HMPI | HEALTH MANAGEMENT, POLICY & INNOVATION

BAHM BUSINESS SCHOOL ALLIANCE FOR HEALTH MANAGEMENT

The TEACH Framework for Introducing Faculty, Students, and Other Business School Stakeholders to Diversity Topics: Pronouns as an Exemplar

Kevin D. Frick, Johns Hopkins Carey Business School

Contact: kfrick@jhu.edu

Abstract

What is the message? Business schools with healthcare management programs are likely to teach an increasingly diverse group of students to manage increasingly diverse workers and make decisions impacting increasingly diverse patients. The author developed a framework to help faculty and other stakeholders effectively address and support diversity in educational settings.

What is the evidence? The author's TEACH framework guided the production of a video on the Business of Pronouns at the Johns Hopkins Carey Business School.

Timeline: Submitted: December 2, 2023; accepted after review December 5, 2023.

Cite as: Kevin Frick. 2023. The TEACH Framework for Introducing Faculty, Students, and Other Business School Stakeholders to Diversity Topics: Pronouns as an Exemplar. *Health Management, Policy and Innovation* (HMPI.org), Volume 8, Issue 3.

In the future, business schools with healthcare management programs are likely to teach an increasingly diverse group of students to manage increasingly diverse workers and make decisions impacting increasingly diverse patients. The Johns Hopkins Carey Business School's focus on diversity flows from efforts to encourage diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) as a manifestation of one of the school's four core values, "unwavering humanity." Placing belonging alongside diversity facilitates students, faculty, staff, and alumni being their authentic selves at the school and gives students an approach to take with them when they graduate. Diverse individuals being their authentic selves allows a focus on work and learning rather than on how they are perceived.

Teaching and developing tools to teach about diversity benefits from having a framework to build on. For my diversity-related work, I developed the TEACH framework: the **Tangibility** of both the diversity exemplar and the steps to improve DEIB; the instructors' and students' needs to demonstrate **Empathy** in an **Authentic** manner; and the instructors' and students' needs to be both **Curious** and **Humble** about how they seek information about a marginalized population.

In this this commentary, I describe how the TEACH framework guided the production of a video on the Business of Pronouns at the Johns Hopkins Carey Business School.

The Video

One part of DEIB is gender identity, which has been in the news quite a bit in the past year: laws have been passed and court decisions handed down on whether individuals should be treated as their gender assigned at birth or as the gender with which they identity and how they present. The Johns Hopkins Carey Business School has taken steps to ensure individuals of all gender identities and presentations receive respect and feel they belong in the classroom and workplace.

One aspect of facilitating belonging for individuals of all gender identities is the use of pronouns reflecting individuals' gender identities. For many, pronouns have not been considered a "choice." Most individuals accept labels given by society, simply using "he" or "she" and related pronouns. Some individuals realize their gender identity is not what society assigns at birth; they may choose to use the other binary pronoun (e.g., from she to he) or choose to use a non-binary

pronoun (e.g., they). Some choose to respond to and be described using any pronoun. Some individuals choose to use “neo-pronouns” such as “ze,” “xe,” and “per” (https://intercultural.uncg.edu/wp-content/uploads/Neopronouns-Explained-UNCG-Intercultural-Engagement.pdf). All these are acceptable choices to express gender identity.

Students at the Carey Business School can choose to indicate pronouns they would like to be called (traditional or otherwise) in both the learning management system and the directory. Not all community members are familiar with issues regarding pronouns and gender identity. In response to one student’s non-positive experiences, a Carey Business School team was formed to create an educational video. Participants included a broad group of the school’s stakeholders: the dean, an associate dean, and a student co-leader of the Pride Business Association provided introductory remarks; a panel including myself (while still making mistakes and being corrected), a school staff member ally to the trans community, a university staff member from an office called Gender & Sexuality Resources, an alumnus who uses all pronouns, a student who had experienced misgendering (i.e., someone using an inappropriate pronoun), and one of that student’s classmates conducted a panel discussion on relevant issues; and, other participants in the video included one alumnus who suggested ways of dealing with misgendering and two business communication faculty who reflected on communication with and about pronouns.

