BENTLEY UNIVERSITY

Gloria Cordes Larson
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Workplace Inclusion—*Nurturing a Culture of Care and Belonging*

A Curated Research Report

Prepared by The Center for Women and Business at Bentley University

About the Gloria Cordes Larson Center for Women and Business (CWB)

BENTLEY UNIVERSITY
Gloria Cordes Larson
Center for Women and Business

Advancing women and fostering workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion

The CWB provides thought leadership and training on critical diversity, equity, and inclusion issues. CWB facilitators lead hundreds of sessions with businesses worldwide, providing knowledge and tools to foster inclusive organizations. Our dynamic programs focusing on workplace inclusion range from strategic sessions for senior leaders to hands-on workshops for emerging professionals. Topics include:

- Corporate Culture, Unconscious Bias, and Inclusive Leadership
- Allyship Across Difference
- Building Confidence and Overcoming Unseen Barriers
- The Role of Courageous Conversations
- Mentorship, Sponsorship, and Networks
- Talent Pipeline Issues from Entry Level to the Boardroom
- The Impact of Intersectionality
- Authentic Leadership and Team Development
- Effective Negotiations
- Workplace Flex and Parental Leave
- Taking Employee Resource Groups to the Next Level
- Developing Diversity and Inclusion Metrics
- The Multigenerational Workforce—Issues and Impacts

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Introduction

Employees everywhere are becoming more vocal about the imperative for positive, caring workplace cultures. Culture has soared to first place on job candidates' list of important factors to consider, and hiring managers are increasingly focused on culture when recruiting talent, according to Korn Ferry research.[1] Accenture reports that 77 percent of women and 67 percent of men believe culture can help them thrive in the workplace.[2] And Gen Zs are driving even more demand for inclusive work environments.[3]

Perhaps the surest sign that culture is front and center for U.S. businesses is the Business Roundtable's recent decision to update the purpose of a corporation.[4] Shifting away from shareholder value as the paramount organizational goal, the statement of purpose now begins: "Americans deserve an economy that allows each person to succeed through hard work and creativity and to lead a life of meaning and dignity." It delineates the imperative to invest in employees, advance diversity and inclusion, and commit to ethical relationships at all levels.

In a recent survey of CEOs and CFOs, 90 percent said they believe a positive corporate culture is important to their organization,[5] and 80 percent ranked culture among the five most important factors driving their company's valuation.[6] Hence leaders are, in theory, aligned in prioritizing culture.

And yet there is a disconnect that's unsettling. While numerous studies show that a significant majority of leaders firmly believe they are creating empowering environments where employees can be authentic and thrive, employees often disagree.[7] Accenture concludes that only 28 percent of employees strongly believe that their employer's values and actions are aligned,[8] and in one recent study nearly half of employees said that leaders were minimally or *not at all* committed to improving culture.[9]

On the following pages, we explore those aspects of organizational culture that align with diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) efforts. We share relevant data, scenarios, challenges, and opportunities, and highlight positive actions for change. The report includes timely information on inclusion and culture during the concurrent health and racial justice crises.

To create this report, we reviewed nearly 200 sources, including research, articles, and books on organizational culture. We also interviewed thought leaders, employees, and executives engaged in DE&I to gain context and insight.

What is Workplace Culture?

"Culture is the number one reason employees stay with or leave your company," asserts a savvy HR veteran.[10] Workplace culture is the most significant factor influencing employee happiness, work relationships, and job satisfaction, according to *The Culture Question*.[11] And another HR expert describes culture as "the environment that surrounds you at work all of the time."[12]

But what, precisely, is culture?

According to an MIT study, there are more than 50 distinct definitions in the academic literature, ranging from "the stories employees tell to interpret events" to organizational rituals.[13] Every employee contributes to creating a culture, whether implicitly or explicitly, and much of that contribution is imbedded in unspoken behaviors, attitudes, and social patterns.[14]

Research firmly establishes certain culture markers, including written and unwritten rules for working together, values, beliefs, assumptions, interests, experiences, upbringing, and even personal habits. Culture is not only key to workplace relationships, processes, and productivity, but also to employees' mental wellbeing, physical health, and job satisfaction, and the data demonstrates that each of these outcomes is connected.

In this report, we move beyond the broad concept of culture to explore cultures that support inclusion and belonging. Accenture CEO Julie Sweet highlights their fundamental importance: "Creating a culture of equality must be at the top of the business agenda. It starts with the belief that diversity is not only the right thing to do, but a business imperative that is treated the same as any other strategic priority."[18]

Great cultures provide continuous alignment to the vision, purpose, and goals of an organization,[15] and successful companies are constantly reviewing, adjusting, and working to enhance their culture.[16] In companies with intentionally positive cultures, the dual goals of profitability and human growth–the double bottom line–emerge as one holistic concept instead of two distinct elements.[17]

What Makes a Culture Inclusive?

Inclusion creates a workplace where all people—regardless of gender, race, sexual orientation, religion, country of origin, disability, age, and socioeconomic background—are welcome, respected, and have access to equal opportunities.[21] Characterized and nurtured by trust, encouragement, and empathy, inclusive organizations ensure that employees know they can contribute to decision-making, policies, and processes. [22] In such organizations, leaders provide workers with the information, resources, and tools they need to succeed.

Lenovo Intel research characterizes inclusive environments as those, "…where intellectual diversity flourishes, where those with disabilities can fully participate and thrive, where employees of all backgrounds can find mentors and allies, and where mental health is taken seriously as a core part of overall wellbeing."[23]

Deloitte identifies two types of inclusive connection:[24]

- meaningful relationships with coworkers and their teams, and
- connection to the organization's purpose and goals.

One example of this dual connection is Unilever's *Brands with a Purpose* initiative which creates products for consumers in rural villages that are both affordable and commercially viable. People working on *Brands with a Purpose* teams have the highest engagement scores at the company, and the brands themselves are growing 69 percent faster than the rest of the business.[25]

Why Does Belonging Matter?

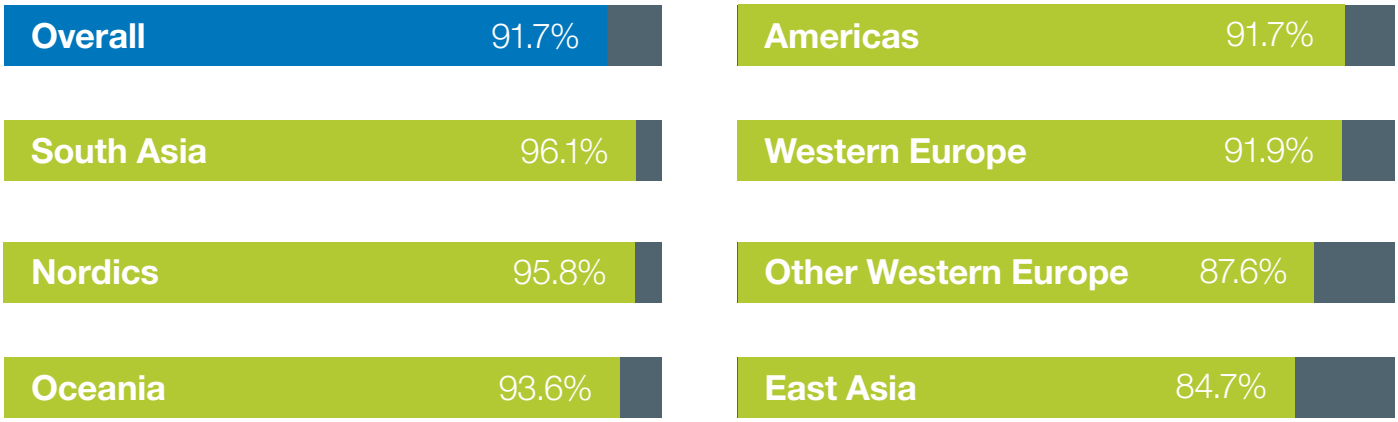
Inclusive cultures are often described as *cultures of belonging.* Why? For starters, belonging is a universal need that translates to being accepted and included.[30] Research indicates that belonging to a group of coworkers is often a better workplace motivator than money alone,[31] and one recent study finds that an overwhelming 93 percent of respondents believe a sense of belonging actually *drives* organizational performance.[32]

A VP of culture and community at Zillow Group states that superior business outcomes often associated with diverse teams can't be achieved without a sense of belonging.[33] It's not enough to simply include people at the table, she states, but to "amplify everyone's voices, clear barriers… and appreciate each other for our unique backgrounds."

Psychological safety is a critical component of an inclusive culture and impacts the success of the business.[26] Google's HR group conducted a two-year study across more than 180 teams within the organization to answer one question: *What makes a Google team effective?*[27] They identified psychological safety as the strongest predictor of a successful Google team. In such groups, the report concluded, "Members feel safe to take risks and feel vulnerable in front of each other."[28] A Google HR analyst writes, "Who is on a team matters less than how the team members interact, structure their work, and view their contributions."[29]

How Important is a Sense of Belonging at Work?

Microsoft-Cognizant research reveals the universal human need for belonging. Globally, 92 percent of survey respondents affirm the need, "to feel like you are appreciated for who you are and what you can contribute."[34]



E-commerce company Next Jump believes that their culture should make employees' work truly meaningful, and they visibly and deliberately embed it in the salary review process. While employees' contributions to revenue count for 50 percent of the salary review outcome, contributions to culture account for another full 50 percent.[35]

The Benefits of Inclusion ...and the Costs of Exclusion

The Value of Inclusion

Research supports the enormous value that flows from an inclusive culture.

