Strategies, Suggestions & Stories: How to Create, Facilitate and Sustain an Inclusive and Empathetic Workplace Environment

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Overview

- Definitions
- Small changes with huge impact
- Story Time
- Q&A
- Closeout

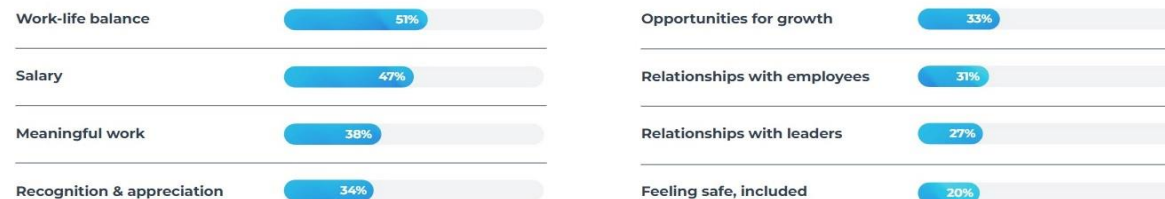# Definitions

► **Belonging-** Can be defined as a subjective feeling that one is an integral part of their surrounding systems, including family, friends, school, work environments, communities, cultural groups, and physical places (Hagerty et al., 1992).

► **Inclusive Workplaces-** Refers to practices, behaviors, and structures that promote a sense of belonging and interdependence of the collective and encourage divergent ideas, acknowledge unique skills and experiences, and value individual characteristics and identities (Morukian, 2022).

► **Empathetic Workplaces-** Ability to share and understand others' emotions, taking on other's perspectives, and is non-judgmental

   ► Stronger collaboration, less stress and greater morale, bounce back more quickly

The State of Job Satisfaction

▶ Overall job satisfaction has hit an alarming low, with just 22% of professionals surveyed giving their company a rating of excellence. Even fewer non-supervisory employees would describe their company's job satisfaction as excellent (13%).

▶ A people-centric culture, focused on high-performance is now a critical component in achieving desired business results.

Which of the following contributes most to your overall job satisfaction?

Work-life balance	51%
Salary	47%
Meaningful work	38%
Recognition & appreciation	34%

Opportunities for growth	33%
Relationships with employees	31%
Relationships with leaders	27%
Feeling safe, included	20%

Prioritizing People-Centricity

▶ Employees who are most satisfied with their jobs put less weight on salary than all others, and place significantly more weight on relationships with both employees and leaders. Which of the following contributes most to your overall job satisfaction.

▶ Low engagement is far more likely to be recognized as a top challenge by managers and non-supervisory roles than by executives and other leadership.

   ▶ Non-supervisory employees are more than 2x more likely to identify low engagement as a challenge than executives.

Percent of those who rated low morale and engagement as a significant challenge to the success of their organization:

21%	34%	42%	50%
Executives	VP/Director	Manager	Non-supervisory employees

Redefining The Employee Experience

- The 2024 trends point to the importance of recognizing the humanity in our peers and prove that people-first workplaces are the ones coming out on top. And by on top, we mean greater productivity, stronger morale, lower turnover, and more revenue.

  - Employees' job satisfaction have little to do with their jobs themselves, but are more broadly about how employees are treated and how they feel while on the job.

- Today's professionals crave a workplace that not only complements their life outside of work, but also serves as a place where they can contribute with purpose.

Where Can We Go?! There's Hope!

▶ Feelings of appreciation, inclusion, and belonging start with an individual being able to identify the impact they're making on overall company objectives.

▶ Feelings of value and appreciation can come from more than just acknowledgement with rewards. Treating employees as people who matter equally, allowing them to see the positive impact they make on company goals, as well as their impact on others—and emphasizing that their contribution matters—all contribute to promoting appreciation and employee well-being.

5 ways to make employees feel appreciated at work

Provide regular feedback

Express your gratitude

Listen and act on employee feedback

Recognize accomplishments publicly

Ensure employees understand how their efforts impact company goals

Putting People First: Power of Words/Stories (Language)

- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) work requires an understanding of how history has shaped the way we experience the world.

