EXPLORING SEVEN DIMENSION MODEL OF LEADERSHIP FROM THE LENS OF PWD EMPLOYEES

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ABSTRACT

The differently abled continue to face discrimination in several spheres of life, including but not limited to education and employment, as well as social integration. This paper aims to deepen the discussion about the challenges when seeking employment and infuses the Seven-Dimension Leadership Model to understand how such challenges can be dealt with. The framework of this discussion includes how transformation, scope and ethics of leadership can foster organizational change. The focus is on Leaders to practice more of what is relevant and beneficial for the differently abled job seekers and employees.

The Seven-Dimension servant Leadership Model, that grounds on visionary thinking, emotional intelligence, inclusivity, adaptability, accountability, empowerment and innovation etc. helps understand how leadership can be a tool in breaking the barrier to inclusive growth especially for the PwDs. The model addresses the importance of leaders who embrace the principle of creating a barrier free workplace. The incremental benefits of applying this model in companies would be the effective integration, advancement in careers as well as, improvement of the quality of life of PwDs.

This study lists the specific issues that people with disabilities encounter, namely, inability to access education or occupational training resources, discrimination in employment opportunities, lack of accessibility to workplaces, and unsatisfactory workplace structures. Moreover, many organizations do not understand or misinterpret what People with Disabilities (PwD) can offer and, therefore, leave them out of productive work. Such systemic issues require a leadership that is both creative and results oriented in promoting equity.

The paper discusses cases of some private companies which have adopted the leadership strategies consistent with the Seven-Dimension Leadership Model. These corporations engage in policies and practices which ensure inclusivity, modifications and career development policies specific for PwD. Some companies have begun inclusive recruiting policies, while some other have developed employee resource groups and mentorships for employees with disabilities.

Due to those challenges of employability and inclusion which persons with disabilities face, this paper finds that the Seven-Dimension Leadership Model presents a good framework. It also becomes clear that leadership is capable of promoting organizations from mainly the traditional setting, to an inclusive space for all, including the differently-abled.

Finally, the research emphasizes the importance of leadership in changing the landscape of employment for people with disabilities and calls for active efforts that adhere to the seven-dimensional leadership model of practice.

Keywords: Differently abled, Employment challenges, Seven dimension servant leadership model

INTRODUCTION

Society creates leader, leaders lead the society. It's a circle that showcase that leaders reflects the existing norms and values in the society (Solinger et al, 2000) and they influence the society to create a paradigm shift in the values and norms in either ways, challenging or reinforcing the status quo (Voulvoulis et al, 2022). The action and reaction of the leader can maneuver the perception and expectation of the society and vice versa (Sharapov, Dmitry, and Jan☐ Michael Ross., 2023) In many theories, leadership model explains that leader's focus is on organizational success or exercising power over subordinates (Olley, Richard, 2021). In a country like India, where the population of PwD community as per the 2001 Indian Census reported that 2.1% of the Indian population i.e 21.9 million people, in order to empower the PwD community, all the major leadership model can be justified based on the styles that go in sync with the personality, strength and need of the target. Models like resilient leadership, authentic leadership and servant leadership have shown the compatibility with the concept of empowering PwD employees (PE). PE understands the need of empowering others, creating clear and transparent communication, significance of empathy, resilience and healing in the organization culture (Bam, Armand, 2018). They bring together persuasion and shifting perspectives in action. In servant leadership, the leader prioritizes the well-being, growth, and development of their team members, fostering a collaborative and supportive environment (Roberts, Gary, 2021). Since 20th century, many theories are advocating that servant leadership (SL) style represents leadership in a coherent way. With the evolution of concepts, SL was substituted as an alternative to authority and power centric models of leadership(Keith, Kent, 2008, Wong, T. P., and D. Page, 2000). There was a continuum of theories which was derived from SL as locus.