- Employees who feel a strong sense of belonging are 50 percent less likely to leave, 56 percent more likely to improve their performance, and 75 percent less likely to take a sick day.[36]
- Workers who experience a sense of belonging are an overwhelming 167 percent more likely to recommend their organizations as great places to work.[37]
- Organizations with inclusive cultures are three times as likely to be high performing, six times more likely to be innovative and agile, and eight times more likely to achieve better business outcomes.[38]
  - One study concludes that, in a 10,000-person company, if all workers felt a high degree of belonging, the organization would gain over $52,000,000 annually from increased productivity.[39]

"The simple act of recognizing and showing appreciation to your workers goes a long way," notes Forbes.[40]

"When employees are appreciated their happiness at work increases and they're much more likely to go above and beyond for their employer."

The Costs of Exclusion

Although U.S. workplaces spend roughly $8 billion a year on DE&I, they often completely overlook the concept of inclusion,[41] and one in five employees say that their company has been through a recent culture-related crisis.[42] Consider that:

- Shortfalls related to belonging can "carry a devastating cost to the personal health and productivity of employees as well as to the culture and fiscal wellbeing of organizations," according to a BetterUp study.[43]
- The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) reports that during the past five years, the turnover cost of a toxic work environment was more than $223 billion for U.S. employers.[44]
- In a recent McKinsey survey, 39 percent of all respondents said they had turned down or decided not to pursue a job because of a perceived lack of inclusion in their organization.[45]

Despite the strong analytical data, qualitative research, and anecdotal evidence in support of inclusive cultures, many organizations continue to focus on diversity and miss the inclusion piece of the puzzle. The price for doing so can be high.

Additional data focuses on individual employees and demonstrates the profound impacts of exclusion on their lived experiences:

- 40 percent of people say that they feel isolated at work.[46]
- Employees—especially those from underrepresented groups—identify a lack of belonging as a key factor in voluntary turnover.[47]
- 79 percent of employees who quit their jobs cite a lack of appreciation as a key reason for leaving.[48]
- 65 percent of North American workers, according to one study, say they weren't recognized even once in the past year.[49]
- A single "micro-exclusion" can result in an immediate 25 percent decline in a worker's performance on a team assignment,[50] and employees who experience micro-aggressions are three times more likely to think about leaving their jobs.[51]

A KRC Research-United Minds report concludes that despite being seen as a precious asset, "…culture can quickly become its greatest liability. In today's world of extreme transparency, it's only a matter of time before what's broken on the inside is revealed to the outside. Not only do unhealthy cultures demoralize employees—they alienate customers, ruin reputation, and destroy value."[52]

What Makes a Leader Inclusive?

Leaders who embody inclusion are essential to cultures of belonging. In fact, it's nearly impossible to create such a culture without that committed exemplar at the top of the organization. Indeed, the top executives of every business featured in the most recent ranking of *100 Best Companies to Work For* embody inclusive qualities, and their influence shapes exemplary workplace cultures.[53]

What Characterizes an Inclusive Leader?

- Inclusive leaders first and foremost create genuine human connections among all employees.[54] They demonstrate humility, empathy, and learning agility.[55] They inspire their teams to "contribute, outperform, and realize their maximum human potential—no matter their title, identity, or experience." [56]
- According to Cognizant, "Leaders who model inclusive behavior ensure that employees can freely express their views and opinions, feel secure in proposing novel ideas, are empowered to make decisions, are able to give and receive actionable feedback, and are given credit for their contributions."
    - Likewise, employees who say they work for an inclusive organization affirm these behaviors in their own leaders.[57]

Six Signature Traits of Inclusive Leaders[59]

HBR reports the following distinct traits of inclusive leaders:

1. **Visible commitment** to DE&I organizationally and personally, along with a willingness to challenge the status quo and hold others accountable.
2. **Humility** about their own capabilities, including the practice of admitting their personal mistakes and creating space for others to contribute.
3. **Awareness of bias,** including their own blind spots and systemic challenges.
4. **Curiosity** about others, demonstrating an open mindset, listening without judgment, and empathetically seeking understanding of others.
5. **Cultural intelligence,** demonstrating attentiveness to others' cultures and adapting as needed.
6. **Effective collaboration,** empowering others, paying attention to diversity of thought and psychological safety, and focusing on team cohesion.

A consciously inclusive leader, according to *Pride Leadership*, is one who works not only to uncover and understand their own unconscious biases, but also "to actively cultivate an environment of organizational diversity, inclusion, and belonging."[58]

Leveraging Personal Advisory Boards

How can leaders monitor their own inclusive behaviors? One tactic is to establish a diverse personal advisory board (PAD)—a group of people, often peers, who have regular contact with the leader and whom the leader trusts to talk straight.[61] These trusted advisers can provide granular feedback on everyday interpersonal behaviors that support or inhibit inclusion. For example:

- Does the leader give equal time to all meeting participants, or favor those who are co-located over those who have dialed in?
- Does the leader always refer to one gender when giving examples?
- Does the leader use a broad spectrum of imagery when addressing a diverse audience, or imagery (such as sports metaphors or all white iconography) that represents only one group of people?

Accenture identifies **"culture makers"** as leaders who are ahead of the curve in driving positive culture change. They make up only six to nine percent of all business leaders, and about two thirds are millennials and female. They are committed to positive, inclusive cultures, they hold themselves accountable, and they believe they need to serve as models for their employees. *Notably, they run organizations that are growing more than twice as fast as those of their peers.*[60]

The Role of Frontline Managers

While a committed leader sets the stage, **frontline managers** are critical contributors to workplace culture. Catalyst states that, "A manager's behavior has a direct link to an employee's experience of inclusion—in fact, almost half of an employee's experience of inclusion can be explained by managerial inclusive leadership behaviors."[62]

Frontline managers need to nurture the following employee mindsets to engender a culture of care:

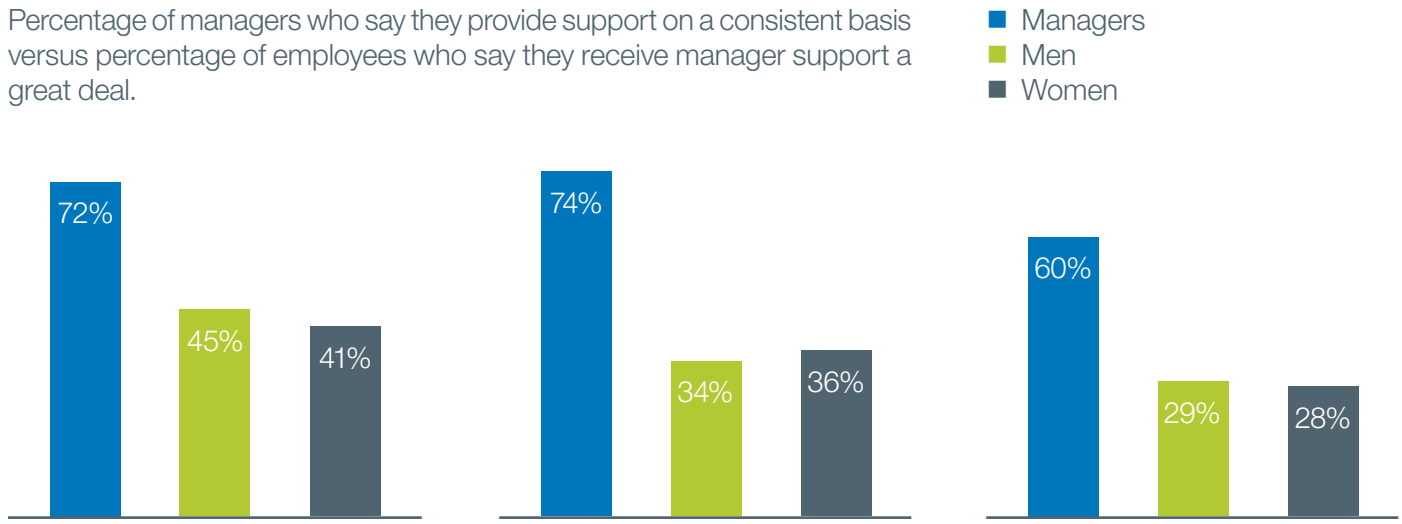
- I'm valued—appreciated and respected for my unique perspectives and talents.
- I'm trusted—to make meaningful contributions and influence decision-making.
- I can be authentic—bringing my full self to work and express my unique identities.
- I'm psychologically safe—I have the latitude to hold differing views and make mistakes without being penalized and feel secure enough to tackle tough issues or take risks.

Research demonstrates a disconnect between the perceptions of front-line managers compared to their supervisees.[63] In fact, 60 to 75 percent of managers believe they engage in a range of inclusive behaviors versus only 28 to 45 percent of those they manage. Please see A Disconnect Between Managers and Their Team Members on page 10.

- These findings highlight the need for a greater focus on managers, sometimes referenced as "the frozen middle."[64] Organizations need to more actively support direct supervisors and hold them accountable—providing resources, tools, guidance, training, performance metrics tied to inclusive behaviors, and feedback—just as they do for senior executives.

A Disconnect Between Managers and Their Team Members[65]

Percentage of managers who say they provide support on a consistent basis versus percentage of employees who say they receive manager support a great deal.



"Know your inclusive-leadership shadow," advises one DE&I researcher.[66]

"Seek feedback on whether you are perceived as inclusive, especially from people who are different from you. This will help you to see your blind spots, strengths, and development areas. It will also signal that diversity and inclusion are important to you. Scheduling regular check-ins with members of your team to ask how you can make them feel more included also sends the message."

