

Highlights

- 1 Contextualizing equality and belonging
- 2 Key elements of equality and belonging in the workplace
- 3 Considerations for leadership action on equality and belonging

JUNE 2022

Equality and belonging

Lived experiences in the workplace



An **employee's experience in the workplace is nurtured both by its material conditions as well as its relational aspects** i.e. the dynamics and communication among coworkers and superiors. In order to participate and contribute to the workplace ecosystem, an employee needs to have a sense of the role they occupy within it. **This role is often gauged through the nature of their relationships with teams and leaders, the opportunities they are given, the values that govern their experiences, and the boundaries that form workplace culture.**

In this edition of #research4outcomes, we outline the cultural enablers of equality and belonging in the workplace. **Our insights stem from an engagement with a global retail company, through research methods that spanned policy reviews, one-on-one conversations, culture workshops, and diary studies.**

We studied our insights in the context of two frameworks. **The Human Needs Theory details the basic psychological, social and biological needs that humans possess**, not necessarily in a specific hierarchy or prioritization. **The Culture Bonds framework captures the push and pull factors that determine culture in an agile, digital-first environment.** Connecting these two theories helped bolster our understanding of the motivations, desires and challenges that employees navigate in the spheres of equality and belonging.

Understanding equality and belonging for leaders and employees



Key elements of equality

- Being treated *fairly, and with respect and empathy*, regardless of gender/ culture/ nationality/ orientation.
- Being given *equal opportunity* for growth and the *same rights as others*.
- *Acknowledging and appreciating differences*, of all kinds, and being treated equally despite that.
- *Being listened to and having your perspective valued* despite differences.
- Being *open and transparent* in all that you do; *Same information flow and communication* across levels, teams and geographies.



Key elements of belonging

- Being *acknowledged, recognized, appreciated and celebrated* by coworkers and superiors, feeling valued. *Meritocratic work environment*.
- *Being connected and feeling the camaraderie* with team members. "Being like a family."
- Feeling aligned with the company's goals, aspirations and purpose. *Included in decision making*.
- *Receiving organizational support and "care"* for personal as well as professional hardships. Feeling a sense of being "safe".
- Being provided *opportunities and freedom to speak up, without judgment*; opportunities to learn and develop. *Feeling empowered*.

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Considerations for leadership action on equality and belonging

Speaking up

The *creation and maintenance of forums where employees can voice their concerns and opinions* is vital to a culture of transparency and equality. Employees are supported by the existence of these platforms, and can be encouraged to speak up. *For newer employees, these become spaces where they can familiarize themselves with the existing culture.* Such platforms, if constructed to include anonymity, can also *build comfort around difficult conversations.*

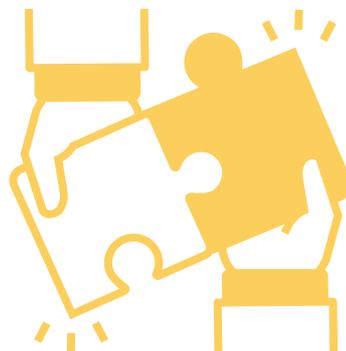
Response



Ensuring that there is a **strong feedback loop** will make employees feel that they are being listened to. If **empathy is built among the leadership, it will seep through the organization, not only ensuring that employees are heard, but also translating into action steps.**

Collaboration / working together

When working both within and across teams as well as levels, **open and transparent communication can lead to higher camaraderie and quicker resolution of problems.** Establishing **shared goals can strengthen cross functional collaboration.**



Regular peer and leadership connects can help maintain alignment, especially given the switch to virtual work post-pandemic. Furthermore, providing **space for upward feedback** can help smoothen collaborative efforts.

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Decision making

When employees are free to take decisions within the realm of their work, it **highlights the trust** that is placed in their abilities and sense of judgement. Including relevant functional groups in decision making processes can serve to **diffuse perceived power centers, lending a sense of fairness to the workplace culture.**



Celebrations and rituals

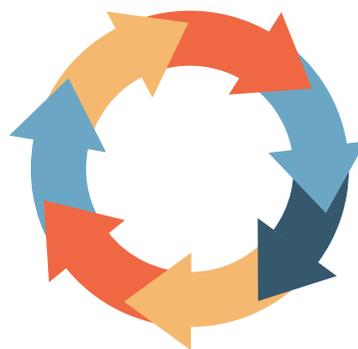
When good performance is noticed and rewarded, employees feel appreciated in their roles. Incorporating rituals such as cross-geo, cross-level events and

occasions into work culture makes people feel part of a community that celebrates together. **Sharing physical symbols of the organization can also strengthen this sense of community.** Scheduling recurring connects with team members and managers allows for smaller scale personal ties as well.

Information flow and change management

Information should be organized in such a way that it can be sought as needed, with as much transparency as possible. **When implementing change, leaders should ensure that employees understand the larger strategic purpose behind it.**

For newer employees, greater support may need to be provided when introducing new processes, in order to prevent imbalances in the reception of information. All employees should be made to realize their relevance in the larger organizational structure.



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Work-life balance

Feeling trusted, needed, and cared for in the workplace can help employees navigate their daily routines better. ***With remote work becoming prominent, it is important to acknowledge that employees can face digital fatigue.*** Helping them set boundaries between work and home, such as a fixed time to log off, and short screen-free breaks during the day, can tackle burnout. ***Wellness benefits that include families as well can create a feeling of community support.***



Growth

Supporting employees' growth aspirations can strengthen their beliefs in their own potential. Providing them opportunities to upskill and learn creates a growth-fostering environment.

Ensuring that such support and opportunities are provided equally across geographies, functions and levels is imperative. Being receptive to ideas that challenge the status quo can allow employees the freedom to experiment and be creative.

As organizations navigate newer territories, it is critical to ensure that employees at all levels feel secure and valued within the cultural space of the workplace.

Through our interdisciplinary research and design offering, OrgScapes, we enable organizations to practice better workplace listening; and understand how lived experiences in the everyday are shaping the meanings and future aspirations of their talent.

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