

HR Insights

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The Value of Belonging in the Workplace

Social belonging is a fundamental human need—one that naturally extends to the workplace. According to the Center for Talent Innovation, when people feel like they belong at work, they are more productive, motivated and engaged, thus making them 3.5 times more likely to contribute to their fullest potential.

With hybrid and remote workplaces becoming increasingly popular, additional employee experience layers must be considered among employers. Ultimately, employers can elevate their workforce experiences by creating spaces where employees feel they belong.

As employers compete for top talent, they can turn their attention to workplace culture and belonging to keep employees engaged and make them feel accepted. This article explores the concept of belonging and the benefits of building an inclusive culture in the workplace.

What Is Belonging?

Belonging is a critical component of company culture. At work, belonging is the experience of employees being wholly accepted and included by those around them.

Professional services network Deloitte defines employees' sense of belonging as how organizations can foster diverse, equitable and inclusive communities for these workers and how they feel like members of the broader world. This impacts how employees are accepted and feel comfortable being themselves, as well as how they contribute to their respective organizations' common goals.

Furthermore, Deloitte states that creating a sense of belonging requires the following mutually reinforcing attributes:

- **Comfort**—Employees should feel comfortable at work, which necessitates being treated fairly and respected by their co-workers and leaders.
- **Connection**—Employees should feel they have meaningful relationships with co-workers and teams, keeping them connected to organizational goals.
- **Contribution**—Employees should feel they contribute to meaningful outcomes, understanding how their strengths help achieve common goals.

Many workplace factors can impact employees' sense of belonging, including (but not limited to) company culture, benefits offerings, communication methods, learning and development resources and mental health support. Any day-to-day interactions among co-workers and managers or companywide initiatives may impact workplace culture and the overall employee experience.

Benefits of Belonging

A Deloitte report ranked belonging as the top human capital issue organizations face today. Nearly three-quarters (73%) of respondents said fostering a sense of belonging was important to promote company success, with 93% agreeing that a sense of belonging drives organizational performance.

In a culture of belonging, employees are encouraged to bring their most authentic selves to work and unlock their full potential. Belonging isn't just beneficial for employees, but for organizations, too. Specifically, creating a sense of belonging in the workplace can offer the following advantages:

- Improved employee performance
- Boosted employee engagement
- Reduced employee absenteeism
- Decreased employee turnover
- Enhanced workforce experiences
- Strengthened workplace culture
- Elevated employer branding

Employee belonging impacts wellness and happiness, but also affects engagement, motivation and retention. That's why many organizations rethinking their diversity, equity and inclusion efforts often add a renewed focus on belonging. Outside of these initiatives, a focus on belonging can play a key role in improving workplace culture.

How Employers Can Foster Belonging

Although creating a culture of belonging is vital from an organizational and leadership level, managers and supervisors have the potential to be the most impactful with individual employees. Here are some common ways managers can foster a sense of belonging in the workplace:

- **Check in with employees.** Regular one-on-one meetings can help employees feel a greater sense of belonging when their managers and co-workers check in on them personally and professionally.
- **Ask for input.** It's essential for managers to continually ask employees what they can do to promote belonging and make employees feel accepted. This can be part of an ongoing dialogue.
- **Give employees a voice.** Managers can aid in encouraging employees to speak up and share their thoughts. For example, if someone has the floor but is being interrupted, managers can step in to moderate and let the original speaker continue.

Alternatively, if an employee rarely speaks up, managers can check in with this individual privately to ask how they can be better included in team conversations.

- **Create a psychologically safe space.** Being psychologically safe means employees feel secure in taking risks and being vulnerable in front of others. Managers should intervene if they see others being disrespectful.

Successful teams are built on trust and respect, and a sense of belonging strongly supports this concept. As such, organizations should always aim to create spaces where everyone feels welcome.

Summary

In short, people want to feel a sense of belonging and value in their communities, including the workplace. Isolation at work can lead to employee disengagement, negative perceptions of employers or job dissatisfaction. Leaders are responsible for building trust and acceptance, which will help create safe spaces for employees.

Thoughtful belonging efforts can bolster the overall employee experience by allowing staff to bring their authentic selves to work. In turn, these initiatives may carry additional workplace benefits, such as enhanced productivity and performance.

Contact ToughComp today for additional resources on building a strong workplace culture.