

Executive Action as the Cure: The Essential Role of University Leadership in Mobbing Prevention

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Abstract

Academic mobbing is a pervasive issue in higher education, manifesting itself as a sophisticated form of bullying where academics gang up to intimidate, unjustly accuse, humiliate, and harass their targets. One of the central objectives of mobbing is excluding the target from the community. In stark contrast, inclusion fosters a safe, accepting, and respectful environment where individuals feel included and valued. Because inclusion dictates the absence of exclusion, mobbing cannot coexist in an inclusive environment. Data from corporate America demonstrates how inclusion enhances workplace culture, boosts employee morale, increases productivity, and leads to overall success. Indeed's Inclusive Manager Program, for instance, resulted in a 700% return on investment and a 30% increase in team performance. This paper argues that adapting these successful inclusion strategies from the corporate world can immunize universities against academic mobbing and underscores the crucial role of university presidents as catalysts and overlords in initiating, leading, and sustaining an inclusive community, which, by definition, is free from academic mobbing.

Keywords: *Inclusion, Diversity, Leadership, Productivity, Commitment.*

Introduction

Academic mobbing has long been a concerning issue in higher education, with statistics and trends that paint a troubling picture (Southern, 2008). In a comprehensive explanation, Khoo has stated (Khoo, 2010, p. 61):

"Academic mobbing is a non-violent, sophisticated, 'ganging up' behavior adopted by academicians to "wear and tear" a colleague down emotionally through unjustified accusation, humiliation, general harassment, and emotional abuse. These are directed at the target under a veil of lies and justifications so that they are "hidden" from others and difficult to prove... Mobbing activities appear trivial and innocuous on their own, but the frequency and pattern of their occurrence over a long period of time indicates an aggressive manipulation to "eliminate" the target."

Academic mobbing can have a devastating impact on individual careers, mental health, and overall well-being while also posing significant consequences for institutional reputation, research productivity, and financial stability (Faria, Mixon Jr, & Salter, 2012). While the challenges caused by academic mobbing are well-documented (Cornoiu & Gyorgy, 2013), the solutions to effectively address these problems have been less readily available (Şenol, Avsar, Argün, Avsarogullari, & Kelestimur, 2015).

In contrast, the corporate world has developed a range of successful inclusion strategies that results in cultural transformation, accountability, and leadership commitment - protecting itself from mobbing-like behavior. This paper proposes that adapting these strategies from corporate America to higher education can provide the necessary framework for universities to address and prevent academic mobbing (Doerfler, et al., 2021, Metzger, Petit, & Sieber, 2015). In other words, higher education can mimic this behavior to immunize itself against academic mobbing. This process is entirely dependent on university presidents and leaders because, without their initiation and leadership, these practices' implementation and sustainability are impossible. Simply stated, higher education can mimic behavior from corporate America to immunize itself against academic mobbing.

From the outset, it is important to concede that many view diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) as reverse discrimination. Inclusion is viewed as too soft and touchy-feely to be taken seriously. One Vice-President at a Fortune 50 company said of his newly hired engineers, "We already pay them above market value. I'm not going to hold their hand while doing it." This paper will show that when corporate America creates an inclusive environment, it not only fosters a healthy workplace for its employees but also significantly increases the business's bottom line. This dual benefit represents the very definition of a win-win scenario—an outcome too substantial for any serious institution to ignore.

However, when corporate America creates an inclusive environment within an organization, it not only fosters a positive workplace but also significantly boosts the overall success and sustainability of the business. Inclusion means more than just complying with DEI policies; it involves genuinely valuing and respecting each individual and promoting equal opportunities for everyone. This environment helps employees feel accepted and appreciated, leading to higher morale and a stronger sense of belonging. Open communication and transparency allow for safe reporting and constructive dialogue. Collaboration thrives as employees work towards shared goals, supported by equitable policies consistently enforced across the organization. Leaders are the keys to success in this process; they play a crucial role by modeling and promoting inclusive behaviors, ensuring every team member feels integrated and supported through mentorship and professional development opportunities.

Academic mobbing is marked by hostile and unethical behavior aimed at individuals, often leading to their exclusion and marginalization. This behavior creates a toxic workplace where communication is restricted, and fear and mistrust dominate the organizational culture. Policies in such environments are applied inconsistently, if at all, leading to arbitrary treatment and increasing

the stress and anxiety experienced by employees. The harmful effects of mobbing go beyond individual well-being, affecting the organization's reputation, performance, and legal standing. High turnover rates increased legal risks, and deteriorated mental health among employees are common in environments plagued by mobbing. This stark contrast highlights the importance of fostering an inclusive workplace where mutual respect, collaboration, and support are fundamental principles.

