Stream Title:

Organizational Disability Inclusion:
Looking Backward & Living Forward in the New Normal

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Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forward.   -- Soren Kierkegaard

Stream Outline

In our current moment of political, social, and environmental instability, we seek through this stream to bring together a like-minded community of scholars prepared to re-examine, renew, and recast dominant frames of understanding about disability and inclusion in current-day organizations. In our post-pandemic period of successive crises that bears witness to the dismantling of democratic institutions (Mahadevan, Primecz, & Mills, 2023) the wisdom of 19th-century philosopher Soren Kierkegaard can remind us that we are inexorably thrust into the present-tense before we can fully integrate or appreciate our recent (and more distant) past. Critical scholarly engagement with disability inclusion must therefore continually survey the ground previously covered in striving to better envision the 'now' and the 'next'.

This subtheme therefore proposes to bring under review existing disability inclusion epistemologies, ontologies, theories and empirical practices to form new bridges towards radical future forms of inclusion (Powell, 2015). Contemporary organizations face contradictory injunctions to simultaneously cultivate diversity and the uniqueness it affords, alongside an "inclusion imperative" for their diverse constituents. Political polarization and

a general backlash against progressive causes–whether targeting 'wokeness', critical race theory, or claims for marginalized communities in general–generates additional complexity for those wishing to embrace oppositional views (Chowdhury, 2022) on inclusion. Today's employees must navigate such incursions of politics into the workplace while seeking out inclusive settings carrying the promise of human flourishing, e.g. a space enabling them to realize their full potential.

Extant research demonstrates the many positive features of inclusion. Shore et al. (2011) for example suggest that an inclusive climate, inclusive leadership and inclusive practices lead to positive employee perceptions that lead to increased well-being, job satisfaction, organizational commitment and enhanced performance. Although much of the research on diversity is traceable to the past four decades, gender and racio-ethnic approaches have historically provided the privileged lens of analysis for studying inequalities in organizations (Zanoni et al., 2010; Amis et al., 2018). Joan Acker's (2006) seminal work on inequality 'regimes'–the processes, actions, and meanings that maintain class, gender and racial inequalities within particular organizations—can be further extended to our collective reflections on the production of inequalities when it comes to ability, dis-ability, and ableist worldviews that perpetuate dis-abled lived experiences of the organization.

Intersectional theoretical approaches enable us to interrogate identity at the crossroads of two identity categories (Crenshaw; 1991, 2020) and its incursion into the study of organizations has begun to bear its fruit. It can allow us to better understand how social inequalities are perpetuated through the workplace performance of entrenched stereotypes (Alberti & Ianuzzi, 2020) or how people "construct, perceive, or affirm those who are different" (Mahadevan, Primecz, & Mills, 2023: p 191) and how immigrants experience radical forms of inequalities under lockdown conditions (Dobusch & Kriessi, 2020). Intersectionality has evolved to become a preferred means for many MOS researchers to avoid excessive focus on a single strand of diversity (Ozbilgin et al., 2011).

The Vicissitudes of Diversity Inclusion. So where do such developments and questions leave us today as we grapple with disability inclusion and its intersection with other identity categories? Kudlick (2003) suggests that extant 'anti-oppression' analytical approaches to gender, race and sexuality can provide valuable tools for exploring disabilities, often excluded from studies of inequalities. The predominant view on disability has shifted from a *medical pathology* orientation to a *social* one, implying that better inclusion can emerge when disability is considered as a *social category* rather than a medical condition; i.e. as an illness or pathology (Sloan et al.;

2018). Nevertheless, disability cannot be understood solely through the lens of *social category* because it requires considering the *nature* of the person's impairment and often necessitates accommodations that enable better occupational adaptation. Unlike impairment, which constitutes a materialized medical condition of the individual (and therefore the domain of individual responsibility), disability can be perceived as a *social construct* emanating from environments created for able-bodied people (i.e. *ableist* worldviews). From this perspective, it becomes the responsibility of the collective—governments, civil society and organizations--to make inclusion a reality by removing the exclusionary barriers that they enact and perpetuate. The act of **including others** is also a **practice**—as is the act of excluding. Donna Haraway reminds us that in "passion and action, detachment and attachment" we can cultivate our own "**response-ability**" or a "collective knowing and doing" (Haraway, 2016: p. 28) to develop an ecology of practices around disability inclusion. Yet recent studies have revealed that different types of organization deploy distinct means to implicitly sustain an able-bodied/disabled dichotomy that sorts employees according to ideal worker norms (Jammaers & Zanoni, 2020).

People with Disabilities in the *New Normal* of Higher Education. People with disabilities (PWDs)—a whopping 16% of the world population (WHO, 2023)--are among the most vulnerable in society and are hence the most impacted by global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the overnight shift to emergency remote work afforded more privacy and opportunity to self-accommodate for PWDs, it also further isolated them (Lederman; 2020). This was experienced in striking ways by students and learners of all ages and identities who struggled to adapt to a dynamic new normal each day. Higher education institutions (HEI) made campus support services for learning and crisis management more widely available during and after the pandemic through student accessibility services (Mullin & Mitchell; 2021). In essence, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on PWDs' willingness to disclose their special needs, whether 'visible' or 'invisible', is a nuanced and multifaceted issue. While some PWDs may have been more inclined to disclose their needs due to the radically volatile organizational landscape, others might have faced new barriers that made disclosure more challenging, which is sometimes due to the nature of their disability.

Given the above developments, this stream calls for work from scholars who seek to share their empirical, conceptual, epistemological and ontological insights from both quantitative and qualitative traditions. Specifically we call for original work on disability inclusion from a wide range of different disciplines and theoretical perspectives including, and not limited to, the following:

➔ How are ability and dis-ability socially constructed in the organization? How are they organized, disseminated, and perpetuated in organizational stories, lived experiences, and cultures?

➔ How does dis-ability intersect with specific identity categories such as gender, race, class, socioeconomic status, or age?

➔ What forms of radical inclusion can be envisioned in a 'forward-living' ontology of the inclusive organization?

➔ How can the 'looking backward, living forward' ontology enable better scholarly engagement with issues of critical forms of organizational inclusion?

➔ How do disruptions and crises such as the recent global pandemic distinctly impact people with disabilities?

➔ How are higher education institutions (HEIs) managing the growing number of students with disabilities?

➔ How are the various ways in which disability disclosure rates are impacted (by the current socio-political context, organizational policy shifts, post-pandemic normative changes, and more?)

➔ How do people with disabilities adapt to *the new normal* workplace? (including scenarios of hybrid work, remote home office, return to the office, and varying forms of flexible work arrangemnets?)

➔ What can organizations do to better promote employee disclosure of invisible disabilities?

➔ In what ways is dis-ability constructed as a factor of precarity- or precarization in organizations? What examples demonstrate its social construction as a strength or form of resistance?

➔ What issues specifically impact or influence the organizational lived experience of neurodivergent constituents?

➔ How are ableist worldviews perpetuated – or countered – by organizational policy and practice?

➔ Under what empirical circumstances does ableism generate organizational control over worker identity?

➔ Under what empirical circumstances can dis-ability generate collective human flourishing in the organization?

➔ How can organizations combat ableist ideal worker norms

➔ How does technology help or hinder the inclusion of people with disabilities?

➔ What sorts of connections can be made between eco-feminist responses to *social and environmental crises*—what Donna Haraway calls the quality of our "response-ability" (Haraway, 2016)—and the need to include the dis-abled, or those categorized as holding a dis-ability? How can response-ability to dis-ability shift the current inclusion landscape?

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