Digging Deeper on Trust

When it comes to nurturing a culture marked by inclusion and a sense of safety, the literature consistently references the importance of *trust* among teams and across organizations.

The value of trust to DE&I goals is immeasurable, helping everyone—and particularly marginalized groups—feel included and engaged. HBR notes, "Establishing trusting social bonds with colleagues helps overcome outsider status and leverage one's distinct attributes—a true benefit to DE&I progress."[67] The authors of *An Everyone Culture* add this: "Imagine finding yourself in a trustworthy environment, one that tolerates—even prefers—making your weaknesses public so that your colleagues can support you in the process of overcoming them."[68]

Virtual Work Can Erode Trust

Remote work presents a paradox that impacts mutual trust. On the one hand, virtual workers feel isolated from colleagues; on the other, they are drowning in digital messages from them. The research suggests that an organization's culture and creativity risk declining in a remote environment because people find it harder to build cohesion and trust online.[69]

IBM's CHRO talks about the benefits of face-to-face work and the toll of remote work, saying we build a "bank of trust" when we all work together physically.[70] In remote situations, however, "weak ties fray" and "in a videoconferencing situation, trust is actually quite fragile," according to a New York Times report.[71] People more readily form cooperative bonds when they are face to face, whereas in video "trust is diminished overall."

Why? Partly, it's because video reduces our ability to sync up in subtle ways with the person on the screen. In person, we can detect smiles or frowns before they happen, synchronizing emotional reactions over time, according to University of Wisconsin-Madison psychologist Paula Niedenthal.[72] This all helps us better connect with one another and establish trust.

A simple trust-building practice that translates to virtual work is having team members share a significant life event in the past year that occurred outside of work, or a story from childhood.

Check-ins and check-outs also help engender trust. At Decurion, check-ins and check-outs at meetings are rigorously held to ensure that focusing on individual mind-sets and growth is a habit.[73] They bring themselves fully, as whole people, into the workspace. Employees might share their internal state—*I'm feeling excited or nervous today*—their efforts to listen better to others. Or they might let the group in on something that is happening at home that's impacting how they are showing up that day. "It's about what the individual needs to do to be fully present—it can't be scripted," says the firm's COO. "Our full humanity is required, and to have that, you need authentic engagement."

For more information on the impacts of virtual work on inclusion, please see Pandemic, page 20.

Trust in the Context of Conflict

In a trusting environment, people can share what really matters to them without fear that the information might be used against them, and it means they believe other team members act with good intent.[74] People establish such trust through relationships and by using constructive processes to address conflict.

Building a trusting culture related to conflict means being able to give and receive honest feedback. A chief obstacle, of course, is the fear of negative confrontations and defensiveness. *The Culture Question* identifies the following steps to overcome these obstacles and support trusting, constructive conflict:[75]

1. Unite the team around purpose and values.
2. Increase connection time.
3. Set a tone for honest feedback by inviting and demonstrating it.
4. Focus on issues, not people.

Stay interviews are a useful practice to enhance an already-existing culture of trust.[76] They are designed to assess the degree of employee satisfaction and engagement in an organization and—unlike employee satisfaction surveys—they incorporate two-way conversations and the ability to ask follow-up questions.

A caution, however: if your organization confronts a trust deficit, employees won't provide authentic information in stay interviews. Anonymous employee satisfaction surveys may be preferable until trust is rebuilt. If your organization's climate lacks trust, you will need to rebuild that trust before you can conduct meaningful stay interviews.

Courageous Conversations provide a powerful approach to explore areas of conflict and build trust. This type of intentional dialogue—often related to race, gender, or power—helps bridge difference and is particularly useful in organizations seeking to advance inclusion and racial justice.

Courageous conversations simultaneously require and nurture courage, honesty, openness, and vulnerability. Ideally, the practice becomes embedded in an organization over time, so that it is a well-recognized and frequently relied upon tool.

Bentley University's Center for Women and Business utilizes its own methodology and training for courageous conversations. Please see the Appendix, page 32, for our framework.

Inclusive Cultures Use Intersectional Approaches

A BCG study concludes that "Successful culture change acknowledges each employee's unique life context and needs,"[78] and additional research acknowledges the important role of intersecting identities, noting that inclusive cultures, "recognize, honor, and celebrate intersectionality."[77]

What precisely is intersectionality?

It refers to the unique ways race, gender, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, ability, status, and other social and demographic identities come together to inform peoples' lived—and workplace—experiences. Often, the resulting impact is discrimination, disadvantage, or oppression.[79]

The experiences of women in the workplace demonstrate the impact of intersectionality. To be clear, all women are not having the same workplace experiences, thus the strategies to support their inclusion must vary. Black women, Latinas, Asian women, LGBTQ+ women, and women with disabilities face distinct challenges. Consider just some of the data:

- Among LGBTQ+ employees under age 35, 28 percent are people of color who identify as women, versus just 2 percent of those aged 55 or older.[80]
- Black women *and* women with disabilities are far less likely than other women to feel they have an equal opportunity to grow and advance. They are also less happy at work and more likely to leave their company than are other women.[81]
- During the pandemic, women with disabilities are disproportionately reporting that they are not receiving the flexibility they need to work effectively, and they are experiencing stress and burnout at greater levels than other women.[82]

Please see the CWB report, *Intersectionality in the Workplace*, to learn more about intersectionality.

Black Women and Women with Disabilities are Having a Notably Worse Experience at Work[83]

HAVING A BETTER EXPERIENCE — HAVING A WORSE EXPERIENCE

	ALL MEN	ALL WOMEN	LESBIAN WOMEN	BISEXUAL WOMEN	WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES	WHITE WOMEN	ASIAN WOMEN	LATINAS	BLACK WOMEN
Equal Opportunity on Fairness					▼				▼
I have equal opportunity for growth and development	69%	66%	70%	66%	54%	69%	63%	62%	56%
I have equal opportunity for advancement	59%	55%	57%	54%	41%	57%	54%	54%	42%
I have equal access to sponsorship	34%	30%	33%	26%	21%	32%	28%	30%	26%
Promotions are fair and objective	51%	46%	48%	44%	36%	48%	42%	44%	35%
The best opportunities go to the most deserving employees	48%	40%	40%	38%	31%	42%	41%	39%	28%
Only the most qualified candidates are promoted	23%	17%	16%	15%	13%	18%	17%	15%	11%

The Impact of Leader Behavior when Teams are Diverse

What leaders say and do has an outsized impact on others, and research indicates it is even more pronounced when they lead diverse teams.[84] Subtle acts of exclusion by leaders—often a manifestation of insensitivity to unique identities—can quickly lead to a deterioration in culture. Likewise, peers play a role when they lack understanding of their colleagues' many identities. BCG concludes that this leads to inaccurate or insensitive assumptions and behaviors.[85]

Thus, both leaders and employees must take a more intersectional approach to workplace culture and pay particularly close attention to identities that intertwine with race, such as first generation college, sexual identity and orientation, religion, age, health, and much more.[86]

DE&I researchers conclude that "...the ultimate goal in working with diversity is to weave it into the fabric of the organization -- into all the different dimensions of work, structures, and processes."

This report's sections on race (page 15), LGBTQ+ experiences (page 17), employee wellbeing (page 18), culture and the pandemic (page 20) all reflect intersectional considerations.

A Generational Distinction

Research indicates that Black Millennials are more vocal about inclusion in the workplace. [88] We spoke with a Black Millennial who works in the tech sector. Here's what she had to say:

I work for a company where people are mostly happy and supportive of each other—this is a great place to be. We receive all these wonderful welcome gifts when we join the company. That's the tip of the iceberg though, and as you dive into it and get under it, you start to learn more. The tech sector tries to cover the issues with flashy gestures and gifts. But why are the leadership teams all white? Why are the power structures still what they were over a decade ago?

When you get under the iceberg you see those pieces come alive. There is a deeper story here. One of our core values is transparency, but sometimes it feels fake. We choose when we want to be transparent and when we don't. We don't want to share data externally, or only when it doesn't make our leaders look too bad. I think we engage in situational transparency. Instead, we should put it all out there. And we need to be able to benchmark, and provide honest feedback about policies and processes in order to drive culture and advance diversity and inclusion.

"With accumulating experience, we have learned that it is one thing to create diversity in an organization by recruiting people of different nationality, cultural background, race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, discipline or work style. But it is quite another to develop a supportive work environment that enables people of diverse backgrounds to perform at their highest levels, contribute fully to the organization, and feel professionally satisfied. And it is even a greater challenge to integrate fully the varied knowledge, experiences, perspectives and values that people of diverse backgrounds bring into an organization's strategy, goals, work, products, systems, and structures. From our perspective, the ultimate goal in working with diversity is to weave it into the fabric of the organization—into all the different dimensions of work, structures and processes."[87]
-Gender and Diversity Program of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)

Culture in the Context of Race

Ample research demonstrates that people of color are disproportionately impacted by workplace culture. The Center for Talent Innovation (CTI) concludes that white men feel the strongest sense of belonging in their organizations followed by white women, while people with other racial identities experience something quite different:[89]

- Nearly 80 percent of Black professionals—about three times the rate of white peers—say they have experienced discrimination or that they fear they or their loved ones will have such experiences.
- On average, 58 percent of Black employees perceive racism in their workplace,[90] compared to 41 percent of Latinx employees, 38 percent of Asian employees, and 15 percent of white employees.[91]
- About 19 percent of Black professionals feel someone of their race or ethnicity would never achieve a top position at their company, compared to 3 percent of white professionals.[92]

Race Remains a Third Rail in the Workplace

The events of 2020—the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and others—have brought Black Lives Matter and racial justice to the forefront in many organizations. Despite this, the subject of race remains a "third rail" in the workplace, obstructing authentic discussion and allowing systemic privilege and power dynamics to remain in place.[93] An HBR article concludes that many Black professionals feel "it is never acceptable at their companies to speak out about their experiences of bias—a silence that makes them more than twice as vulnerable to feelings of isolation and alienation in the workplace."[94] Black employees who believe they cannot speak authentically are nearly three times more likely as others to consider leaving their workplace, and they are an overwhelming 13 times more likely to be disengaged.