The video included useful information for those unaccustomed to using anything other than pronouns based on gender assigned at birth. Faculty were reminded of the students’ choice to indicate pronouns in the learning management system. Faculty are expected to be aware of and use students’ pronouns. If a faculty member misgenders a student, the mistake may be pointed out by the student or by one of the student’s classmates, or the faculty member may realize it themselves. When corrected, the most appropriate response is “Thank you,” whether it is a first instance or a reminder. If the faculty member recognizes it themselves, a quick acknowledgment of the mistake is appropriate. Regardless, the faculty member should also note that they will try harder in the future to use the correct pronoun.

The students and alum also provided valuable lessons in the video. The student who had been misgendered described constantly correcting others as “exhausting”. An alum made suggestions for those who are misgendered: (1) having a “pronoun buddy” who can politely point out the mistake; (2) taking the person who misgendered someone aside to explain the

issues; and (3) dealing with it directly in the moment. A student will notice if the misuse of pronouns behavior continues for an extended period, although change will inevitably take time.

The video is almost fifty minutes long, with distinct breaks in conversation to allow viewers to watch shorter segments. Even so, fifty minutes is not sufficient to provide a detailed and nuanced discussion of all possible issues. DEIB leadership hopes individuals will have conversations about these issues. One model of learning is for an employer, particularly one focused on education, to provide opportunities for individuals to have discussions after watching the video so that they can process and continue to learn.

Application of the TEACH Framework

The TEACH framework was applied in the process of creating this video. Prior to producing the video, it was noted that a leader may have a grand vision for increasing diversity, the perception of equity or inclusiveness, or the feeling of belonging by individuals within an organization. The lofty vision does not help stakeholders to understand the process of reaching the point to which the organization is headed. Spelling out exactly what element of diversity is being focused on and the first few steps in the process of reaching the final goal creates a sense of tangibility that can help individuals to feel that they understand what they are being asked to do and why in the short run. Each individual involved in the video production knew the level of effort expected, the duration of time required, and the short-term outcome being sought. When the video was announced to faculty, other contributions to tangibility included making the time required to watch the video clear and the involvement of leadership.

Stakeholders naturally demonstrate varying levels of empathy as part of their personalities, and multiple types of empathy have been identified (https://acuityinsights.app/2020/06/empathy-1/#:~:text=Renowned%20psychologists%20Daniel%20Goleman%20and,%3A%20Cognitive%2C%20Emotional%20and%20Compassionate). One type of empathy is “compassionate,” in which one individual appreciates another’s story but is able to maintain sufficient psychological distance. In addition, that person is sufficiently dispassionate to be analytical and to offer a set of ideas and solutions to an issue by taking a step back and separating out emotion and therefore is, perhaps, more rational (https://www.crslearn.org/publication/the-power-of-empathy/compassionate-empathy-the-greater-good-and-social-

justice/#:~:text=Compassionate%20empathy%20is%20considered%20the,others%20(Batson%2C%202014). The video is intended to evoke compassionate empathy for individuals of all gender identities.

The video was developed to promote use of appropriate pronouns in the classroom to signal to all students that authenticity of all gender identities is welcomed and encouraged. The instructor signals an understanding of related issues and demonstrates norms. Students can feel comfortable that their non-binary or transgender status will not be judged and they, as their authentic selves, will be treated like all other students. The instructor also demonstrates their own authenticity by recognizing their ability to use appropriate pronouns and acknowledging when they do not.

Instructors need to continue to be curious throughout their careers to keep themselves up to date in their fields. This is particularly true in healthcare management, where treatments, state and national policies, organizational structures, and incentives for and provided by healthcare organizations change rapidly. Curiosity to learning about how individuals of all gender identities express themselves is an important skill for instructors and for future managers. The curiosity needs to be realized with humility. Part of being a good ally is to be able to listen and to advocate for those in the community one is allied to. Individuals who do not have a lived experience can try to understand and grasp a lived experience but cannot claim to have had the experience and can only appreciate to a certain degree certain aspects of the experience. Individuals in marginalized groups often wish for allies to gain information by doing some “homework” on their own rather than always asking for explanations from members of the allied community. The video is one step in providing reliable information for members of the Carey Business School community to gain information about pronouns before asking for additional detail from a non-binary or transgender individual.

Conclusion

The TEACH framework was effectively applied to the issue of pronouns in business. The video production experience can serve as an example of applying the framework so others can plan to apply the framework to producing educational materials about other areas of diversity.