 In 2008, Liden, Wayne, Zhao and Henderson propagated a new model of Leadership "Seven dimension model". The dimensions are: "***Emotional healing, creating value for the community, empowering, helping subordinates grow, putting subordinates first, behaving ethically, forming relationships with immediate followers, and servanthood***" (Liden et al. 2008). Liden, Wayne, Zhao and Henderson propagated the seven dimension (SD) model of servant leadership which primarily focuses on empowering others, showcasing ethical behavior, putting the team ahead and similar ethos. The theory is particularly impactful for the PwD community as it recognizes the need of emotional intelligence and empathy which plays a strong influence in the leadership model. The basic challenges which are faced by the PE are their employability challenges, technological accessibility and availability, affordability of assistive devices and policy and implementation gaps (Karki 2023, Jahan, Nusrat, and Catherine Holloway, 2020, Morwane et al 2021, Jiya et al 2022, Anthony Aning 2014, Mogensen, Karina Fischer, 2022). The strength of the model when analyzed with the perspective PE had high ethical quotient with the aspect of creating value for the community, developing and empowering other (King, Trevor Logan Oliver, 2021, Digo, Gerry S., 2021) .

The further discussion in the paper will be trying to understand the influence of SL through the SD model in creating solutions of each challenges faced by PE.

DISABILITY IN INDIA

In India, people with disabilities (PwD) are termed "Divyangjan" that means people with divine abilities as coined by a political leader, which somehow streamlines societal attitude towards the community from a respectful and empowering perspective. Social stigma and insufficient resources have humbled the ability amongst the disabled people. Organizational professionals recognize the need for systemic improvements in human resources and talent practices to support disability inclusion (Cavanagh et al., 2017; Praslova, 2023). Even though progressive law formulation and initiatives have specifically aimed at fostering equitable employment opportunities, individuals with disabilities often encounter significant barriers and discrimination in the job market. Yet, mainstream organizational practices have not sufficiently addressed the persistent lack of disability inclusion in the workplace (Praslova, 2023; Schloemer-Jarvis et al., 2022). Many of the attitudinal and practical barriers identified by Stone and Colella (1996) still exist in organizations today. There is a gap between the perspectives of organizational practitioners and researchers and those of the disabled communities. Many practitioners and researchers use the medical model of disability, which views disability as an individual issue, while disabled communities mostly support the social model, which sees disability as a result of environmental and social barriers (Oliver 2013). These differing perspectives are reflected in language preferences, "with disability" associated with the medical model and "disabled" preferred by those focusing on social aspects of disability (Andrews et al., 2019).

In spite of various progressive programs, there are significant challenges that are multifaceted. The employment rate of PwD is influenced by a set of factors which includes societal attitude, issues related to accessibility, certain barriers related to education and most importantly implementation of the policies as prescribed in the legislation. Despite of numerous laws and different policies made specifically for promotion of employment of people with disabilities, for example, Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016) still the actual on ground employment rate remains very low. According to International Labour Organisation (ILO) and a report published in ESCAP 2021, the employment rate of people with disabilities in India is approximately around 36% which is significantly lower than the employment rate of the general population which is about 58% (ESCAP, UN, 2021 report).

Some of the major employability challenges faced by the PwD community are:

Accessibility Challenges

One of the most common and immediate obstacles that is faced by people with disabilities is lack of an accessible physical infrastructure at the workplace. For example, offices and other buildings does not have elevators or ramps, accessible restrooms and bathrooms which hinders the basic process of work for PwD. A government audit in 2020 revealed that less than **5%** of public buildings were fully accessible to PwD. This figure indicates a larger national issue in majority of work places designed without inclusivity in mind in India. PE also faces a lot of workplace discrimination, biases and lack of understanding from the professional ecosystem (Joshi, Bharat & Thomas, Bigi, 2020). This kind of ignorance in terms of infrastructure for people with disabilities causes limitations for them which in turn affects the comprehensive productivity and job satisfaction of such people. Other issue might be that due to a lack of inaccessible and incompatible public transportation they may face significant challenges in commuting to and from work (Sandra Rosenbloom, 2007), There are several guidelines for example, *The Ministry of Urban Development guidelines on accessible*

urban infrastructure 2016 which mentions accessible public transportation but the implementation part of such policies and acts still remains inconsistent across major cities and towns in India. This on ground inconsistency aggravates the already existing difficulties that are faced by people with disabilities in securing and maintaining jobs on a daily basis.