Investing in an inclusive environment is a moral or ethical decision and a strategic business move. The positive impacts on reputation, employee retention, and academic performance translate into tangible financial benefits. Organizations that prioritize inclusion are better positioned to attract top talent, secure funding, and achieve higher levels of innovation and productivity. This paper argues that inclusion and mobbing are mutually exclusive behaviors. Therefore, fostering an inclusive environment can protect a university from mobbing. As demonstrated later in the paper and below in Table 1, the mutual exclusivity of inclusion and mobbing highlights the need for institutions to commit to creating and maintaining inclusive environments.

Academic Mobbing

Academic mobbing refers to the systematic and deliberate psychological harassment of an individual within a higher education community. It involves a coordinated effort by colleagues or superiors such as deans, provosts, presidents, or Human Resources, to undermine, isolate, and ultimately force a target from their position (Khoo, 2010). Unlike sporadic workplace bullying, academic mobbing is characterized by its organized and sustained nature (Harper, 2016, Keim & McDermott, 2010, Tura & Yardibi, 2018). For those unfamiliar with the concept, it can be likened to "Mean Girls on steroids," where harassment is ongoing, involves multiple perpetrators with different roles, and uses insidious tactic such as spreading rumors, withholding crucial information, assigning unreasonable workloads, and public humiliation, to destabilize the victim. As Janice Harper (2016) illustrates, the most effective accusations are those that are so outlandish or contrary to one's openly held beliefs that, with repetition, people come to accept them.

Contrary to the belief that mobbing targets are inherently weak, research shows that targets are often high-achievers who exhibit exceptional performance and strong ethical standards. Such individuals are frequently recognized for their contributions to their field, a success that can provoke jealousy and competitiveness among colleagues (Friedenberg, 2008, Hagan, 2020, Khoo, 2010). In addition, those who introduce innovative ideas or challenge the status quo are seen as threats by those resistant to change (Seguin, 2016). Other factors that can make someone a target include isolation, noticeable differences in personal characteristics (e.g., gender, race, nationality), and even the possession of a strong, assertive personality, which can be misinterpreted as aggression. The lack of support from university leadership further emboldens perpetrators, who act with the belief that there will be no repercussions (Hagan, 2020).

Academic mobbing employs various tactics designed to create a hostile work environment and erode the target's self-esteem, professional reputation, and productivity. Common tactics include;

gossip and rumor-spreading, that is, disseminating damaging rumors through informal conversations, emails, and social media to undermine the target's credibility (Hagan, 2020, Westhues, 2022); shunning, exclusion, and isolation, systematically excluding the target from meetings, social events, and decision-making processes to weaken their professional network; ridicule and public humiliation, publicly belittling the target's ideas, work, or personal characteristics in academic forums or communications; bureaucratic harassment, imposing excessive administrative burdens, such as unfair evaluations and unwarranted complaints, to stifle the target's professional growth; withholding information and resources, deliberately denying the target access to essential information, funding, research opportunities, or professional development resources; formal complaints and investigations, escalating issues through formal complaints based on exaggerated or fabricated accusations that damage the target's career; and, unfair workload distribution, assigning menial or disproportionately burdensome tasks unrelated to the target's expertise to undermine their productivity. These methods are typically employed as part of a broader strategy to render the work environment intolerable, thereby forcing the individual out.

Academic mobbing is both vicious and alarmingly commonplace in higher education. Studies suggest that up to 30% of faculty members have experienced some form of mobbing (Southern, 2008, Liu, Wu, Yang, & Jia, 2020). The detrimental effects are profound. At the individual level, victims often suffer from anxiety, depression, and stress-related conditions, and their professional reputations are tarnished, leading to reduced job satisfaction, hindered career progression, or even forced resignation. For tenured faculty, losing tenure due to mobbing places them at a significant disadvantage when seeking new employment (Şenol, Avsar, Argün, Avsarogullari, & Kelestimur, 2015). The emotional toll also extends beyond the individual, affecting families and personal lives, especially in communities where tenured faculty have established deep roots (Khoo, 2010). And institutional impacts can also be severe, as high rates of mobbing can impair research productivity, damage a university's reputation, and jeopardize financial stability through increased turnover, legal battles, and settlements (Faria, Mixon Jr, & Salter, 2012).

Several intrinsic factors contribute to the prevalence of academic mobbing. Rigid hierarchical power structures concentrate authority among a few individuals, facilitating the abuse of power. Intense competition for limited resources, such as research funding, publications, tenure, and recognition, can drive colleagues to undermine one another (Metzger, Petit, & Sieber, 2015). Additionally, siloed departmental cultures and significant power disparities between senior and junior faculty create fertile ground for exclusionary practices. Cultural factors, wherein aggressive behaviors or an overemphasis on productivity override collegial respect, further exacerbate mobbing. A common misconception is that tenure safeguards faculty from mobbing; however, tenure may even increase the risk of mobbing. Tenured professors who challenge established norms, achieve continued success, or support non-tenured colleagues can provoke jealousy or be viewed as threats by their peers. Such individuals may face mobbing as a means of silencing dissent or curtailing change. No amount of job security or past achievement offers immunity (Westhues, 2004 pp. 235-248). The adage goes, "If they want you gone, you're gone."

