

Employers Guide to Well-Being and DEIB

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1. Introduction

“Diversity is having a seat at the table, inclusion is having a voice, and belonging is having that voice be heard” (Fosslien L, & Duffy, M.W., 2019).

Since the murder of George Floyd in May of 2020, many corporate businesses, non-profit organizations, universities, and government entities made public statements and commitments to begin, enhance, and/or resurrect their diversity, equity, and inclusion programs. Some have argued these public commitments were performative and merely good public relations^{1 2}. Genuine or not, study and investment in the field of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) in the workplace has increased significantly in the last two and a half years^{3 4 5}. From this research, it has been found that employees belonging to non-dominant demographic groups: including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, veteran status, political view, etc. have fewer feelings of belonging at work^{6 7}. Additionally, evidence suggests that stronger feelings of inclusion and belonging lead to greater job satisfaction, longevity, pride, and promotion of the company to others⁸.

2. DEIB in the Workplace

While many employers have the best of intentions, studies have indicated that the ways in which DEIB has traditionally been incorporated into work environments has continued to leave many people who identify as members of various minority groups feeling disconnected, unseen, and unsupported^{9 10 11}.

- For many years, increasing diversity at work simply meant hiring people from a variety of diverse backgrounds. While this addresses the “numbers” problem in an organization, it does not necessarily meaningfully incorporate diverse ideas or representations^{12 13}.
- Often, individuals belonging to non-dominant groups are the only one or one of a few minorities in their particular company division or specialty. This is shown to lead to feelings of isolation, exclusion, bias, unequal expectations, and pressure to perform “better” than peers of the dominant background simply to feel seen or heard^{14 15 16}.
- Research has also indicated that differences in resource access exist between dominant and non-dominant groups in the workplace. These distinctions are not only perceived but concrete^{17 18}. Access to professional networks, personal/familial relationships, and mentorship opportunities are disparate^{19 20}.

- As an example, there is evidence for differences in networking expectations and practices between people identifying as male and female. These differences can lead to loss of promotion opportunities, loss of individual successes, and an impact on wellness^{19 20}.
- In a study conducted by Coquel in May 2020, questions were asked of over 3,700 college-educated professionals. In one section, there were questions related to the pandemic. It was found that Black colleagues were five times more likely to have lost a family member to COVID than White colleagues. Latinx colleagues were four times more likely than Whites, and Asians were two times more likely^{26 27}. Additionally, in that same study, it was found that 21% of Asian female professionals had changed their behavior outside of work to avoid harassment. Clearly, employees of different backgrounds come to work with different stories—are these stories ever heard or acknowledged?
- In the same study conducted by Coquel in 2020, individuals ranked their sense of belonging in the workplace on a scale of 0-10. White men scored highest with an average of 7.6/10 while Black women and Asian women scored lowest with 6.88 and 6.77, respectively^{26 27}. What incidents and interactions contribute to these feelings of not belonging?

3. Doing DEIB Better

- In a February 2020 study, also conducted by Coquel, belonging at work was defined using four indicators: being seen, connected, supported, and proud. Professionals with higher belonging scores are far more likely to say they are “engaged at work,” “very loyal to their organization,” “intend to stay longer than two years,” and “would recommend their company as a good place to work”²⁶.
- It’s been shown that creating psychologically safe environments for “only” or “few” people within departments to network and mentor one another can ease the sense of emotional exhaustion as well as lack of perceived accomplishment²¹.
- Organizations with top quartile racial and ethnic diversities are 35% more likely to financially perform above medians and have higher rates of employee retention because of feelings of inclusivity. Greater diversity leads to a wider range of backgrounds and experiences and organizations are more likely to creatively solve problems⁸.
- A 2019 study by BetterUp found that workplace belonging can lead to an estimated 56 percent increase in job performance, a 50 percent reduction in turnover risk, and a 75 percent decrease in employee sick days. The study found that a single incidence of “micro-exclusion” can lead to an immediate 25 percent decline in an individual’s performance on a team project

4. Incorporating well-being and DEIB

- In a 2020 Deloitte Insights article, their Global Human Capital trends indicated that the strongest influences determining belonging in the workplace are employees' experiences with 1) workplace culture; 2) leadership behaviors; and 3) personal relationships^{12,13}.
- The CDC and other research indicate that there are significant disparities between health and well-being of ethnic and racial minorities and those who identify as White. The root of many of these disparities is the stress that is experienced by people of color as a result of repeated macro and microaggressions, executed by both individuals and systems. It is critical for employers to be curious, gain understanding, and acknowledge the unique life experiences of their employees and how these experiences might impact their overall well-being in different ways.^{22,23,24} Incorporating well-being practices may look different and be received differently by everyone.
- Research has revealed two distinct types of well-being: hedonic and eudaimonic. Each has a different role to play in the workplace. Hedonic well-being refers to an individual experiencing pleasant feelings- doing enjoyable tasks. Eudaimonic well-being is the concept of optimal human functioning or potential- the fulfillment of desired goals. There are times when these distinct well-being types conflict with one another. Employers should note these unique types as well as acknowledge the role that culture, privilege, and societal inequities impact for employees.²⁵

5. Conclusion

Being truly inclusive when considering organizational health and well-being means offering something for everyone while creating a sense of belonging that drives engagement and positive outcomes. In order to do this, the well-being solution implemented must be truly personalized to the individual and not a cookie-cutter offering. A majority of traditional wellness approaches are largely one-dimensional, leaving employees feeling left out based on their physical or mental ability, work location, schedule, interest level, or goals. Or they just don't see themselves and their unique needs reflected in the well-being solution being provided.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and well-being are top priorities as leaders navigate the disclosure economy, the "Great Resignation" and a competitive talent market.²⁸

To meet the needs of every employee at the organization DEIB cannot be treated in isolation from well-being. Both need to be a concerted effort that is led from the top down and fully integrated into the workplace culture in order to see a positive impact on organizational health.

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