Notably, white professionals *rarely* believe that Black peers have a tougher climb to the top. Until such views and the micro-inequities that flow from unconscious bias and unacknowledged privilege are addressed, solutions to decrease racial workplace inequities will be hard to attain. Thus, the starting place for many organizations must be introspection and authentic dialogue across difference.[95] For a Courageous Conversations framework, please see Appendix, page 32.

Minnesota Children's hosted a series of **"Employees of Color Listening Sessions"** that were designed to create a safe space for open and honest dialogue related to employee retention. CEO Marc Gorelick reflects: "We learned that we need to create a deeper sense of community and inclusion for our diverse talent and make development opportunities more accessible along with providing leadership training on implicit bias."

The Listening Sessions also catalyzed the formation of new Employee Resource Groups and the process of strategically aligning them with the goals of recruitment, retention and inclusion.[96]

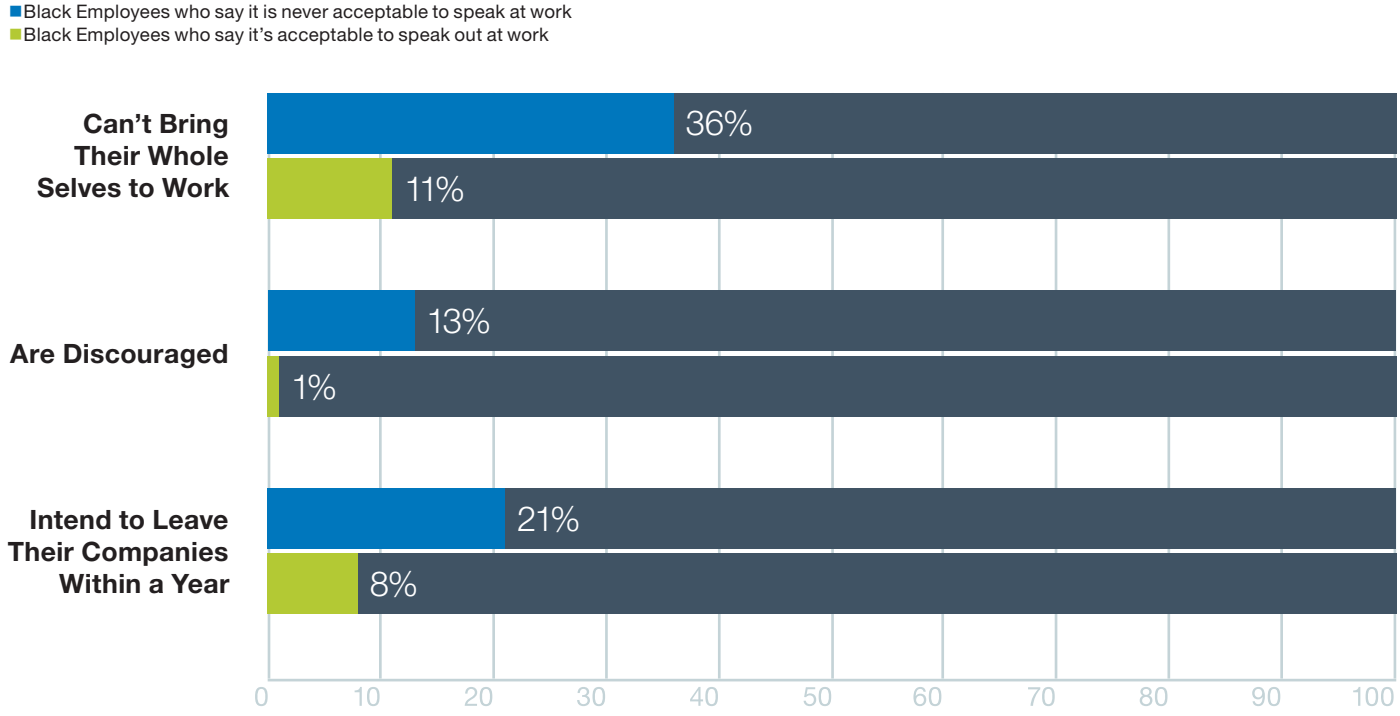
Avoid Woke-Washing

We spoke to Erin Dowell and Marlette Jackson, co-authors of *Woke-Washing Your Company Won't Cut It*.[98] Their research concludes that more than a few companies have recently rushed to demonstrate their commitment to racial justice via solidarity statements but have done little else. They label this behavior *woke-washing*: "Appropriating the language of social activism into marketing materials" while glossing over troublesome inequities. People of color, other marginalized individuals, and allies alike will see through such inauthentic behavior that contradicts the very notion of an inclusive culture.

In research comparing the experiences of Black and white women, inclusive climates are found to help the Black women feel supported most often when their work is independent.[99] That is, inclusive climates, while always important, "are more effective when Black women do not have to rely on their coworkers too much in the course of their day-to-day job performance."

Why? Perhaps because many women of color have routinely been left out of social events and excluded from information sharing opportunities. This exclusion may lead to their resentment and mistrust of coworkers, because being excluded from less important interactions signals that they might be excluded from more important, career-influencing interactions.

What Happens When Racial Bias Isn't Discussed at Work[97]



Inclusive Cultures for LGBTQ+ Employees

Like all multidimensional identities, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation present unique perspectives about work and life along with distinct career obstacles. The data on how employees who identify as LGBTQ+ experience workplace culture and inclusion compared to other employees is mixed, and with workplace attitudes changing quickly, statistics can rapidly become outdated. The data below is drawn from research reported between 2018 and 2020.

- CTI reports that a sense of belonging among LGBTQ+ employees is higher than might be expected, which "may speak to recent gains in the LGBTQ+ movement in U.S. society."[100]
- McKinsey finds that 80 percent of senior leaders who identify as LGBTQ+ are out at work,[101] and yet:
  - 80 percent of LGBTQ+ women below the level of senior vice president report having to correct colleagues' assumptions about their personal lives.[102]
  - Only 58 percent of LGBTQ+ women are out and only 32 percent of LGBTQ+ junior employees are out.[103] One employee notes, "Being authentic once you've made it is easier than being authentic when you haven't."
- A significant 71 percent of women who identify as lesbian report experiencing micro-aggressions in the workplace.[104] They hear demeaning remarks about themselves and others and are far more likely to feel they cannot talk about their personal lives at work.
- The data demonstrates that allyship is particularly effective in creating more inclusive cultures for LGBTQ+ employees. Consider that:
  - Straight participants involved in allies programs are twice as likely to recognize discrimination compared with employees at companies that do not have such a program in place.[106]
  - Allies are more than three times more likely to intervene when they witness micro-inequities against an LGBTQ+ employee.[107]
  - Allies programs seem to matter even for those who aren't active in them.[108] According to BCG, "Even straight employees at companies with an ally group who choose not to participate in it are more likely to recognize discrimination and more willing to speak up compared with employees who work at companies that do not have an ally program."

LGBTQ+ employees face more significant legal barriers regarding immigration since many nations still don't recognize LGBTQ+ relationships.[105] This is a particular hardship and barrier to career advancement for workers in global organizations that expect employees to be able to relocate around the world.

The Link Between Culture and Employee Wellbeing

A growing body of data demonstrates the significant link between employee wellbeing and a sense of engagement at work.[109] We know that improved wellbeing leads to a greater sense of belonging, which in turn enhances organizational performance.

Despite this, a Deloitte study reveals a *readiness gap* for organizations.[110] While close to 80 percent of employees globally identify wellbeing as an important priority for their organization's success, only 12 percent feel their organization is ready to address it.

A Microsoft Japan initiative demonstrates how worker wellbeing can enhance organizational productivity.[111] Microsoft's intentional changes to improve wellbeing included: reducing their work week from five days to four, decreasing the number and length of meetings; restructuring processes so that performance did not depend on any single individual (making it possible for all people to take meaningful work leaves as needed); and providing more tech tools to enable greater efficiency in communicating.

The result? Employees had more control over where, when, and how they work, leading to increased productivity and less mental and physical stress.[112]

Emotional Wellbeing and Stress

Emotional wellbeing is of particular concern in today's workplaces, and mental health—an invisible and often unrecognized disability—deserves greater attention, since failure to understand employees' mental health challenges can harm working relationships, inclusion efforts, productivity, and the bottom line.[113]

The toll taken from mental health challenges is significant:

- Over 40 million Americans suffer from an anxiety disorder.[114]
- Employers are seeing an increase in health costs directly correlated to the treatment of mental illness, specifically anxiety.[115]
- Over 90 percent of employees report feeling stress at work, with one-third saying their stress level is high to unsustainably high.[116]
- Over half of workers report that their home life is negatively affected by work at least once a week, and more than 50 percent report related sleep loss.[117]
- The World Health Organization has classified burnout "resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed" as a diagnosable health condition.[118]

Boomi is one company that believes putting mental health first is a crucial step in building a healthy culture.[119] COO Chris Port explains how he opened up about his own mental health journey with the entire company in order to empower employees to do the same. "I chose to share my struggle with mental health and how it's impacted and influenced my job and my family."

