A Journey to Inclusive Leadership
Case Studies
Curated by Joanne Lee
Case Study 1

Title: Under-Represented Work Member

In 2011 in Killeen, Texas, an employee who typically worked remotely needed to report to the office in person according to her direct supervisor’s recommendation. This employee was returning from work after a maternity leave of 6 weeks. She was required to report to the office to reinstate her work status and to pick up materials she needed to travel for her upcoming 3-day training in Dallas. A mother leaving her firstborn for the first time at child care can be emotional and stressful.

Upon arrival on site, the employee notified her supervisor of her need to use a private room for lactation every three hours that day at the office. The on-site supervisor informed her that he would check on which room she could use. The employee suggested several ideas, such as an empty office or classroom spaces to ensure access to an outlet for the electronic pump, and door that she could lock. She also suggested that she could make a sign to post on the door to let everyone know that that space and time is unavailable for other uses.

After several hours of being in the office, the employee has not heard back from the on-site supervisor about room status. She checked with him again, and he replied that he did not have any rooms available for the employee to use. He suggested that she either use the restroom, which is a public restroom with three stalls, or use the broom closet if she needed a bit more privacy.
The employee decided to use the restroom. This required that she use one of the stalls for the first time with difficulty. She did not have a table, chair, or an outlet to use her electronic pump. Routinely, customers were coming in and out of the restroom, as well.

The second time she needed to lactate, she decided to use the broom closet for a little privacy. The closet was a room full of chemicals, brooms, rugs, toilet products, and other cleaning supplies. She then sat on the floor, connected her electronic pump, and pumped in tears. This experience left her emotional and frustrated. She phoned her immediate supervisor (who was located off site), informed her that she wanted to return home to finish the workday, and left.

- What could a direct supervisor have done with the situation?

To prepare the employee, the direct supervisor should have scheduled time to connect with the employee to discuss accommodation needs. To prepare the on-site supervisor prior to the employee’s arrival and a determination of the immediate needs and accommodations, the supervisor could have made a call to inform the on-site supervisor. Having open conversations to enable questions and concerns to be revealed up front could have ensured that the employee’s transition to work would have been planned much better. The direct supervisor should encourage these conversations with curiosity and courage. Empathetic leadership is key to resolving situations where employees might feel vulnerable. For real change to happen, every individual leader needs to buy into the value of belonging – both intellectually and emotionally—and be willing to listen to what their employees need from them.

- What could have improved the on-site supervisor’s responses to the situation?

It is understandable that the on-site supervisor may have a lot of work to do and no concepts of what a new mother might be experiencing or need. However, Deloitte’s research shows that the behaviors of leaders (be they senior executives or managers) can drive up to 70 percentage points of difference between the proportion of employees who feel highly included and the proportion of those who do not. One of the behaviors or traits of a leader is curiosity, this is when the inclusive leader have an open mind-set; they are deeply curious about others, listen without judgment, and seek to understand. For this case scenario, the employee was transitioning back to work and the experience was one that would determine whether or not she felt listened to, and maybe respected. The on-site manager could have sought to understand the situation and its sensitivity by having an open dialogue with this employee, seeing it as a moment of inclusion. (Bourke & Dillion, 2018)
Verizon Wireless (VZW) advertises itself as an innovative wireless communications company that connects people and businesses with the most advanced wireless technology and service available. As a company they market their values with the following statement: “We know teamwork enables us to serve our customers better and faster. They embrace diversity and personal development not only because it’s the right thing to do, but also because it’s smart business.”

Verizon states that they are committed to developing all employees to inspire them to take their careers wherever they want it to go. As we know, employee development is an integral part of talent management. Talent management refers to the process of attracting, selecting, training, developing, and promoting employees through an organization. Organizations that focus on developing talent in-house ensure their employees have the tools and resources that they need to perform well, and transition to leadership roles. Internally developed leaders are valuable assets because, over time, they have developed necessary core competencies and internalized company values. These actions by management increase the probability that employees will be more relevant in the future while improving the likelihood that the company will retain the talent it needs.
Verizon has stated that supporting women as leaders is a Verizon business imperative. To support Verizon's commitment, and to help close the representation gap of women in leadership positions, Verizon is taking proactive steps to provide high potential women the opportunity to participate in personal and professional developmental activities. Verizon's credibility has been the catalyst for numerous diversity and inclusion skill building and personal development opportunities for women and culturally diverse individuals and groups.

Verizon partnered with PRISM International, Inc. s' Women's Leadership Forum: Women at Work: Being an Advocate for Your Own Success™. This partnership lasted several years and brought this program to hundreds of women across the enterprise. According to PRISM, Women at Work: Being an Advocate for Your Own Success™ is a fast-paced, highly interactive session that explores situations women face in today's workplace while inspiring them to reach higher levels of personal effectiveness, growth, and development.

Due to the success of this partnership, Verizon has been recognized by numerous national organizations and spotlighted for its' practices and employment records that benefit women and encourage their advancement to top management positions (PRISM International, Inc., 2013).