Inclusion vs. DEI

Most people use the terms diversity, equity, and inclusion synonymously, assuming they all mean the same thing. However, these concepts are distinct and often misunderstood, which hinders their effective use in solving problems.

Diversity exists when you have a *diverse* group of people. Visible diversity includes race, age, gender, or physical attributes such as height, hair color, or physical disabilities. Invisible diversity includes factors like religion, sexual orientation, marital status, learning disabilities, and psychological disabilities. After self-identification, a head count can determine diversity statistics, e.g., 48 percent men and 52 percent women. The importance of diversity among engineers was demonstrated in 1994 when Ford introduced the Windstar minivan—an early case study of how background and life experience can directly influence both design innovation and business performance (Prodis, 1994). The Windstar was developed by a team of female engineers and designers whose lived experiences as women and working mothers informed several design features that male-dominated teams had long overlooked. These included adjustable seatbelt straps for shorter drivers, a pull-down hatch strap to make the rear door accessible without jumping, juice-box-sized cup holders for children, and rerouted floorboard wiring to prevent heels from catching and pulling wires loose. These features addressed everyday usability challenges that traditionally male-dominated engineering teams had long overlooked. The result was a commercial success. In 1995, Ford reported a record-setting year for minivan sales, up 20 percent from the previous year, driven in large part by the performance of the Windstar (PR Newswire, 1995). The Windstar did not just expand Ford's market. It showed that diversity delivered value that homogeneity could not.

Equity is one of the most misunderstood terms in DEI. It is often governed by compliance frameworks and frequently confused with equality. To illustrate the difference, consider a classic children's Easter egg hunt. Equality means everyone starts at the same time, regardless of age or ability. Some children may gather twenty eggs, while others may only find two. Equity, on the other hand, means younger or children with a disability are given a head start or assistance so that everyone has a fair chance to collect the same number of eggs by the end. In simpler terms, equality ensures everyone begins at the same starting line. Equity ensures that everyone has a fair path to reach the finish line. This distinction becomes even more important in the workplace. For example, an employee who uses a wheelchair must be able to enter the building, move between floors, and collaborate easily with colleagues. That may require ramps, elevators, wide hallways, and accessible restrooms. In a corporate environment, equity means providing employees with the specific support they need to grow, advance, and succeed. It recognizes that fairness is not about giving everyone the same thing—it is about ensuring that each person has what they need to thrive.

Inclusion, the focus of this paper, is essentially a feeling. When individuals feel wanted, accepted, and appreciated, they are likely to be happy and productive employees. For example, you feel excluded if you attend a colleague's barbecue and feel compelled to hide because you know nobody. Conversely, you feel included if a coworker greets you warmly and introduces you to others at the

barbecue. This simple difference illustrates how inclusion fuels well-being. Researchers often say, "If you cannot measure it, it doesn't exist" (Jones & Silberzahn, 2016; Lavinsky, 2017). The inclusion elephant in the room is this: because inclusion is a feeling, it can be difficult to measure. However, exclusion—the absence of inclusion—is far easier to identify and measure. Feeling excluded has been shown to temporarily lower IQ by 25% and analytical reasoning by 30% (Young, 2002). The U.S. Surgeon General has stated that exclusion is more dangerous to children and teens than poverty, gang membership, or drug addiction (Wilczynska, 2024). Therefore, inclusion is measured by the absence of exclusion. By extrapolation, diversity—at its core is the inclusion of different voices, perspectives, and lived experiences—cannot thrive in environments that tolerate exclusion. As a result, inclusion can exist without diversity, but diversity cannot exist without inclusion.

Inclusion or Mobbing, Not Both

Creating an inclusive environment not only fosters a positive workplace but also underpins an organization's overall success and sustainability. True inclusion goes beyond mere compliance with diversity policies. It means genuinely valuing each individual and promoting equal opportunities for all. In such an environment, employees feel accepted and supported, leading to increased morale and a deep sense of belonging. Open communication and transparency allow for safe reporting and constructive dialogue, while collaboration thrives under equitable policies and leadership that actively models inclusive behavior through mentorship and professional development.

