

New Study Examines Why Belonging at Work is Crucial During Crisis

New research from Center for Talent Innovation points to stark differences in workplace experiences along lines of race, gender, and ethnicity, and calls upon companies to make dramatic change

NEW YORK, June 22, 2020—At a time when the pandemic, economic fallout, and social uprising have magnified inequities in American society, new research from the Center for Talent Innovation (CTI) calls upon business leaders to create workplace cultures that drive a sense of “belonging” for all employees.

The new report, *The Power of Belonging: What It Is and Why It Matters in Today’s Workplace*, measures employees’ sense of belonging and finds that White men score higher than female employees and employees of other races or ethnicities. Among those groups, Black women and Asian women score the lowest.

The nationally representative survey of 3,711 college-educated professionals was fielded in February and included a scale with 24 questions used to calculate a “belonging score” ranging from 0 to 10. Respondents’ median belonging scores were analyzed across a broad range of demographics including gender, race/ethnicity, generation, LGBTQ identity, and status as a parent, veteran, or immigrant. Belonging was defined as being 1) **seen** for your unique contributions; 2) **connected** to your coworkers; 3) **supported** in your daily work and career development; and 4) **proud** of your organization’s values and purpose. The report offers data-backed solutions for what organizations, leaders, managers, and colleagues can do to promote a workplace culture of belonging for all.

Belonging scores correspond with positive career indicators. Professionals in the highest quartile of belonging scores are far more likely than those in the lowest to say they are very engaged at work (97% vs 54%), very loyal to their organization (93% vs 35%), intend to stay at least two years (88% vs 61%), and would recommend their company as a good place to work (71% vs 17%). A lack of belonging is associated with negative outcomes. Those in the lowest quartile of belonging scores were over four times as likely to say they felt “stalled” in their careers compared to those in the highest quartile (47% vs 11%).

“Companies are being called upon to dismantle bias within their organizations, and that means they need to look inward at their corporate cultures to understand what makes it so hard for certain groups to advance,” says Lanaya Irvin president of CTI. “Belonging will become increasingly relevant in the aftermath of global pandemic, economic disruption and social unrest. This report gives corporate leaders a path forward toward creating inclusive cultures where all employees feel seen and heard and respected in their authentic identities and across lines of difference.”

“To recover from our current global crises, companies need employees who are engaged, loyal, and proud to work for their companies,” says Julia Taylor Kennedy, CTI executive vice president and co-

lead researcher on the report. “That’s what you get when employees feel they belong. Inaction on systemic racism and the disproportionate impacts of COVID will damage belonging at companies, when it’s needed most.”

A follow-up survey in May revealed stark differences of the COVID-19 crisis across racial groups in the trauma employees of color are bringing into the workplace. Black professionals were *more than five times as likely to have lost a family member as a result of COVID-19* as their White colleagues (11% vs 2%), and Latinx employees were four times as likely as their White colleagues to have lost a family member as a result of COVID (8% vs 2%). Asians in our sample were twice as likely as their White colleagues to have lost a family member to COVID (4% vs 2%). In addition, more than one in five Asian women (21%) have changed their behavior outside of work to avoid racial harassment.

“There’s potential for real, systemic change right now, as the systems and structures that promote inequity get torn down and rebuilt,” says Pooja Jain-Link, executive vice president and co-lead researcher. “Belonging is crucial to the creation and forming of new systems. We need to feel like we belong to each other and belong to this new world.”

Methodology: The research is based on two surveys; in-person focus groups and *Insights In-Depth*[®] sessions (a proprietary web-based tool used to conduct voice-facilitated virtual focus groups) with over 500 participants; and one-on-one interviews with more than 40 people. The first national survey was conducted online and over the phone in February 2020 among 3,711 respondents. The second national survey was conducted online in May 2020 among 627 respondents. For both surveys, all respondents were between the ages of 21 and 65 and employed full time in white-collar professions, with at least a bachelor’s degree. Data were weighted to be representative of the US population on key demographics (age, sex, education, race/ethnicity, and census division). The base used for statistical testing was the effective base. These surveys were conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago under the auspices of the Center for Talent Innovation (CTI). NORC was responsible for the data collection, while the Center for Talent Innovation conducted the analysis.

Research Advisors: Lynne Oldham, Chief People Officer, Zoom; Prof. John A. Powell, Haas Chancellor's Chair in Equity and Inclusion, Professor of Law, African American Studies, and Ethnic Studies, UC Berkeley; Michael Welp, Ph.D., Co-founder of White Men as Full Diversity Partners.

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About the Center for Talent Innovation: The Center for Talent Innovation (CTI) is a nonprofit think tank dedicated to helping leaders design diverse and inclusive workplaces where every person belongs. Founded in 2004, CTI has produced dozens of research reports and hundreds of best practices on cutting edge topics. CTI’s work is regularly cited by elite media, such as the *New York Times*, *Harvard Business Review*, and the *Washington Post*. Its Task Force and consulting practice serve multinational corporations that impact millions of employees globally. For more information, visit www.coqual.org.