Port emphasizes an environment of flexibility to support mental health, letting his team members define what balance means for them. The company is attentive to employees' anecdotal and survey feedback.

Port concludes, "This culture doesn't persist without constant reminders. The same way we check in frequently with employees about career growth and next steps, likewise we need to about mental health.

Organizations must integrate employee wellbeing throughout their business and take a broader view of what it means. This includes addressing physical, mental-emotional, and even financial health. Deloitte asserts that if organizations focus on helping their employees feel their best and perform at their best it will strengthen "the tie between wellbeing and organizational outcomes and foster a greater sense of belonging overall."[120]

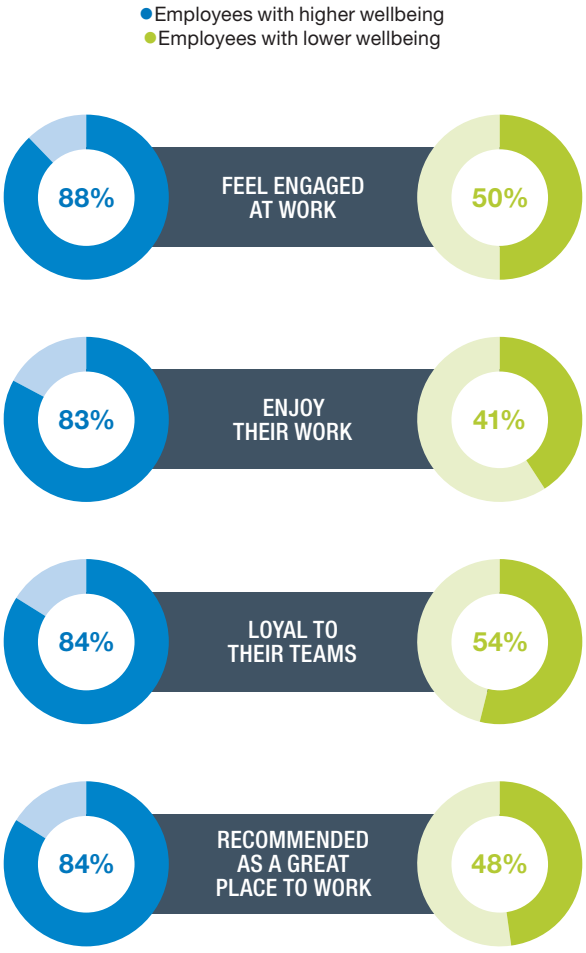
Increasingly, organizations are exploring and utilizing technology to provide tangible wellbeing tools to their employees.[121]

Options range from simple activity trackers and meditation apps to sophisticated machine learning devices that deliver customized information to reduce stress and fatigue.

A data scientist receives an automated message after several hours of videoconferencing with her team, saying, "Katrina, it's time for a break. Do you want to take a short walk or do a five-minute guided meditation to reset your focus?"[122] She is wearing brain-sensing earbuds with electrodes to measure her brain's electrical activity, analyze stress and distraction levels, and provide feedback.

Quantum Workplace and Limeade research reveals the deep connection between wellbeing and inclusion at work.

Employees with higher wellbeing vs lower wellbeing[123]



Please see Culture and the Pandemic, page 20, for more information related to wellbeing and mental health.

Culture and the Pandemic

Research concludes that Covid-19 and its impacts could deepen certain DE&I trends, either positively or negatively,[124] because some organizations will use this period to enhance inclusion while others may view DE&I as "a luxury we cannot afford" during the global health crisis.[125]

2020 McKinsey research offers some of the positive impacts, including:[126]

- Up to 70 percent of employees think that diversity in hiring will increase, in part because organizations can expand diversity hiring slates in the absence of geographic restrictions.
- More than 90 percent of businesses are reconsidering longer-term travel expectations for their employees; sustaining decreased travel responsibilities will support mothers, caregivers, and people with disabilities.

And yet after only weeks into the pandemic and a new normal of remote work for many, workers began expressing concern that organizational culture could erode during the health crisis. Influencing factors include: lost ability to interact in often unexpected ways that build culture, like spontaneous hallway conversations; fears for loved ones related to illness, job loss, and workloads; and the toll of virtual work on personal wellbeing and team cohesion. Please see page 11 for more information on team cohesion and trust.

Consider some specific impacts of the pandemic and virtual work to date:

- Global Disability Inclusion reported in May 2020 that more than half of workers with disabilities had either lost their jobs, been laid off or furloughed, or believed they would lose their job in the next few months.[127]
- U.S. employees' risk of depressive, post-traumatic stress,[128] and general anxiety disorders increased by at least 40 percent in the first few months of the crisis.[129]
- Black and Hispanic women have been hit hardest by the pandemic's economic decline.[130]
  - Over half of Black women classify their jobs as essential, outside-the-home positions compared to 38 percent of white women.[131]
- The childcare impact is greatest for women of color, women without a college degree, and women with low incomes.
- Among mothers, only 9 percent have reported being promoted while working from home, and only 13 percent have received pay increases. Meanwhile, more than a third of fathers say they have received promotions, and 26 percent have gotten a pay raise.[132]

Leaders Must Validate the Pandemic's Emotional Toll

Korn Ferry stresses the need to acknowledge that employees experience the health crisis differently and that those experiences are in a constant state of flux.[133] While some are distressed and even facing tragedy, others feel energized. "And some employees may be in the former camp on some days and the latter camp on other ones! Making zero assumptions about how people are experiencing the Covid crisis is the right starting point for any effort."

- Leaders must prioritize the health and safety of their workers and create a culture marked by compassion. Uniphore's founders Ravi Saraogi and Umesh Sachdev believe connecting culture with empathy and compassion is paramount, noting "Empathy trumps money: every minute, every day."[134] CEO of the London Stock Exchange Group David Schwimmer says, "People are looking to me for a different kind of leadership. In this environment, it's about helping people maintain morale. It's about people being prepared for whatever may come in the face of uncertainty."
- Visibly validating the emotional impact of the pandemic and remote work for employees is also key. One study concludes: "While conversations about the emotional toll of the pandemic may seem uncomfortable or unnecessary, they help strengthen ties with employees, who appreciate leaders' openness."[135] And grief expert David Kessler advises, "What everyone has in common is that no matter how they grieve, they share a need for their grief to be witnessed."[136]

McKinsey advises honest discussion about the health crisis throughout the organization. "Normalize emotional concerns of employees at all levels.[137]

Hold top team conversations about real and perceived losses from the pandemic, how it has affected (everyone), and recognize the contributions that the team and all employees have made. Define this as an important and open conversation to have. Ensure that other leaders work with their teams similarly, and cascade the conversation throughout the organization."

Provide Tangible Resources to Support Employees During the Pandemic

While employers cannot prevent the life disruptions and stress resulting from the pandemic and remote work, they can provide tangible processes and tools to better support their employees. "Zoom fatigue," for instance, is real. Some companies have addressed this by holding *no meeting days* where employees can catch up on work, emails, or pressing family matters—and unplug from the physical toll of too much screen time.[138]

MIT Sloan advises making employees experiences as similar as possible to the in-person work world, setting clear expectations on frequency of communication; respecting physical time zones and personal schedules; holding virtual social times focused on bonding; and sending people physical packages as a sign of appreciation (swag, books, snacks, birthday cakes, handwritten notes).[139]

Organizations must also provide and reinforce the availability of programs that support employee wellbeing. A sampling includes enhanced flexibility, health insurance, employee assistance programs, childcare support, and other wellness programs.[140]

- EY is providing employees with free access to apps to support emotional resilience, as well as one-on-one group counseling and daily drop-in sessions where employees can learn tips for managing anxiety, stress, and social isolation.[141]
- The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has developed a comprehensive toolkit to help leaders support their staffs during the crisis.[142]
- Pepsico has offered free virtual summer camp for kids, in order to support parents who need child-care assistance during the pandemic.[143]
- Google has increased its paid caregiving leave policy from six weeks to a total of 14 weeks during the crisis.[144]
- Many organizations are providing access to wellbeing counselors who can help employees address stress.

Virtual Mentoring offers critical human connection during a period of crisis and mandated virtual work.[145] Its unique benefits include the ability to mentor on a global scale and at all levels of an organization. Virtual mentoring also offers more flexibility about when and how to connect, ranging from instant messaging to deep dive virtual meetings.

Keys to success are proactive check-ins between mentors and mentees, leveraging technology well, taking an inclusive approach—carefully considering who is invited to participate and why—and providing guidelines or frameworks for mentors and mentees, especially if they are new to mentorship.

Human Resources—The Culture Caretakers

In organizations that successfully develop and nurture caring cultures, everyone plays a role, and top executives are key. They serve as inspirational visionaries, value leaders, and aspirational role models; however, it is Human Resources (HR) professionals that serve as the "caretakers" of organizational culture.

Ideally, HR serves as a thought partner for leadership, a strategist for policies, and a tactician to implement initiatives that nurture belonging. One HR executive sums it up this way: "We are in the best position to make culture come to life because we are in charge of the people practices of the organization."[146]

HR plays a vital role in perpetuating a strong and inclusive culture, starting with recruiting and selecting applicants who will share the organization's beliefs and thrive in that culture.[147] HR also develops orientation, training, and performance management programs that outline and reinforce the organization's core values, and it ensures that appropriate rewards and recognition go to employees who truly embody the values.