In stark contrast, academic mobbing is the antithesis of inclusion. It is characterized by hostile, unethical behavior that deliberately excludes and marginalizes individuals. In mobbing environments, communication is restricted, and fear and mistrust permeate the culture; policies, if they exist, are applied inconsistently, intensifying stress and anxiety among staff. The consequences of mobbing extend far beyond individual harm, affecting an institution's reputation, performance, and legal standing. High turnover rates, increased legal risks, and deteriorating mental health are common in workplaces where mobbing prevails. This clear dichotomy underscores the critical need for organizations to commit to building and maintaining environments founded on mutual respect, open collaboration, and robust support.

Investing in an inclusive environment is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic business decision. Enhanced reputation, improved employee retention, and increased productivity all translate into tangible financial benefits. Ultimately, because inclusion and mobbing cannot coexist, institutions must prioritize inclusion to ensure long-term success and sustainability. Table 1 below illustrates the stark differences across a variety of categories.

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of the Mutual Exclusivity between Inclusion and Academic Mobbing

CATEGORY	INCLUSION	ACADEMIC MOBING
DEFINITION	Valuing and respecting individuals as they are, promoting equal opportunities for all.	Hostile and unethical behavior by one or more members towards another, often targeting a specific individual.
ENVIRONMENT	SUPPORTIVE: Fosters respect,	HOSTILE: Characterized by exclusion,

CATEGORY	INCLUSION	ACADEMIC MOBING
	acceptance, and support networks.	rumors, over-criticism, and humiliation.
COMMUNICATION	OPEN: Promotes safe reporting channels, transparency, and open dialogue.	RESTRICTED: Discourages open communication, often involving secretive actions.
COLLABORATION	ENCOURAGING: Encourages teamwork, shared goals, and interdisciplinary collaboration.	COMPETITIVE: Driven by competition, silos, and power struggles.
POLICIES AND PRACTICES	FAIR AND EQUITABLE: Implements and enforces policies consistently to ensure fairness.	UNFAIR AND ARBITRARY: Policies are often applied inconsistently, if at all.
MENTAL WELL-BEING	ENHANCED: Provides psychological safety and resources for mental health support.	DETERIORATED: Leads to stress, anxiety, and mental health issues.
INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE	POSITIVE: Built on respect, collaboration, and support from leadership.	NEGATIVE: Characterized by fear, mistrust, and power abuse.
LEADERSHIP COMMITMENT	STRONG: Leaders are committed to promoting and modeling inclusive behaviors.	WEAK OR ABSENT: Leaders often ignore or may even participate in mobbing behaviors.
INTEGRATION & MENTORSHIP	INCLUSIVE: Ensures integration and support for all members through mentorship.	ISOLATING: Isolates targets, increasing their vulnerability to mobbing.
IMPACT ON REPUTATION	POSITIVE: Attracts high-quality talent, funding, and positive public perception.	NEGATIVE: Damages institutional reputation, leading to loss of talent and funding.
IMPACT ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE	IMPROVED: Focuses on academic achievements and innovation without fear of mobbing.	HINDERED: Distracts from academic work and innovation due to stress and conflict.
LEGAL & COMPLIANCE RISKS	REDUCED: Complies with legal requirements and avoids costly legal battles.	INCREASED: Higher risk of legal issues and financial penalties.
TURNOVER & RETENTION	LOW TURNOVER, HIGH RETENTION: Reduces turnover rates, saving on recruitment and training costs.	HIGH TURNOVER, LOW RETENTION: High turnover due to a toxic environment leads to increased costs.

Inclusion Strategies from Corporate America; Successes and Failures

In recent years, corporate America has moved well beyond compliance-driven DEI efforts toward a proactive, strategic emphasis on inclusion. This section examines the evolution of inclusion in the corporate world, outlines the core strategies that companies have implemented, highlights notable success stories, and contrasts these with cautionary examples such as Amazon's experience. The following discussion, supported by Table 2, provides valuable insights that can serve as models for adapting these practices to higher education.

Many companies have recognized the tangible business benefits of inclusion. Early DEI efforts were primarily aimed to meet legal requirements and avoid discrimination lawsuits (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016, Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006). However, as case studies and research revealed that an inclusive workforce enhances creativity, decision-making, and problem-solving, organizations began to shift their focus. McKinsey & Company's research, for instance, shows that companies with higher levels of diversity and inclusion tend to perform better financially (TeamDayforce, 2021, Hunt, Layton, & Prince, 2015, Richard, Murthi, & Ismail). This strategic transformation was spurred in part by top-level advocacy. CEOs and other senior leaders began to take a visible, vocal role in championing inclusion (Ng & Sears, 2020, Johnson, 2017). Inclusion gradually emerged not only as a legal or ethical mandate but as a core driver of business performance.