Psychological Challenges

Emotional safety and psychological support from the management is a very basic need of any individual. Maslow's hierarchy too places safety and security as basic requirement. Organizations may be well designed for physical safety but when it comes to meeting emotional needs a lot needs to be done. Inclusion can be created by leaders demonstrating through their actions, belief in, and commitment to diversity, creating opportunities for dialogue about differences, and when required, even altering rules for acceptable behaviors (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2013, Wasserman et al. 2008). Empirical research has shown that when leaders solicit and appreciate employee input, it helps create work climates that are high in psychological safety. The leaders in the management are responsible in cultivating safe spaces for the PE where they can share their grievances without the fear of being judged. SL provides a platform where they can manage the mental trauma and negative experiences of PE and can understand the challenges faced by them. When the leader is focusing on "*creating value for the community*" they are encouraging organizational inclusivity and it is made a part of organization mission and policies (Nicholas, Troy N, 2023). By providing an ongoing feedback mechanism, training resources, mentor buddy philosophy for PE, leaders are promoting them in *growing and succeeding* (Bidlack, Ashley 2023), (N Vohra 2015). *Ethical work* practices while dealing with PE can guarantee short term and long term benefits to the organization.

Technological accessibility, availability and affordability of assistive devices

The growing potential of advancements in technology can help a lot in filling up the gaps for people with disabilities to make work and jobs more accessible. Assistive technologies such as speech to text software, adaptive info input devices, screen readers can be used and can significantly improve the employability rate in people with disabilities. However in India, these technologies are still in the nascent stage.

According to a report by NASSCOM in 2022a there are only 30% of companies in India that use assistive technology for their employees. The primary factors that lead to low adoption rate of such technology can be multifaceted like lack of awareness, inadequate training, high cost etc. A lot of other obstacles like website and software applications not being designed for people with disability, make it very difficult for them to use it. A survey in 2019 by *Centre For Internet And Society* suggest about 78% of websites in India have not complied with special guidelines for accessibility in web content which are standards set internationally for accessibility of the web.

Due to unavailability of assistive devices and skewed training opportunities, job productivity and competency of PE is impacted negatively, due to which there is lot of stress and negativity (Burggraf, Brandie, 2020). There can be an emotional toll on PE which under SD leaders can address through ensuring open communication on the problem. During the conception of technology there can be an inclination in decision taken by leaders to adopt universal design principles which all the diversity can cater particularly PE. When the leader promotes and ambassadors accessibility standards, they create a cohesion for the larger audience which again signifies creating value for community aspect of SD (Neuschel, Robert P, 2005). By embedding inclusivity into the organization's technological infrastructure, leaders not only benefit PwD within their company but also contribute to a broader societal

shift toward more accessible technologies. This creates long-term value by making technology universally usable, benefiting employees, customers, and partners alike as mentioned in the SD model. Leaders can provide equal access to all learning and development opportunities to PE which will help them to *grow and succeed* in their respective competency. By making accessibility a core component of decision-making processes, leaders foster a culture of fairness and inclusion, which improves organizational integrity and employee morale. This emphasizes the *ethical behavior* of the leader under SD. By advocating proper resources in system, leaders are *empowering* PE by making them more independent and self-sufficient in the workplace.

Certain very challenging task which team impossible for persons with disabilities can be performed with the help of assistive devices which play a crucial role in reducing the challenges faced by people with disability in work places. Limiting accessibility and affordability of assistive devices creates a major hindrance in encouraging quality of work life in PE. According to study by World health Organization in 2018, 5 to 15% of people with disabilities who need assistive devices belong to middle income countries or low income countries. Especially in India the percentage of such assistive technology and devices is quite low due to certain factors like limited healthcare infrastructure as well as economic constraints. Another survey by National sample survey office and their report on disability (2019) suggest that the major barrier is indeed the expensive nature of such devices. About 72% of people with disabilities cannot afford acquiring necessary system devices and financial constraint is a major reason for it.