- Power of words: Can be used to inspire, illuminate, and elevate. They can also be used to inflict pain, dismiss, and destroy. Words are to be chosen with great care and intention.

- Power of stories: The stories we hear, and the stories we tell one another have great power. We have to be open to having our beliefs and assumptions challenged.

  - The old adage "History is told often told by the winners" clouds our collective understanding of the past and does not accurately reflect the experiences of those who have been systematically oppressed, traditionally marginalized, and victimized (Morukian, 2022).

Putting People First: Power of Words/Stories (Language)

- It amplifies the relationship between language and cultural identity
  - Language does not exist in isolation; language is a part of culture.
  - Language and culture are at the core of all human society.
  - Language is a symbolic system through which people communicate and transmit culture

    Thornborrow, J. (2010).

- In short, understanding the importance of language and (communication characteristics) are ways for your department/organization to improve social interactions, conflict management, and workplace culture.

Ways to Improve Workplace Communication

▶ Listen actively

  ▶ Most of us spend a good part of our conversations thinking about what we'll say next— not actively listening. Furthermore, we're easily distracted by our phones, computers, and what's happening around us.

  ▶ It's important to give your full attention to the person speaking. Maintain eye contact and avoid interrupting. Once they've said what they want to say, ask clarifying questions to make sure you understand. Show that you relate to what they're saying and validate their perspective by repeating back to them what you heard.

  ▶ Ensuring employees feel heard not only improves communication but also has tangible business benefits. In a global study by The Workforce Institute at UKG and Workplace Intelligence, 74% of employees reported they're more engaged at work and more effective at their jobs when they feel heard.

* Ways to Improve Workplace Communication by Lyra Health

Transparency and Clarity

▶ Convey the what, why, and how

  ▶ In any type of communication, it's important to understand your audience. Keep in mind the three things they want conveyed: what's happening or what needs to be done, why, and how you'll support them through it. Think about how to apply these three essentials across the spectrum of communication— whether it's written, in-person, or digital.

  ▶ It's also best to be direct. "With any kind of information sharing, direct communication is important," said Wasserman. "Be sure to pair it with the support people need to be successful."

  * Ways to Improve Workplace Communication by Lyra Health

Ways to Improve Workplace Communication

▶ Be aware of your emotions

    ▶ Self-awareness can impact how you communicate. It's important to check how you're feeling about a situation, gauge your mood and stress level, and assess how that might color your delivery or receipt of a message. "Mental health support can help people regulate their emotions so they can be better communicators," said Wasserman.

▶ Exercise empathy

    ▶ Empathy is an essential part of effective communication. It's important to tune into what the other person is feeling so your message resonates with them. Put yourself in the other person's shoes and consider the situation from their perspective. Let them know you hear them and understand that they may be facing challenges or have anxiety about what's happening. This is especially important in stressful or uncertain times. If you're the one receiving the message, show empathy for the person delivering it.

    * Ways to Improve Workplace Communication by Lyra Health

Encourage Feedback

▶ You can improve communication by creating a work culture that encourages employees to share their thoughts, feelings, and ideas, as well as their constructive feedback.

▶ Regular one-on-one meetings with those you manage can cultivate this sense of psychological safety and allow feedback to flow in both directions. The most effective feedback is specific, timely, and focused on behaviors and outcomes. Be sure to ask for the other person's perspective and suggestions and create a plan to address necessary actions. When you're receiving feedback, try not to get defensive—even if you feel it's unjust. This is critical for fostering psychological safety.

▶ The Situation-Behavior-Impact (SBI) model is a helpful, bi-directional framework to help with giving and receiving feedback. It has you describe the situation in which the behavior occurred, recount the actual behavior, and explain the impact it had.

▶ Assessments and employee surveys are another way to ask for feedback and show you're listening by acting on the responses. Eighty-eight percent of respondents in the UKG survey said their organization is more likely to perform well financially when their employees feel heard, are engaged, and have a sense of belonging.