To capitalize on the benefits of inclusion, corporations have developed comprehensive strategies that can be distilled into several key components. First, leadership commitment is critical; top executives must clearly demonstrate their commitment by setting measurable goals and holding themselves accountable. For example, Microsoft tied executive compensation to inclusion goals, signaling that D&I objectives were a top priority (McIntyre, 2023, Slater, Weigand, & Zwirlein, 2008, Kilos & Reaume, 2021). Second, organizations must develop inclusive policies and procedures that outline expected behaviors, provide robust reporting channels, and establish accountability. Such policies are effective only when paired with mechanisms that ensure safe reporting and consistent enforcement (Chakraverty, 2022, Larcker & Tayan, 2018). Third, protection against retaliation and the creation of safe spaces are essential. Companies like Uber and Pinterest have introduced anonymous reporting channels and third-party investigations to foster transparency and fairness (Dixon-Fyle, Dolan, Hunt, & Prince, 2020, Acas, 2022, Bourke, 2018).

Fourth, many firms have implemented comprehensive training and development programs. Mandatory training on unconscious bias, cultural competence, and inclusive leadership, practiced by organizations such as Deloitte and PwC, has proven to enhance employee awareness and empathy (Bourke & Garr, 2017, Deloitte LLP., 2019, Prabhakar, 2022, Swartz, Palermo, Masur, & Aberg, 2019). Fifth, companies can establish clear processes for addressing incidents of discrimination or exclusion, ensuring that issues are promptly and effectively resolved. Coupled with targeted resource allocation, these strategies are supported by dedicated budgets, staffing, and time allocations. Furthermore, continuous legal and ethical oversight guarantees that inclusion efforts remain compliant and robust. Finally, many organizations build support networks, including employee resource groups (ERGs) and mentoring programs, to cultivate community and provide ongoing support for underrepresented groups (Onyeador, Hudson, & Lewis Jr., 2021, Catalino, Gardner, Goldstein, & Wong, 2022, Dobbin & Kalev, 2016, Nahm, Williams, Holloway, Meyers, & Verbruggen, 2017). Open communication and transparent reporting complete the framework, while metrics and regular feedback ensure ongoing improvement and accountability.

The success of these strategies is well documented. For instance, Indeed's Inclusive Manager Program, launched in 2022, provides a compelling case study. Designed to help managers build trust, address microaggressions, embrace diversity, and foster belonging, the program was evaluated in a

study involving 146 managers. The results were impressive: 100% of participants improved in building trust, with 52% showing significant to exceptional gains. Similarly, 100% enhanced behaviors that fostered a stronger sense of belonging, with 48% achieving notable improvements. Additionally, 95% of participants reported an increased likelihood of recommending Indeed as an inclusive workplace, and 90% observed that their teams shared more ideas and opinions. When these improvements were translated into monetary benefits, the program delivered a benefit of over \$10,419 per participant and achieved an ROI of 700% (Leone, 2023, Indeed, 2024). Detailed quantitative outcomes comparing inclusion efforts across companies like Johnson & Johnson, Accenture, and Indeed, underscore how leadership commitment, effective ERGs, and clear metrics are key drivers of success.

In contrast to these success stories, Amazon's inclusion efforts illustrate critical pitfalls. Despite its global prominence, Amazon faced an annual turnover rate of 150%, costing approximately \$8 billion, about 25% of its \$32 billion revenues, due to demanding work conditions, limited career development, and ineffective retention strategies (Ellis, 2022, Segal, 2022). Internal documents and leaked reports revealed a work environment in which inclusion initiatives lacked genuine leadership commitment and failed to integrate into company culture. This failure has severe consequences, including high attrition and widespread employee dissatisfaction.

The lessons from Amazon's experience are stark. First, there is an unequivocal need for genuine leadership buy-in, without which inclusion initiatives will flounder. Second, adequate resourcing is critical; underfunded programs inevitably have limited impact. Third, sustained, consistent effort with clear, unified messaging is essential to transform organizational culture. Examination of failed inclusion efforts at companies like Google, Uber, and Starbucks highlight issues such as insufficient leadership commitment, under-resourcing, and cultural resistance. These lessons provide valuable insights for academia: by avoiding such pitfalls and embracing comprehensive, well-resourced, and authentically-led inclusion strategies, universities can more effectively prevent academic mobbing and create a supportive, inclusive environment. Examining the evolution of inclusion initiatives in the corporate world provides valuable insights and a potential model for universities to adopt in their efforts to address academic mobbing. This involves understanding how companies have implemented effective strategies over time, which can inform similar approaches within higher education institutions.

Transforming Corporate Inclusion Strategies to Fit Academia

If the reader takes nothing else away from this paper, it should be that it is non-negotiable for the university president to lead the charge in creating an inclusive environment as openly, publicly, and transparently as possible. Additionally, chairs, deans, VPs, and all other supervisors must be held accountable by tying their overall performance reviews directly to their success in fostering inclusivity. These two factors are number 1 and 1a in the process. There is no close second. Applying corporate inclusion strategies in an academic environment is an extremely detailed and comprehensive topic in itself. Table 2 below provides a brief, overall summary.