In creating value to PE community, leaders can collaborate with various institutes like NGO, government agencies and manufacturing segment to help in creating the devices that are affordable. The push effect of needs of PE can lead to change in design and procuring of the designs for the manufacturers. Creating and collaborating with the supply chain stakeholders with transparent pricing, warranty protections and accessible customer service can impact the community purchasing behaviour of the devices. Understanding the need of the strategic planning right from designing and procuring of the devices can help the leaders and management to create a niche in the organization. The conceptual clarity which leads in understanding and empathizing with PE will lead to direct positive correlation in organizational profit and productivity.

Policy and implementation gaps

India has made several important strides in programmes and initiatives which aim for empowering and encouraging PE in all facets and stages in their lives. Sugamya Bharat Abhyan started with an objective of creative major infrastructure like office, IT and technology accessible to PE. It was aimed to improve empowering PE. Acts like Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016 demands and increases the scope of protection of PE in all facets. Inspite of the promising aspects of each act and policies, there are several gaps which are identified during implementation level. Limitation in accessibility in urban and rural setup in terms of incomplete and inconsistent execution and transportation barriers have reduced the impact of the policies. Despite government campaigns, there is still widespread ignorance about disability rights, accessibility, and inclusivity. This lack of awareness hinders the integration of PE into everyday life, both at the community and national level. (Srivastava, Prashant, and Pradeep Kumar, 2015)

In an organization during policy making process and the *empowering* aspect of SD model leads the leaders to involve PE in active participation which could create a sense of ownership and therefore ensuring that the policies are more relevant and effective. As per

Guide training 2010, providing clear training and guidance on disability policies helps ensure that policies are implemented consistently and effectively. This increases compliance, reduces confusion, and empowers PE to advocate for their rights within the organization. This helps them to *grow and succeed*.

There are several models on which the leaders work. Each leader has his own unique functional method. But leaders working with PwDs need to more humane than the rest. It's a very challenging task to take PwD ahead with them for societal transformation and the development of the PE too

Servanthood

Servant leadership prioritizes the growth, well-being, and empowerment of employees. Its objective is to create an inclusive environment that enables all employees to thrive. The traditional leadership used to focus on the success of the company or organization, for them profit was the key. Servant leadership puts employees first to and aims at empowering the employees to grow in the organization. When implemented appropriately, servant leadership can help foster trust, accountability, growth, and inclusion in the workplace.

Servant leadership stresses personal integrity and serving others, including employees, customers, and communities. The primary role of the leaders would be to act as support for the PEs and also provide any assistance required at all levels during the working period of the PE. So the leaders act as support system to the PE employees as well as all others.

STRENGTHS OF THE MODEL FOR PE

1. **Focus on Empathy and Emotional Healing**:

Leaders need to excel in empathy and emotional intelligence. The dimension of *emotional healing* aligns closely with the natural ability to of leaders to understand and respond to the emotional and psychological needs of their followers (Lumpkin, Angela, and Rebecca M. Achen, 2018). Leaders need to be adept at creating environments where people feel supported, which fosters trust and loyalty within teams. Additionally, leaders should have a heightened awareness of the importance of mental health and resilience, leading them to prioritize emotional well-being in the workplace.

2. **Creating Value for the Community**:

Leaders need to be deeply connected to the communities they serve, particularly in advocating for greater inclusivity and accessibility. The dimension of *creating value for the community* is highly relevant, as PwD frequently seek to drive social change, champion diversity not just within their organizations, but also in the community. (Vohra et al 2015, Choudhury Kaul et al, 2022). This aspect of the model highlights leaders' potential to inspire systemic change and foster more inclusive environment. However, this focus on serving the broader community can sometimes detract from their own career development and personal advancement. Leaders may feel compelled to focus on advocacy rather than career progression, which can limit their opportunities for promotion or recognition within their organizations.(Dess, Gregory G., and Joseph C. Picken., 2000). Balancing community impact with personal career growth is essential to ensuring that leaders are not disproportionately shouldering the burden of advocacy without receiving the same opportunities for advancement as their peers.