SHRM articulates specific HR responsibilities when it comes to culture:[148]

- Reinforcing and acting as a role model for organizational values and beliefs
- Ensuring that ethics are defined, understood, and practiced
- Enabling effective communications and feedback channels
- Defining roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities
- Providing continuous learning and training
- Enabling reward and recognition systems
- Encouraging employee empowerment and team cohesion
- Identifying and solving individual and organizational problems and issues

HR can play a valuable role in facilitating awareness and understanding of subcultures within an organization, and they can help mitigate the downsides.

PwC reports that since "… organizations all have subcultures, business leaders may not be as attuned to behaviors 'on the ground' that are causing employees to feel that their environment is not inclusive."[149] On the other hand, employees may not be aware of effective culture-related work that is happening at the top of business, such as accountability metrics for executives and diversity data collection. The firm concludes, "Both misconceptions need to be corrected to have authentic leadership support and employee engagement in D&I."

HR Nurtures Inclusion for Underrepresented Groups

HR policies and initiatives that support employees infuse cultures with visible positive culture markers. Policies or programs that might be lacking for underrepresented employees, especially during a time marked by health and racial justice crises, deserve special attention.

Practical considerations include:

- Benefits for domestic partners
- Leave policies for all genders-that treat all parents equally
- Work-life balance and wellness initiatives
- Mentorship/sponsorship programs for underrepresented groups
- Flexible work hours and adequate paid time off so employees can care for family members

- Meetings and presentations that address accessibility issues such as language differences or hearing and vision impairment
- Floating holidays that allow all employees to observe days of cultural or spiritual importance to them
- Sufficient support for Employee Resource Groups (ERGs), particularly those representing people of color
- LGBTQ+ nondiscrimination policies[150]
  - Supporting LGBTQ+ employee resource groups with sponsorship and funding
  - Equal benefits for LGBTQ+ employees
  - Medical leave for employees who are transitioning

HR Should Leverage ERGs for Inclusion

Employee Resource Groups, or ERGs, exemplify a caring culture and provide a valuable support system for employees from underrepresented groups. If they do not already exist, organizations should consider facilitating formation of ERGs for people with disabilities, women of color, veterans, parents, or other groups. ERGs can also support mentorship and sponsorship programs, which are a key ingredient in an inclusive workplace, aiding retention and advancement.

It is critically important, however, to recognize that the presence of ERGs does not ensure an inclusive environment. It is not the role of an ERG to solve problems in an organization. Rather, their purpose is to serve as a resource and support system for marginalized groups.

In fact, if decision-makers miss the mark, ERGs can lead to further workforce segmentation. "For example, a white person in leadership may see that an ERG for Indigenous women exists and consider the work of including Indigenous women done, excusing herself from that work," says one expert.[151]

ERGs should work collaboratively with each other and across the organization, making them part of a holistic approach to inclusion.

For more information about ERGs, please see The CWB research report, *Taking Employee Resource Groups to the Next Level.*

We spoke to a financial services executive who leads a women's ERG. Here's what she had to say:

My hope is that the ERGs can contribute more to the work culture here. We have internal data indicating that employees who participate in ERGs are far more engaged that those who are not. I'm heading up the largest ERG that we have—it's our women's group, with 1,300 to 1,500 members—so I'm aware of what's going on in that space.

Our company has used gender as a definition of inclusivity for a long time, and we are now realizing that we need to define inclusivity in a different way. We need to talk about race and ethnicity. We need to include disability. We need to include sexual orientation.

I think the problem is not that people are opposed to change but that they don't know how to go about making impactful change. We also have a culture where not going along with the crowd has, historically, been difficult. I think our ERGs can really help in tackling these challenges and transforming our culture.

Communicating About Culture

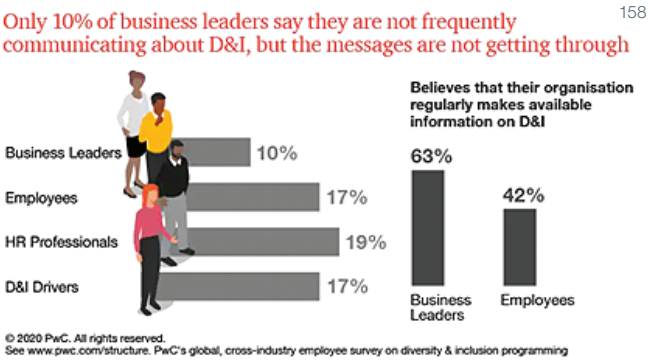
Communicating Your Inclusion Goals, Values, and Plans

A recent PwC study reveals a disconnect between employees' and leaders' perceptions of communications related to inclusivity.[152] While 63 percent of top executives believe their organizations regularly make DE&I information available, only 42 percent of employees agree.

An MIT report concludes that there is no correlation between an organization's official values and the degree of cultural health or inclusion; a significant reason is poor communication.[153]

- Among companies that publish corporate culture statements, less than one quarter include information about how their values help the organization succeed.
- While most businesses assert that culture is a competitive advantage, they often do not explain the link between values and performance, and they are sometimes too abstract.

In contrast, some organizations explicitly spell out the connection between culture and desired organizational outcomes.[154] Netflix is one such company. They describe their culture as *People over Process*, embedding it in the values statement and spelling it out in detail.[155]



At Netflix, the culture philosophy is ***people over process.***

It is imbedded in their values statement and spelled out with these specific descriptors: judgment, communication, curiosity, courage, passion, selflessness, innovation, inclusion, integrity, and impact. And the company clearly communicates that employees are expected to uphold these values in every action and interaction, which will result in a creative, collaborative, and successful organization.

Where companies choose to publish their core values provides a clue as to why they matter, with about 20 percent placing them in the portion of their website targeted to recruitment.[156] At Hubspot—the No. 1 business on Glassdoor's 2020 list of best places to work—here is what's spelled out on the website: "Culture doesn't just help *attract* amazing people, it *amplifies* their abilities and helps them do their best work."[157]

Target attributes its inclusive culture, in part, to "a radical emphasis on courageous conversations and active listening that extends beyond the organization. The company culture is summed up in the call to action to 'stay open.'"[159]

Make Inclusive Communications Strategies the Cultural Norm

Organizations that weave authentic, transparent communications strategies and tools into their day-to-day processes and interactions are ahead of the curve in achieving inclusive cultures.

Inclusive communications strategies are abundant and varied. Consider these best practices:

- **Courageous conversations** are a tool to engage in challenging dialogue across difference, and can be embedded throughout the organization, becoming an integral part of a culture of belonging. For a Courageous Conversations framework, please see Appendix, page 32.
- **Stay interviews,** also discussed on page 12, are an inclusive behavior that makes space for authentic employee feedback separate from the formal review process. First, they enhance overall organizational feedback.[160] In addition, stay interviews give managers a chance to recognize employee loyalty in the moment, demonstrate that they care about more than performance, and validate that they are open to adopting the employee's recommendations.[161]
- **Employee experience blueprints,** designed with guidance and as a group activity in workshops, serve as a foundation for ongoing conversations with managers about expectations versus reality. Employees design their own "experience blueprints," which help them determine and document their priorities. This tool not only enhances communication between managers and workers regarding culture and employee experience, but it also keeps aspirations and reality aligned over time.
- **Group listening sessions** are particularly effective to help heal emotional pain that employees have experienced as a result of racism. They can take a range of formats. Ideally, someone serves as a moderator, providing prompts as needed and ensuring that each individual has the time and space to share their authentic story and be heard without interruption from others.

  In some sessions, the speakers share their life story and experiences from the perspective of someone who has experienced racism. People of different races may speak, or the session might be dedicated to hearing solely from one group of people; i.e., Black employees discussing oppression.

  Listening sessions related to racial injustice might explore these specific questions:

  - What are your earliest memories of being aware that people are mistreated based on the color of their skin?
  - What was good about growing up with your racial identity?
  - What was difficult about growing up with your racial identity?
  - How does it make you feel to witness—or be aware of—racism?
  - When have you stood up against racism?
  - When did you participate in or fail to interrupt racism?

It is not just about having a seat at the table, but a voice.[162]

Urban Zen CEO Helen Aboah believes that one of the reasons she made it to the top was the ability to make her voice heard. She asserts: *Black voices need to be heard, and Black coworkers need to feel confident showing up as their true self, without worrying their every move is being perceived through the lens of their color.*

How Do You Measure Your Culture Quotient?

Assessing culture is inherently difficult. Despite progress, we still lack standardized metrics and effective ways to benchmark relevant data.[163] Additionally, employee responses to engagement and satisfaction surveys are impacted by bias. McKinsey notes, "It is unclear that employee responses to internal satisfaction surveys, even if anonymous, are fully representative of their experiences and are not influenced by employees' perceptions about what their employers consider to be acceptable responses."

In order to effectively assess culture, organizations should utilize a combination of approaches and tools, including employee surveys, interviews, focus groups, and other feedback mechanisms like confidential call lines.