Table 2: Applying Corporate Inclusion Strategies to Higher Education

CATEGORY	CORPORATE ENVIRONMENT	→	ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT
LEADERSHIP COMMITMENT	CEO, COO, and Board of Directors must demonstrate a clear commitment to inclusion.	→	University leadership (presidents, provosts, deans, and department chairs) must actively promote inclusive behaviors.
	CEO, COO, Board of Directors should publicly endorse inclusion initiatives through speeches, policies, and actions.	→	University leadership should make public commitments and incorporate inclusion into strategic plans.
	CEO, COO should allocate resources and implement policies that foster inclusivity.	→	University leadership should allocate resources, implement policies, and establish practices that promote inclusivity and deter mobbing behaviors.
POLICY DEVELOPMENT	CHRO, Legal Advisors should develop comprehensive inclusion policies that outline expected behaviors and anti-discrimination rules.	→	University administration (policy development teams, legal advisors) should implement clear anti-mobbing and inclusivity policies and define consequences for violations.
	CHRO should include policies on recruitment, promotion, and workplace behavior.	→	Human resources and academic affairs offices should include policies on hiring, tenure, promotions, and academic interactions.
	CHRO, Policy Review Committees should ensure policies are regularly reviewed and updated.	→	University administration (policy review committees) should regularly review and update anti-mobbing policies to reflect best practices and evolving needs.
PROTECTION AGAINST RETALIATION	CHRO, Compliance Officers should enforce strong anti-retaliation policies and protective measures for employees who report discrimination or harassment.	→	University administration must establish and communicate robust anti-retaliation policies, ensuring those who report mobbing are protected and supported.
	CHRO should ensure regular check-ins and adjustments to work arrangements for those who report incidents.	→	Implement protective measures such as work/study adjustments, confidentiality, and regular check-ins.
	Legal Counsel, Compliance Officers should create clear policy statements outlining the prohibition of retaliation and the consequences for engaging in such behavior.	→	Clearly state that retaliation will not be tolerated and outline consequences.
	CHRO, Employee Support Services should provide access to support systems such as counseling, legal advice, and career support for those who fear retaliation.	→	Provide access to counseling, legal advice, and academic support.
ANONYMOUS REPORTING	CHRO, Compliance Officers should offer anonymous reporting channels to encourage reporting without fear of	→	University administration should provide anonymous online forms, third-party services, and hotlines for

CATEGORY	CORPORATE ENVIRONMENT	→	ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT
	retaliation.		confidential reporting of mobbing incidents.
	CHRO should partner with third-party services to ensure anonymity and confidentiality in reporting.	→	Consider partnerships with third-party services to handle anonymous reports securely.
	CHRO, Compliance Officers should develop secure, anonymous online reporting forms that do not require personal identifying information.	→	Create secure anonymous online reporting forms and well-publicized hotlines.
TRAINING & EDUCATION	Chief Learning Officer (CLO), Training Departments should conduct regular inclusion training sessions for all employees.	→	University administration (professional development offices) should provide training on recognizing and preventing mobbing and promoting inclusion.
	CLO, Training Departments should focus on unconscious bias, cultural competence, and inclusive leadership.	→	Professional development and diversity offices should focus on cultural competence, inclusive teaching practices, and conflict resolution.
	CLO, Training Departments should offer continuous training and development opportunities.	→	Provide ongoing education opportunities, including workshops, seminars, and online learning platforms.
ADDRESSING INCIDENTS	Legal Counsel, Compliance Officers should have clear procedures for addressing discrimination, harassment, and exclusion.	→	University administration (legal and compliance offices, house counsel) should implement transparent procedures for handling complaints of mobbing and discrimination.
	Legal Counsel, Compliance Officers should ensure a safe, confidential process for reporting incidents and taking action.	→	Legal and compliance offices should provide clear, accessible channels for reporting and resolving issues, with support from campus security.
RESOURCE ALLOCATION	CFO, Budgeting Offices should allocate resources for inclusion programs, including staff, budget, and time.	→	University administration (finance and budgeting offices) should ensure funding for inclusion initiatives, including training programs and support services.
	CEO, Board of Directors should create positions such as Chief Diversity Officer to oversee initiatives.	→	University leadership should establish offices dedicated to inclusion and equity (e.g., Chief Inclusion Officer).
LEGAL & ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITIES	Legal Advisors, Ethics Officers should ensure compliance with relevant laws and uphold ethical standards in the workplace.	→	University administration (legal advisors, ethics committees) should ensure compliance with laws and uphold ethical standards, promoting a respectful and inclusive environment.
SUPPORT NETWORKS	CHRO should establish employee resource groups (ERGs) to support diverse employees.	→	University administration (student affairs and faculty development offices) should create peer support networks/mentorship programs for students and