- Do you believe that Verizon has utilized the right strategy to try and enhance the number of women in leadership?

Yes, VSW invested money and made a logical decision to partner with PRISM to help to allow their employees (women) explore situations women face in today's workplace while inspiring them to reach higher levels of personal effectiveness, growth, and development. Gender equality remains a major issue in the corporate world and because of this partnership, VSW became recognized as an organization that promotes women in leadership positions. The leadership at VSW use collaboration, one traits of an Inclusive Leaders to help empower others and create the conditions, such as team cohesion, for diversity of thinking to flourish. The leadership was also applying their committed to diversity and inclusion because it aligns with their personal values, and they believe in the business case for diversity and inclusion. They articulate their commitment authentically, bravely challenge the status quo, and take personal responsibility for change.

- What would a next level effort look like for Verizon after taking these steps to continue to move their gender diversity effort forward?

One thing that VSW can do is to evaluate the gender pay for their workforce, since pay is one way that employees derive value from their work. The organization need to look at the average man’s salary in their organization and the average woman’s salary. If there is a discrepancy, there is likely bias, or at a minimum, the perception of bias.
among female employees. A 2015 Glassdoor survey of workers found that a large majority (70%) believe men and women are paid equally for equal work. They’re not. The real gender pay gap is 81.6 cents. As inclusive leaders for an organization, taking a closer look at and addressing some of the barriers that women may also experience in the workplace. (Elsesser, 2020).

Case Study 3
Title: Individualized Celebration For Your Team Members Matter

A work team has established a tradition of celebrating each other’s special occasions for a small division at a local agency. Whether it is for a birthday or anniversaries, the team celebrates by dining in a restaurant that the celebrant has chosen.

One day in May 2018, the manager spoke out during the team meeting and informed the group that one of the team members will have a birthday coming up soon and that they will need to celebrate. The manager then encouraged the celebrant (team member) to select a restaurant of her choice, and add everyone in the calendar invitation so they can all plan to join. Before ending the meeting, the celebrant informed the team that she would like to have this celebration at an Indonesian restaurant where they have a variety of dishes that everyone
could try. All of the team members accepted and conveyed that they were excited about this celebration.

With excitement, after the meeting, she returned to her desk and checked for everyone's availability to schedule this birthday lunch. She was eager to share her Indonesian dishes with her teammates. She wanted to share this experience with them because it was an opportunity for her to share a little bit of her culture with her team.

After sending the birthday lunch invitation to the team, the manager rushed to the celebrant's office desk, who was in another meeting at the time. The other team members nearby asked the Manager if they could relay a message to the celebrant. He told them that the employee needed to cancel that birthday lunch celebration and that he would talk to her about his reasoning later when they were scheduled together for another meeting.

Once the employee returned to her desk, she received the message from her manager through the other team members. With disappointment, she canceled the outlook calendar invitation and went to her Manager's desk for clarification. At the time, the Manager was at another meeting. Late that afternoon, the group met again for a meeting. The employee was waiting for the manager to speak about his reasons for canceling the celebration, but he did not—no word on why he had the employee cancel it.

The employee drove home in disappointment and tears. She was angry. She felt sad because she perceived that her manager did not care to learn about her culture and the importance of sharing this experience with her team.

Weeks passed and still no word on the celebration. The employee heard several reasons why the manager canceled through the other team members, but not personally from him. Over the next few weeks, the employee became disengaged and unmotivated.

- What key issue occurred in this situation?

The leader on this case study lacks awareness of his personal bias and has a blind spot for other values and cultures. In addition, the leader lacks cultural awareness and is not attentive to other cultures. It is also obvious that this leader was not deeply curious about the impact of the celebration on this employee. Harvard Business Review reported that what leaders say and do makes up to a 70% difference as to whether an individual reports feeling included. It is important for this leader to execute understanding others deeply and understand the impact that comes from when they felt heard. (Bourke & Espedido, The Key to Inclusive Leadership, 2020)
• What could a manager have done differently?

The manager must show humility and address his own bias. Empathy and a greater cultural awareness is critical for this leader and to acknowledge vulnerability. It is also important for this leader to ask for feedback on their blind spots and habits. This leader needs to learn the value of admitting mistakes, and creating the space for others to show their authentic self to work. He should become attentive to other’s cultures and finding ways to have an open-mind and adapt in order for others to feel included and that they belong. To be an inclusive leader, it is important to be aware that employees with diverse backgrounds bring to bear their own perspectives, ideas and experiences, this helps to create organizations that are resilient and effective but it also creates responsibilities for leaders who must have a greater awareness of more diverse cultural attitudes and beliefs.

Case Study 4
Title: On Time Staffing and Inclusive Recruiting and Selection

On Time Staffing (OTS) bills itself as one of the country’s top 25 fastest-growing private staffing companies averaging 40% growth per year over the past decade. On Time Staffing offers
comprehensive staffing solutions that include recruiting, screening, placing, monitoring, and reporting to their clients. Their clients count on OTS candidates to screen for the skills, the demeanor, and the work ethic they require. OTS applies a stringent and rigorous screening and testing processes to ensure clients have a large, diverse pool of outstanding candidates to fill their temporary and permanent staffing needs.