Principal Financial established an ***Ethics Hotline*** so employees can report compensation concerns anonymously, and Intel runs a service it calls ***WarmLine*** to help with discrimination and bias concerns.[164] Via the service, employees can contact case managers who help mitigate issues anonymously. These confidential reporting options help both employees and managers, who can document cases to understand where the organization is falling short.[165]

When businesses use a combination of surveys and in-person feedback mechanisms, they empower employees to provide information in a variety of ways (itself a more inclusive act). For instance, a company-wide employee survey might indicate that older workers feel a lesser sense of belonging than younger employees, and follow-up interviews with those employees might provide the opportunity to better understand their specific age-related experiences along with potential remedies. Investigation that goes beyond surveys helps answer "the why" behind the data.

In a 2020 report, PwC concludes that "Gathering and analyzing data on discrepancies in compensation, hiring, performance and promotion is one of the most powerful ways in which organizations can tackle the unconscious biases that undermine an inclusive culture."[166]

Measurement Strategies and Considerations

Options to gather data go beyond basic surveys, and the way the data is gathered and analyzed impacts its effectiveness as an inclusion tool. Consider the following:

Engagement surveys can dive deeply to better understand if employees feel included, eliciting responses to statements around belonging, communication, development, career opportunities, enablement, and leadership, to name a few.[167]

Pulse surveys offer an ongoing system to check in regularly with employees about improvements that might be needed. Conducted at regular intervals, they are excellent complements to engagement surveys.

Inclusion/exclusion questionnaires provide another effective approach to get at whether employees are experiencing exclusion.[168] They can include a list of "incidents of exclusion," and ask employees to indicate whether and how often they experience such moments. These are akin to the health questionnaires people complete for their doctors.

Anonymous, third-party data collectors are ideal for inclusion surveys of any kind, to ensure employee anonymity.[169] Survey respondents must know they can provide feedback without fear of retaliation; otherwise, their responses will be neither authentic nor complete.

Depth of data is key to quality.[170] Collect demographic data that can be parsed by gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, parental status, age, ability, career level, and more. This approach ensures better understanding of employees' experiences based on identity.

Qualitative evaluations provide context and color for the quantitative findings.[171] One-on-one interviews, exit and stay interviews (please see page 12), and focus groups are all effective methods to gather rich qualitative information about employees' experiences. Measuring inclusion should never be limited to quantitative approaches.

Tracking participation in DE&I training, ERGs, and other relevant initiatives or events provides an additional way to gauge the degree of inclusion in an organization.[172]

Transparency is important.[173] Make it a practice to appropriately share qualitative and quantitative data. This keeps everyone accountable and helps move the culture to a higher level of inclusion and authenticity.

Organizations often struggle with **transparency of data.** A major software company uses a simple approach, posting biannual engagement survey results on a dashboard available to everyone in the organization.[174] It includes personal (anonymous) descriptions of employees' experiences. The information is then used to identify whatever support and training employees might need.

Measurement—Looking Ahead

Stay tuned for more sophisticated approaches—including big data analytics—to overcome shortcomings inherent in current culture measurement approaches.[175] Researchers at Stanford, UC Berkley, and McGill have conducted a series of studies analyzing "digital traces" of culture in electronic communications, such as emails, Slack messages, and Glassdoor reviews. By studying the language employees use in these communications, they can measure how culture actually influences their thoughts and behavior at work.

An MIT/Glassdoor approach to **inclusion assessment** allows employees to easily rate their company's culture and values on a five-point scale.[176] Because quantitative scores alone provide minimal insight, they enhance understanding by utilizing respondent's text responses. In the texts, employees describe in their own words the positives and negatives of their workplace and offer advice. Analysis of the contextual data provides critical granular employee insight about their organization's culture, revealing views about values like diversity, transparency, collaboration, or integrity.

Transforming Workplace Culture

BCG research concludes that leaders must focus on culture change in order to improve employees' "1,000 daily touch points."[177] Indeed, negative touch points are costly: employees who experience more negative touch points are 40 percent less productive and 13 times more likely to quit their jobs. In this context, the imperative for culture transformation becomes easy to understand.

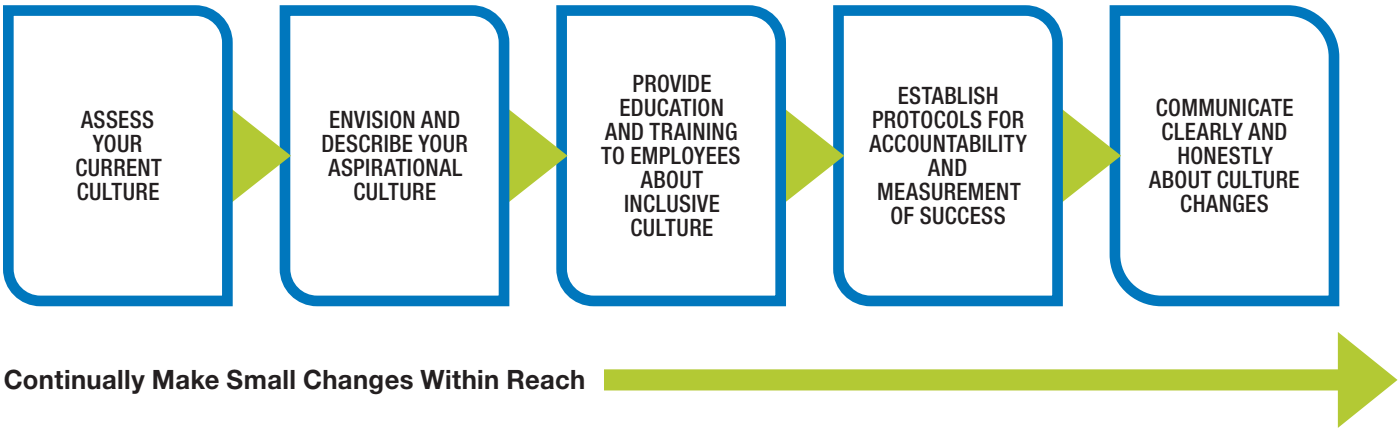
Those looking to create significant, lasting change must first step back and consider high-level strategies. The starting point is process. Practical process steps should include:[178]

1. Assess your current culture.
2. Envision and describe your aspirational culture.
3. Provide education and training to employees about inclusive culture.
4. Establish protocols for accountability and measurement of success.
5. Communicate clearly and honestly about culture changes.

As part of the **culture change initiative,** be sure to take an objective, evidence-based approach to reviewing culture and values.[179] Examine which elements of the culture are working; which aspects are not working; where the pockets of cultural excellence can be found; and which managers and teams are nurturing or undermining values.

This cultural diagnostics exercise might reveal surprises. Perhaps the inclusion values are too abstract or generic or perhaps they are divorced from how employees interact on a daily basis. In such cases, organizations must redesign or refresh core values and provide a concrete behavioral guide linked to outcomes that matter to employees.

CWB Culture Transformation Process Model



The literature converges on the following key ingredients to successful culture change:[180]

- Ensure that top leaders drive the change but that a cross section of people throughout the organization are also engaged.
  - Transformation requires a committed group of people, even in small numbers.
  - Leverage diverse strengths, giving people on the periphery the chance to contribute.[181]
- Communicate consistently and authentically about the need for change and the ongoing transformation process.
  - Leaders must be visible and vocal, sharing their explicit narratives about why inclusion is personally important to them and how it will impact employees and the organization more broadly.[182]
- Provide comprehensive leadership training focused on emotional and psychological competency.[183]
  - Consider core development programs that address emotional intelligence and cultural competency.
- Institute short-term accessible strategies while working on longer-term culture change.
  - Empower employees to impact culture directly in numerous ways.[184] For starters, invite employees to examine or reconsider how their roles tie back to organizational purpose or mission, to instigate change and action at the grassroots level.[185] Ask them to consider the small practices they can put in place on their teams right now.

Change is hard, and leaders driving organizational change must work actively to reassure employees during the transition. Talk about organizational culture as a living thing—not an abstract concept.[186] Point out the ways policies will change while also remaining true to the original aspects of culture that might have attracted valued employees.

Culture transformation leaders must remember to:

- Reaffirm what makes their organization great for employees and stakeholders
- Document their vision about culture
- Invite input from all employees

Prioritizing Culture for Future Success

The imperative to transform workplace culture is greater than ever. For the first time, the workforce spans four generations, each with unique skills, knowledge, and needs. While Millennials have made their mark with increased diversity and attention to culture, Gen Zs —the youngest workers—comprise the most diverse employee group ever to enter the workforce. Lenovo-Intel describes them as "activist citizens…who value their personal brand and carry it through in everything they do, including where they choose to work."

Organizations that prioritize culture will reap rewards in the short term and, perhaps more importantly, create an environment where the youngest generation can thrive, contribute, and succeed over the long-term.

Appendix: Courageous Conversations

What is a courageous conversation?

A tool for engaging in uncomfortable feedback conversations in the workplace. Courageous conversations require honesty, openness, and vulnerability. In organizations working toward inclusion and equity, these types of conversations can happen in real time as a challenging dynamic arises or during more formal, private conversations.

When is it appropriate to initiate a courageous conversation?

One way to help you decide is to consider the possible outcomes of both having and not having the conversation. You might consider the following reflection questions:

- What might I gain from having this conversation?
- What might be the outcome (for this interpersonal dynamic) if I choose not to have the conversation?
- How might my experience at work improve or worsen by having this conversation?
- What are the risks and rewards involved in having and not having this conversation?

How do I ensure dialogue and prevent debate?

Dialogue is the reciprocal, honest and open exchange of information between both parties, leading to shared meaning of the experience being discussed. This is a learning stance, with both parties demonstrating curiosity about one another's point of view.

How do I develop cultural humility?