3. **Empowering and helping subordinates**:

The model's emphasizes on *empowering followers*. Leaders can inspire their teams to take initiative by demonstrating how they have navigated obstacles themselves. Many leaders

possess the ability to *help followers grow and succeed* by sharing their own stories of resilience and adaptability, encouraging their teams to develop perseverance and creativity in the face of challenges. They need to empower the PE to handle themselves in a respectable manner. The Leaders need to help the subordinates grow as per their capabilities. Every individual has some potential but many times we do not realize the hidden potential. As a leader, the individual should be able to identify and help develop the skills, talents that a PE has and provide a supportive environment for the same. (Kulkarni, Mukta, and K. V. Gopakumar, 2014). While the model encourages *empowering* followers, leaders may encounter barriers within their organizations that limit their ability to enact change. For example, if the organization lacks inclusive policies or accessible technologies, leaders may struggle to fully empower their teams, particularly if those teams include individuals with disabilities.

Overcoming these barriers requires strong advocacy and organizational change, which may not always align with the timelines or expectations placed on leaders.

4. **Ethical Leadership**:

Leaders often face charges of discrimination and unfair treatment. They need to be strong advocates for fairness and ethical behavior in leadership. The dimension of *behaving ethically* aligns with leaders' focus on justice, equality, and integrity. As per the work done by Mishra, Arjya, and Amresh Kumar Ray, leaders are well-positioned to serve as role models in promoting fairness and inclusivity, and to ensure ethical decision-making within organizations. Although the model emphasizes *behaving ethically*, leaders may face challenges in organizations that do not prioritize inclusivity or ethical leadership. If leaders are advocating for changes that improve accessibility or combat discrimination, they may encounter resistance from organizations that are slow to change or lack a strong ethical framework. In such environments, leaders may need to work harder to influence organizational culture and drive ethical decision-making, potentially facing opposition or limited support from leadership.

5. **Putting subordinates first:**

It is the responsibility of every leader to first look into the concerns of the followers. The leader should facilitate the needs of the PE by putting their concerns on priority. Only when the PE are looked after will they be able to be fully involved and play a prominent role in the development of the organization. The dimension of *putting followers first* could pose challenges for leaders, especially when they need to balance the demands of leadership with managing PEs. PEs often face additional health-related challenges that require time and energy for self-care. Prioritizing the needs of followers above their own, as suggested by this model, could lead to burnout or neglect of their own well-being.

It's important for leaders to find a balance between serving their followers and ensuring they have the necessary support and accommodations for their own needs.

6. **Forming relationships with immediate followers:**

Leaders need to Foster an environment where followers feel safe to share ideas and concerns. Show genuine interest in followers' perspectives and feelings. Take time to understand individual strengths, weaknesses, and motivations and also provide regular, actionable feedback that helps followers grow. Leaders need to act as mentors to offer guidance and support for professional growth and personal development too. Celebrating small success of PEs makes them feel empowered and vibrant. This would also ensure a positive atmosphere and hold potential for further growth. Leaders need to be willing to adjust their leadership

style to meet the needs of different followers. Each PE employee has varied needs so try to give personal attention to them.

7. Focus on Empathy and Emotional Healing:

Leaders need to excel in empathy and emotional intelligence. The dimension of *emotional healing* aligns closely with the natural ability to of leaders to understand and respond to the emotional and psychological needs of their followers. Leaders need to be adept at creating environments where people feel supported, which fosters trust and loyalty within teams. Additionally, leaders should have a heightened awareness of the importance of mental health and resilience, leading them to prioritize emotional well-being in the workplace.

CONCLUSION

Inclusion of individuals with disabilities in organizations is not just a matter of ethical responsibility; it is also a strategic advantage that can enhance creativity, productivity, and overall organizational performance (Schur et al 2005). The benefits of incorporating diverse perspectives, including those of people with disabilities, are profound and multifaceted.

