authenticity, management and personal development

**References**

1. Discovering Your Authentic Leadership by [Bill George](http://hbr.org/search/Bill%20George/0/author), [Peter Sims](http://hbr.org/search/Peter%20Sims/0/author), [Andrew N. McLean](http://hbr.org/search/Andrew%20N.%20McLean/0/author), and [Diana Mayer](http://hbr.org/search/Diana%20Mayer/0/author)
2. Sync: Leadership for Disabled People Disability Arts Online http://www.disabilityartsonline.org.uk/sync