To develop cultural humility begin by examining your own culture; include your values, learned beliefs, traditions, and the principles that guide your behavior. Understanding your own culture facilitates the development of cultural humility because it allows you to discern between your own preferences and the culturally-informed preferences of others.

To ensure a safe, constructive, and productive exchange, reflect on your goals in advance and consider using this courageous conversation framework, adapting it to your own communication style.

> *While no one conversation is guaranteed to change the trajectory of your career or life, any single conversation can.*
>
> — Susan Scott,
> Fierce Conversations

Assess the situation and whether it warrants a discussion. Ask yourself:

- What are my possible risks and gains?
- Who is my recipient and what are they like? How might they respond?
- Is my viewpoint accurate?

Address real or perceived personal roadblocks, such as:

- There isn't a problem.
- There's no benefit to talking.
- There will be negative consequences to talking.

Be aware of emotions.

- Listen with intention and empathy.
- Accept feedback calmly and thoughtfully.

Assume positive intent.

- Put judgments and views aside.

Focus on dialogue – not debate.

- Create an environment for dialogue.
- Make sure your own statements are backed up by facts.
- Don't be repetitive.

Demonstrate personal and cultural humility.

- Hold yourself and others accountable.
- Commit to ongoing learning.

Be vulnerable, transparent and willing to admit mistakes.

- Have courage and willingness to learn from mistakes.
- Don't be color blind; instead, honor all unique identities.

Create trusting, safe spaces.

- Honor inevitable discomfort, especially in dialogue about underrepresentation and bias.

Expect and accept lack of closure.

- "Hang out in uncertainty," understanding that a situation might not have an immediate solution but may require more thought and discussion.

Fully commit to the conversation by speaking up about bias, gender and other representation issues.

- Remember that talking about the issues does not create divisiveness; dialogue is a step towards positive change.

Content drawn from Catalyst and Bentley University

Culture of Belonging Glossary

Ally (Allyship): A person who works actively to create equitable environments that affirm diversity and inclusion. The term was originally used to communicate straight allyship with LGBTQ+ communities. The term is now used more broadly, and can refer to white allies for individuals who advocate for racial justice and male allies for men who advocate for women's equality efforts.

Assimilation: A person's original ethnic identity is suppressed in an attempt to adjust to the dominant culture required.[187]

Belonging: A sense of acceptance, inclusion, and identity resulting in an employee feeling secure and supported at work.[188]

Bias Blind Spot: The tendency of people to see themselves as less susceptible to unconscious predispositions and cognitive influences than others.[189]

Cognitive Diversity: The wide variety of ways employees think and solve problems. It recognizes the spectrum of styles by which individuals acquire knowledge. Embracing cognitive diversity results in appreciation and acceptance of employee differences in perceiving, reasoning, and problem solving.[190]

Covering: A form of identity management where an individual downplays or disassociates from one of their identities.[191]

Cultural Competence: Understanding one's own cultural identity and possessing the competency to work effectively across cultural difference—see cultural intelligence.[192]

Cultural Diversity: A well-rounded community comprised of individuals with varied identities such as race, ethnicity, age, ability, languages, nationality, socioeconomic status, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and more.[193]

Cultural Intelligence: Being attentive to others' cultures and adapting as required.[194]

Cultural Identity: Feeling of belonging and addressing one's self to their own ethnic or cultural group.[195]

Culture Fit: Attributes that align with an organization's mission, goals, and values. Hiring for culture fit sometimes presents a challenge resulting from bias: hiring managers can conflate culture fit with "I like being with this person,"[196] which can lead to too much homogeneity in an organization.[197]

Culture Gap: Occurs when leaders' perceptions of what people care about are different than employees' perceptions and the actual realities of the culture.[198]

Curiosity Quotient (CQ): References degree of interest people have regarding new concepts and experiences. A person with a higher CQ is more open to new experiences, focuses on gaining more knowledge, and tends to be less satisfied with routine.[199]

DEI: Acronym for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

Discrimination: Unfair treatment and actions based on prejudice (see below) including violence, threats, slander, and exclusion.[200]

Emotional Carrying Capacity: The extent to which people can constructively express emotions, both positive and negative, or be emotionally vulnerable with their coworkers. When emotional carrying capacity exists, it can serve as a source of individual and team resilience.[201]

Emotional Intelligence: The ability to understand, use, and manage your own emotions in positive ways to relieve stress, communicate effectively, empathize with others, overcome challenges and defuse conflict. [202]

Emotional Tax: Refers to the emotional energy individuals from underrepresented groups must spend to counter the impact of unfair treatment—such as bias, exclusion, or discrimination. Marginalized employees often describe this as a perpetual state of being on guard.[203]

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs): An affiliated subgroup of employees within an organization who share distinctive qualities, interests or goals. For more information on ERGs, see the CWB's curated research report, Taking Employee Resource Groups to the Next Level.[204]

Emotional Quotient (EQ): Concerns a person's ability to perceive, control, and express emotions.[205]

Equality: Treating everyone the same way, often

while assuming that everyone also starts out on equal footing or with the same opportunities. Contrasted with equity.[206]

Equity: Recognizes that everyone in an organization does not start at the same place and ensures equal access to opportunity for all employees.

Equity Audit: Assesses whether an organization is creating an equitable environment by assessing barriers to equity that might exist in practices, policies, and systems, including hiring and promotion rates.[207]

For All Leadership: References an inclusive leadership quality that respects, embraces, and harnesses the value of people with diverse backgrounds. Empathy is a key characteristic of For All Leadership.[208]

Glass Ceiling: A metaphor for the barriers that impact advancement in a profession, especially affecting women and those from other underrepresented groups. Women often reach a certain level and cannot break through that ceiling.

Imposter Syndrome: A psychological phenomenon where people doubt their accomplishments and sometime fear being exposed as a "fraud."

Inclusion: A term used to indicate the extent to which individuals from diverse backgrounds within organizations feel valued and represented within all levels of the organization's hierarchy.

Inclusive Workplace: A working atmosphere where all people—regardless of identity—feel a sense of belonging, are able to contribute fully, and thrive.[209]

Inclusive Leader: A leader who intentionally welcomes and incorporates the contributions of all within an organization to encourage teams to voice different perspectives.[210]

Intersectionality: Describes the unique ways race, gender, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, ability, status, and other social and demographic identities come together to inform peoples' lived experiences. For more information on Intersectionality, read the CWB's curated research report, Intersectionality in the Workplace: Broadening the Lens of Inclusion.[211]

Male Ally: A man who utilizes his privilege to advocate for and support women, along with initiatives and processes that advance gender equity. Also see Ally.

Micro-Aggression: Subtle and normally unintentional slight—resulting from unconscious bias—that undervalues or demeans a person. See Micro-Inequity.

Micro-Exclusion: The experience of social exclusion, often unintentional, that negatively impacts a person's psychological wellbeing.[212]

Micro-Inequity: Subtle and normally unintentional slight—resulting from unconscious bias—that undervalues or demeans a person. See Micro-Aggression.

Mono-Culture: An exclusionary organization where the values of one group, culture, or style are dominant.[213]

Multicultural: An inclusive organization where the values of diverse people are embraced and they can contribute to organizational goals and excellence.[214]

Multicultural Diversity Competence: The ability to demonstrate respect and understanding, to communicate effectively, and to work collaboratively with individuals from different cultural backgrounds.[215]

Multicultural Organization: An organization comprised of people from a diversity of cultural identities that offers equal opportunity for input and advancement, and continuously acts to make systemic changes that enhance inclusion for all kinds of people.[216]

Neurodiverse: See cognitive diversity.

Non-binary: A category for a fluid constellation of gender identities beyond the woman/man gender binary.[217]

Psychological Safety: An emotional state in which an employee feels free to hold differing views and

secure enough to address challenging issues or take risks without being penalized.[218]

Racism: The marginalization and/or oppression of people of color based on a socially constructed racial hierarchy that privileges white people.[219]

> **Averse Racism:** Subtle forms of bias and discrimination that exist within otherwise well-intentioned individuals, who see themselves as progressive.[200]
>
> **Systemic Racism:** A combination of systems, institutions and factors that advantage white people and cause widespread harm and disadvantages in access and opportunity for people of color.[221]

Readiness Gap: The divide between an organization's ability to recognize the importance of wellbeing and ability to address it.[222]

Social Awareness: The ability to recognize and understand interpersonal and group dynamics, including the ability to understand the emotions of co-workers and other people with whom one interacts.[223]

Social Intelligence: The ability to recognize the social dynamics in a workplace and the skills to effectively negotiate them.[224]

Stay Interview: An authentic, structured conversation between employees and their leadership to discuss the employee's motivations to continue working for an organization (what's working well) and any areas of concern.[225]

Toxic Managers: Managers who consistently use power to fulfill their own needs.[226]

Unconscious Bias: Social stereotypes outside of a person's conscious awareness; these influence decision-making and behavior in ways the person does not notice.

Values: The beliefs, philosophies, and principles that shape an organization's culture. They impact the employee experience as well as the relationship customers, partners, shareholders, and other stakeholders.[227]

Whole-Person Approach: A holistic, evidence-based perspective that values the interconnection between varied areas of a person's life and the impact this has for them at work (e.g., physical health, financial wellbeing, stress, emotional challenges, and one's life at work).[228]

Workplace Diversity: Refers to an organization comprised of people of varying characteristics, such as gender, race, ethnicity, cognitive and other abilities, age, religion, race, cultural background, sexual orientation, religion, languages, education, abilities, and more.[229]

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