First and foremost, embracing inclusivity cultivates a diverse workforce that reflects the society in which organizations operate. This diversity leads to richer ideas and innovative solutions. People with disabilities often possess unique skills and problem-solving abilities shaped by their experiences. Their perspectives can drive innovation, as they may approach challenges differently than their non-disabled peers. By integrating these diverse viewpoints, organizations can create products and services that cater to a wider audience, ultimately improving customer satisfaction and expanding market reach.

Moreover, organizations that prioritize inclusivity demonstrate a commitment to social responsibility. This can enhance their brand image and reputation, making them more attractive to consumers who value corporate ethics. In an age where consumers are increasingly aware of social issues, companies that champion inclusivity are likely to build stronger customer loyalty. Furthermore, this commitment can improve employee morale and retention. When individuals feel valued and included, they are more likely to be engaged and motivated, leading to higher productivity and lower turnover rates.

In addition to these benefits, including people with disabilities in the workforce can provide organizations with a competitive edge. Research shows that diverse teams perform better. A study by McKinsey & Company found that companies with greater diversity in their leadership teams are more likely to outperform their peers in profitability. This correlation suggests that organizations that embrace diversity, including disability inclusion, are better positioned to succeed in an increasingly complex and competitive business landscape.

Additionally, organizations can enhance their compliance with legal and regulatory requirements by prioritizing disability inclusion. Many countries have laws that promote the employment of individuals with disabilities, and non-compliance can lead to legal repercussions. By fostering an inclusive workplace, organizations not only comply with these regulations but also position themselves as leaders in corporate social responsibility.

Training and awareness programs aimed at promoting disability inclusion can also foster a more empathetic and understanding workplace culture. Such initiatives can reduce stigma and misconceptions surrounding disabilities, leading to a more supportive environment for all employees. This, in turn, can enhance collaboration and teamwork, as employees learn to appreciate the unique contributions of their colleagues, regardless of their abilities.

In conclusion, the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in organizations is essential for fostering a diverse, innovative, and high-performing workforce. The benefits of such inclusion extend beyond ethical considerations; they encompass improved creativity, enhanced brand loyalty, better employee morale, compliance with regulations, and a stronger competitive position in the market. By embracing disability inclusion, organizations not only contribute to a more equitable society but also pave the way for their own success. As we move toward a more inclusive future, it is imperative for organizations to recognize the value that individuals with disabilities bring and to actively work towards creating environments where everyone can thrive. Embracing this approach is not just good for business; it is a fundamental aspect of a just and equitable society.

RECOMMENDATION

Raising awareness through leadership

One way to raise awareness about disability policies is through leadership. Regardless of how disability regulations are implemented, public activism and education are essential. It is also necessary to take into account some aspects that are related to leadership. Insufficient knowledge and false beliefs about disabilities cause PwD to be stigmatized in India, where it has become deeply ingrained in the culture. Prominent members of society take on the role as advocates for a cause, working to bring about the kinds of reforms necessary to foster a culture that values variety.

Awareness Campaigns: Educating the public about issues that affect the health and wellbeing of people with disabilities (PwD) is one of the numerous duties of leaders, whether they are public servants, advocates for non-governmental organizations, or successful business personalities. For example, charismatic or popular leaders can demonstrate transformational leadership by using different forms of media and the platform, share the stories of PwD's successes and challenges in a way that grabs the public's attention.

Inclusive Workplaces: Servant leadership can help organizations create more diverse work spaces everywhere. In the matter of the well-being of individuals with disabilities, certain leaders possess the ability to mold the culture itself and procedures of their organizations to adopt modifications like creating barrier-free environments and adaptable work schedules that include hiring and training disabled workers.

In India there are several corporates that are following the inclusivity model. They do employ PEs in their organizations and have also formulated policies that supports inclusivity. These corporates not only recruited PEs but also ensured to meet the requirements of the PEs in terms of accessibility, assistive devices and PE friendly workspaces.

The company successfully fosters the different values of leadership, like recognition of accommodation as well as addressing the issue of common areas, assistive infrastructure etc. which indicates how empowerment of subordinates and empathy are key factors that should be implied together for better and comprehensive growth of the applicants and employees which are differently abled.

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