* Ways to Improve Workplace Communication by Lyra Health

Lessons Learned

- Justin's Story
    - Going from peer to leader
        - Developing a common language and setting expectations
    - Being a climber and connector
        - Being a self-aware leader and also prioritize the well-being of team members
    - Finding time to be relational versus task orientated
        - When I can democratize and humanize—Do it!
            - "If you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together." -African Proverb
- Holly's Story
    - Roger's core conditions: nonjudgment, empathic understanding, authenticity
    - People are imperfect and fallible and will make mistakes
    - How we meet and respond to mistakes matters
- Bethany's story
    - Using people's strengths- seeking multiple perspectives
    - Responding to people's emotions- listen deeply, be curious
    - Ideals differ from norms- acknowledgment and accountability

It's a small world after all….

- Based on building connection and belonging
  - Recognize people for their individual contributions
    - Supervision, team meetings, emails, gratitude
  - Provide opportunity for connection daily
    - Watercooler moments
  - Support people in their daily work and career development
    - Context is important- micro manager vs. supportive
  - Seek out a variety of opinions
    - Increase engagement
  - Foster a growth mind set- empathy is a skill that can be learned
    - Reinforce the idea of learning
    - Foster an environment of acceptance- mistakes are ok
    - Recognize growth and change
  - Listen deeply and be curious
    - Don't assume
  - Accountability and acknowledgment
    - Set expectations and agree on accountability measures

Language Matters

▶ Trigger warning!

▶ On February 26, 2012, George Zimmerman fatally shot Trayvon Martin — an unarmed Black teenager. At his own trial, Zimmerman claimed that he shot Martin in self-defense. However, Rachel Jeantel, who was on the phone with Martin at the time of the shooting, testified that Martin was fleeing Zimmerman — not approaching him. While Jeantel's first-hand account of the moments leading to Martin's death represents crucial evidence in the case against Zimmerman, her testimony was largely disregarded by the (mostly White) jurors. Jeantel spoke in African American English, which jurors reported was "hard to understand" and "not credible." In jury deliberations, Jeantel's testimony was never once mentioned.

   ▶ **Beyond how we perceive the language used by others, the language we use ourselves has real-world impacts.** Using language that is racially discriminatory, has racist origins / histories, or is imprecise can impact the wellbeing of individuals. Language can also instill and perpetuate harmful stereotypes and biases, as well as signal exclusion or inclusion.

Discussion

▶ Share one way you have made a difference this week.

▶ What are two things you can start immediately?

▶ What might be some barriers?

▶ What are some things you think you or your organization does really well when it comes to creating inclusive and empathetic workplaces?

Resources

- Hawthorne Effect- motivated behavior through special attention, involvement in workplace decisions, and knowing their welfare matters.

  - https://www.library.hbs.edu/hc/hawthorne/09.html

  - http://ncbgudi.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Hawthorne-Experiments.pdf

- Halo and Horn Effect- cognitive bias of an employee's good or bad behavior based on partial impression.

  - https://www.simplypsychology.org/halo-effect.html

  - https://zenodo.org/records/1429134

- **Gender Diversity Initiatives at Duolingo**

  - The case study 'Gender Diversity Initiatives at Duolingo' talks about gender disparity in America's software industry, research findings on the effectiveness of a diverse workforce, and Duolingo's strategy to increase the number of women software engineers in its workforce.

    - On close introspection, Duolingo's management found that women candidates had rejected its offer as the hiring panel consisted of only men, which gave the impression that Duolingo was a male dominated company.

  - The company's management, which strongly believed in having a more diverse workforce, revamped its hiring process to get more women software engineers on board. This strategy was very successful and helped Duolingo to hire an equal number of new women and men computer science graduates in 2018. Duolingo also explored ways to move beyond gender parity, looking to bring in more diversity at all levels of the organization that included other aspects such as race and disabilities.