CATEGORY	CORPORATE ENVIRONMENT	→	ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT
COMMUNICATION & TRANSPARENCY	Chief Communications Officer (CCO) should promote open communication about inclusion goals, progress, and challenges.	→	faculty. University administration (communication offices) should encourage open dialogue about inclusivity and provide transparent reporting channels.
METRICS & ACCOUNTABILITY	Chief Data Officer (CDO), Assessment Offices should implement metrics to track inclusion progress and hold leaders accountable. CDO, Assessment Offices should regularly review diversity statistics, employee surveys, and progress reports.	→ →	University administration (institutional research and assessment offices) should use metrics to assess inclusivity efforts and incorporate them into performance evaluations. Conduct climate surveys and track inclusion in hiring, promotions, and tenure decisions.
FEEDBACK & IMPROVEMENT	CDO, Assessment Offices should continuously seek feedback from employees on inclusion initiatives and make necessary improvements. CDO, Assessment Offices should use employee surveys, focus groups, and inclusion committees for feedback.	→ →	University administration should regularly solicit feedback from students, faculty, and staff to refine inclusion efforts. Institutional research offices should use climate surveys, feedback forms, and inclusion committees to gather input.
INCLUSIVE PRACTICES	COO, Department Heads should integrate inclusive practices into all aspects of business operations. COO, Department Heads should ensure diverse representation in decision-making processes and product development.	→ →	Academic departments should embed inclusivity into curriculum design, teaching methods, and academic policies. Academic and administrative committees should include diverse perspectives in course content, research topics, and academic discussions.
BYSTANDER INTERVENTION	Chief Ethics Officer, HR should implement programs encouraging employees to intervene in discriminatory practices.	→	University administration should provide training sessions on bystander intervention, teaching faculty, staff, and students how to recognize mobbing behaviors and intervene safely.

Challenges and Obstacles When Adapting Corporate Inclusion Strategies to Suit Higher Education

Academic freedom is a cornerstone of higher education, granting faculty and researchers the liberty to explore, teach, and debate ideas without fear of censorship. Yet, this freedom can sometimes conflict with efforts to curb mobbing, the persistent bullying, harassment, and exclusion that undermines the academic environment. While vigorous debate is essential for intellectual growth, it may occasionally escalate into personal attacks or exclusionary behavior. To address this tension, institutions must define clear boundaries by developing comprehensive policies that distinguish legitimate academic discourse from harmful mobbing. Such policies should include explicit definitions and behavioral guidelines with concrete examples (e.g., personal attacks, rumor-

spreading, deliberate undermining). Moreover, ongoing training that incorporates role-playing scenarios, mediation, and conflict resolution exercises can help faculty and staff recognize when academic debate crosses the line into mobbing. This balanced approach ensures that intellectual freedom is maintained while protecting the dignity and respect of all community members.

Overcoming resistance to change is another significant challenge when implementing new anti-mobbing policies in academia. Faculty and staff, who highly value autonomy and tradition, may fear that such policies will encroach upon their independence or disrupt entrenched power dynamics, especially in settings where tenured positions dominate. Resistance can also stem from skepticism about the prevalence or severity of mobbing and a general lack of awareness regarding its consequences. To overcome these hurdles, it is essential to engage stakeholders early in the policy-development process. Inclusive methods, such as open forums, town hall meetings, and focus groups, allow faculty and staff to share insights and foster a sense of ownership over the changes. Clearly articulating the benefits of a mobbing-free environment, such as improved mental health, enhanced collaboration, and a more positive academic culture, can further motivate change. In addition, phased implementation combined with supportive resources like counseling services and peer support groups helps ease the transition and build lasting commitment.

Implementing comprehensive mobbing prevention and inclusion programs requires significant financial, personnel, and organizational resources. Universities must integrate these initiatives into their financial planning by employing cost-benefit analyses that demonstrate long-term savings through reduced legal costs, lower turnover, and enhanced productivity. Funding can be secured through external grants, targeted alumni donations, partnerships with external organizations, or internal budget reallocations. Alongside funding, institutions should develop academic-specific metrics such as retention rates of underrepresented faculty and students, student engagement levels, and diversity in hiring, to monitor progress and continually refine their strategies.

