

SENSE OF BELONGING IN WORKPLACE

INTRODUCTION

The sense of belonging is a fundamental human need, essential for emotional well-being and productivity. In the workplace, fostering a sense of belonging among employees is crucial for creating a positive and inclusive work environment. When employees feel connected to their organization, they are more likely to be engaged, motivated and committed to achieving its goals. Conversely, feeling disconnected or excluded can lead to decreased job satisfaction, increased turnover rates and decreased overall well-being.

METHODOLOGY

This research is adopted by a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to explore the sense of belonging in the workplace. A two process is to be used; a literature review followed by a survey and interviews conducted with employees across different industries and organizational levels.

Literature Review: The first step involved reviewing existing studies, theories and models regarding belonging, inclusion, and diversity in the workplace. The goal was to identify key trends, successful practices, and gaps in the existing research.

Survey: A survey was distributed to 150 employees from a variety of industries to gather quantitative data on their experiences related to belonging. The survey included questions on perceived levels of belonging, engagement, satisfaction and organizational commitment.

Interviews: To complement the survey data, in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 employees to gain a deeper understanding of personal experiences, workplace dynamics, and the role of leadership in fostering belonging.

Data Analysis: The survey responses were analyzed using statistical methods to identify patterns, while interview data was transcribed and coded to identify recurring themes.

DISCUSSIONS OF KEY CONCEPT AND THEORIES

Psychological Safety: A sense of belonging at work is closely tied to *psychological safety*, a concept introduced by Amy Edmondson. Psychological safety refers to an environment where individuals feel safe to express their thoughts and ideas without fear of negative consequences. In workplaces where employees experience psychological safety, they feel accepted and valued. This fosters a strong sense of belonging, enabling them to contribute more effectively, engage in open communication, and collaborate better. When employees believe that their unique perspectives are welcomed, they are more likely to feel a sense of community within their teams.

Social Identity Theory: Developed by Henri Tajfel, *social identity theory* explains how individuals derive a sense of self from the groups to which they belong. In the workplace, employees often identify with certain groups, such as departments, teams, or organizations. When individuals feel that their identity aligns with the values and culture of these groups, their sense of belonging strengthens. Conversely, a lack of alignment can lead to alienation and disengagement. Organizations can foster a sense of belonging by promoting inclusivity, recognizing diversity, and creating opportunities for employees to bond.

Inclusion and Diversity: *Inclusion* involves creating an environment where all employees feel respected and valued, while *diversity* ensures representation of different identities. Research shows that workplaces with strong diversity and inclusion practices enhance employees' sense of belonging, as people feel recognized for their individuality while being an integral part of a larger group. By embracing both, organizations not only improve employee satisfaction but also drive innovation, as diverse perspectives contribute to more comprehensive problem-solving and decision-making.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining Belonging in the Workplace: The concept of belonging in the workplace refers to an employee's perception of being accepted and valued by their organization. Researchers have identified belonging as a basic human need, akin to food and shelter, that is crucial for psychological well-being, in the

workplace context, belonging is closely linked with the ideas of inclusion, diversity, and psychological safety. An environment that fosters belonging is one where employees feel comfortable expressing their true selves without fear of negative consequences.

Theories related to Belonging: The Self-Determination Theory (SDT) by Deci and Ryan (2000) suggests that humans are motivated by three intrinsic needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness, where individuals seek meaningful relationships with others in their environment. In the workplace, this need is met when employees form positive relationships with colleagues and feel connected to the organizational culture.

Additionally, Maslow's hierarchy of Needs positions belongingness and love as central needs that come after psychological and safety needs. In a workplace setting after employees feel secure in their roles and physical surroundings, they strive for inclusion, acceptance and recognition from peers and superiors. Without belonging, employees may experience alienation, disengagement and a decrease in performance.

Workplace Belonging, Diversity and Inclusion: Belonging cannot be discussed without addressing diversity and inclusion. As the global workforce becomes more diverse, organizations are recognizing the need to foster inclusive environments that embrace diversity in all its forms, be it race, gender, sexual orientation or cultural background. The link between diversity and belonging is twofold: while diversity introduces varied perspectives and innovation, belonging ensures that individuals from diverse backgrounds feel valued, respected and able to contribute their best.

Psychological Safety and Leadership: Psychological safety is a key component of fostering belonging in the workplace. Coined by Amy Edmondson (1999), psychological safety refers to an individual's perception that they can take risks, voice opinions and make mistakes without fear of retribution or humiliation. A workplace that promotes psychological safety is one where employees feel safe to express their thoughts, ask questions and challenge the status quo. Without psychological safety, employees may hold back ideas, avoid taking initiative, and experience heightened stress.

Challenges in Fostering Workplace Belonging: While the benefits of workplace belonging are well-documented, organizations face several challenges in cultivating this environment. First, unconscious biases may impede efforts to create inclusive

environments. Managers and colleagues may unintentionally exclude individuals based on race, gender or other characteristics. Overcoming these biases requires training, self awareness and accountability.

REFERENCES

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CONCLUSION

A sense of belonging is essential for creating a thriving workplace where employees feel connected, valued, and motivated. As organizations become more diverse and workplaces evolve with technological changes, fostering belonging will require intentional efforts by leadership, human resources and employees at all levels. The literature review, survey and interviews all suggest that when belonging is prioritized, the result is a more engaged, productive and innovative workforce. Conversely organizations that neglect this aspect of workplace culture risk alienating employees, increasing turnover, and diminishing overall performance.