To accomplish this, OTS recruiters and hiring managers must be successful in identifying, attracting, qualifying, interviewing, and screening candidates in a manner that does not prematurely eliminate viable candidates because of ethnicity or cultural differences. Recruiters and hiring manager's skills are a key part of that strategy and they participate in a program that focuses on understanding others and their preferences. OTS has partnered with PRIMS's Inclusive Recruiting and Selection program.

PRISM designed training program for Recruiters and Hiring Managers that helps them develop and incorporate essential diversity recruiting skills into actual job responsibilities. This program makes existing behavioral interviewing, selection, and recruiting processes more effective in generating a larger, more diverse pool of qualified candidates to help achieve staffing goals. The goal of this program is to gain additional knowledge, skills, and tools for recruiting and hiring more inclusively.

- Do you think that this targeted training is likely to result in a more inclusive hiring process?

Absolutely. Creating a bias-free hiring process is part of the work of inclusive leaders. Unconscious racism, ageism, and sexism play a big role in who gets hired. Providing cultural awareness training, bias training, creating processes to invite larger and more diverse pools of qualified candidates for the workforce is critical to the success of the organization.

- Training is a one time event, what must OTS do to ensure that they are maintaining a hiring process that continues to be equitable?

According to Delottte Insights, Diversity training programs come in many shapes and sizes: educational vs. experiential, voluntary vs. mandatory, inspirational vs. shaming. At its best (voluntary, experiential, inspiring, and practical), training raises awareness, surfaces previously unspoken beliefs, and creates a shared language to discuss diversity and inclusion on a day-to-day basis. These objectives are a positive and important first step in the Inclusive Leadership journey. (Bourke & Dillon, 2018)
Case Study 5

Title: Providing Timely Support is Equally Important

In October 2017, at a training center in Seattle, a woman of color who was working as a facilitator was scheduled to co-facilitate an in-class Leadership Development training session with her manager, who is a white man, as part of her practice. This manager has been facilitating this training topic for several years and has worked with the organization for many years.

The session was a 3-day training of 8 hours a day. On the first day meeting, both facilitators greeted the participants as they walked in and showed them to their seats. There were 24 participants in the class, and they were seated 6 participants in each group for a total of four groups. The intention was to allow the participants to participate in more in-depth conversations with their smaller assigned groups.

The majority of the participants were male, and most were white. Many of them have worked for their organizations for quite a long time, and some were ready for their retirement. Some participants have more leadership experience than the others, and obviously, some did not want to be attending this training.

The co-facilitation style for the organization means rotating the facilitator of each section of training. Every time the manager (white and male) facilitated his part, everyone was engaged.
When the other facilitator (female of color) took over the conversation, facilitating her section, some of the participants were cracking jokes and discussing other things. Two of the participants in particular from one of the groups were engaging in these distractions and ignoring directions from the facilitator. The facilitator had to occasionally pause in between to stop the disruptive behaviors of the two participants and re-engage because she found the class distracted by them.

The incidents repeated during the first session. After the first day, she shared this experience and the related frustrations with her manager. She also informed him that she did not feel respected in the classroom and was feeling uncomfortable and hijacked by the experience because of the two disruptive participants. The manager then encouraged the employee to ignore it and that the participants were only having fun. Being new to the organization, and wanting to meet the expectations of her leaders, she did as instructed but did not feel supported.

- Is the customer always right? Since the participants were paying for the training, should they just be left to do whatever they want?

Not necessarily. Diversity means different things to different people, and organizations must apply those definitions to their organizations accordingly, including their customers. For the diversity and inclusion commitment to work for this organization, they must be more engaged and vocal than it has been to promote the message of a diverse and tolerant society through business interactions. Creating an expectation and mutual understanding that an inclusive workplace will mean that customers must treat the people providing them services with respect, compassion and open-mindedness. And, when customers fall short of that, they will take the same actions that they would if it were an employee or other insider. The inclusive leader for this case study should have addressed the situation immediately and called out the unwanted behaviors. This would demonstrated to all present, customers and employees alike, that inclusion is a guarantee to everyone no matter where they are and no matter who they are. (Eswaran, 2019)

- What could this manager have done differently in this situation?

Empathetic leadership is key to this transformation. For real change to happen, every individual leader needs to buy into the value of belonging – both intellectually and emotionally. It is important for the leader to step up and advocate for diversity and tolerance on a public platform by addressing the issue immediately with compassion and with sensitivity. It is difficult for a leader or organization to make good on the commitment to inclusion if it means that under certain circumstances, they are willing
to ignore the impact of negative behaviors on their employees. Creating exceptions for customers means that there are spaces where diverse employees are inherently and consistently uncomfortable, which is a breach of the commitment of the organization to inclusion. This could ultimately result in lower morale, less commitment by the team, and eventually a less diverse workforce through attrition.
References