Equally important is the establishment of robust accountability measures. Tying inclusion goals to performance evaluations by incorporating measurable objectives in annual reviews ensures that all faculty, staff, and administrators are held responsible for their contributions to a mobbing-free environment. Creating dedicated oversight bodies, such as inclusion committees or diversity offices, and implementing regular, transparent reporting via town hall meetings, newsletters, or online dashboards helps guarantee that inclusion policies are consistently applied. These measures, reviewed and adjusted based on stakeholder feedback, ensure that progress is maintained over time. Together, these strategies - balancing academic freedom with protective policies, engaging resistant stakeholders, and securing resources while enforcing accountability - form a comprehensive approach to adapting corporate inclusion strategies for higher education. This multifaceted effort is essential not only for preventing mobbing but also for fostering a respectful, supportive academic environment that enhances both individual well-being and institutional success.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the transformative potential of inclusion strategies adopted from corporate America to eliminate mobbing in academia. The primary reason for adopting inclusion strategies in higher education is their demonstrated success in the corporate sector. Companies that have prioritized inclusion have experienced significant improvements in workplace culture, productivity, and overall organizational success. Key examples are Indeed's Inclusive Manager Program, which led to substantial improvements in team trust and belonging, resulting in a 30% increase in team performance and a 700% ROI, and Microsoft's Inclusion Goals - by linking executive compensation to inclusion goals, Microsoft has shown a strong commitment to fostering an inclusive workforce enhancing employee engagement and retention. Also notable are Deloitte's and PwC's Training Programs. These companies have implemented comprehensive training programs focused on unconscious bias and inclusive leadership, resulting in greater employee awareness and empathy.

University presidents can adapt these proven corporate inclusion strategies to the unique context of higher education. This adaptation involves leadership commitment with university presidents publicly and consistently advocating for inclusive practices, integrating inclusion goals into the institution's strategic plan and allocating the necessary resources. It also requires policy development and enforcement by establishing and enforcing clear, comprehensive policies *against* mobbing and *for* inclusion that define acceptable behaviors, provide mechanisms for reporting mobbing, and ensure accountability through consistent application of consequences. Comprehensive, regular and mandatory training programs to educate faculty, staff, and students on the principles of inclusion, the negative impacts of mobbing, and the strategies for creating a supportive and respectful academic community, are another important ingredient, as are reporting mechanisms providing safe and anonymous channels of communication to encourage individuals to report mobbing behaviors without fear of retaliation. Additionally, robust support systems should be in place to assist those affected by mobbing.

By adopting and implementing these inclusion strategies, university presidents can effectively immunize their institutions against academic mobbing. The benefits of fostering an inclusive academic environment include enhanced well-being, with individuals who feel included experiencing higher morale, better mental health, and greater job satisfaction, contributing to a more vibrant and productive academic community. Increased collaboration in an inclusive environment promoting open communication and mutual respect will lead to better teamwork and innovation and reduced turnover, with inclusivity improving retention rates by creating a supportive environment where individuals want to stay and grow, reducing the costs associated with high turnover, such as recruitment and training expenses, and negative reputation. Institutions known for their inclusive practices attract top talent and funding opportunities, enhancing their reputation and positioning them as leaders in fostering a positive academic culture.

The process of creating an inclusive environment and immunizing universities against academic mobbing hinges on the active and public support of university presidents. Their role is pivotal in

driving and sustaining the necessary changes. Essential actions for leadership include public commitment with university presidents publicly endorsing and advocating for inclusion, their visible commitment setting the tone for the entire institution and signaling the importance of inclusion to all academic community members. They also include resource allocation with leaders ensuring that adequate resources are dedicated to inclusion initiatives, including funding for training programs, support services, and the implementation of inclusive policies. Policy development and enforcement is also required, with presidents developing comprehensive policies, enforced consistently to ensure accountability, that clearly define and prohibit mobbing behaviors while promoting inclusion. Ongoing education and training will also be necessary, with leadership supporting and mandating continuous education and training programs aimed at raising awareness, building empathy, and equipping faculty, staff, and students with the skills needed to foster an inclusive environment, along with supportive infrastructure, with leaders ensuring that robust support systems are in place, including safe reporting mechanisms and resources for those affected by mobbing.

Inclusion has the transformative potential to act as an "immunization" against academic mobbing. The proven success of inclusion strategies in corporate America provides a compelling case for their adoption in higher education. However, the effectiveness of these strategies is contingent upon the active and public support of university presidents. By fostering an inclusive environment, academic institutions can protect against the detrimental effects of mobbing, enhance their reputation, and create a thriving academic community where every individual feels valued and respected. This strategic approach addresses the moral imperative of fostering a supportive environment and brings tangible benefits in terms of well-being, collaboration, retention, and reputation. The integration of inclusion strategies within higher education is a strategic necessity. By learning from the successes of the corporate world and committing to genuine inclusivity, university presidents can lead their institutions in creating a healthier, more supportive, and more productive academic environment. The commitment of university leaders is the cornerstone of this transformation, ensuring that inclusive practices are deeply embedded in the institutional culture and sustained over time.

Author

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