

Creating a Better Work Environment Through Belonging

By Binwa Sethi

Our current environment of remote working and virtual teams has disrupted our lives from home to work and everything in between. Because of a heightened need for connection and community, the notion of belonging is even more important and relevant during this time of change and uncertainty. Belonging is the feeling of being included in one's environment so that everyone feels supported in the workplace.

Belonging in the workplace is created by having a supportive leader, collaborative teams, and purposeful work:

- **Supportive Leader:** A supportive leader focuses on creating an environment where employees feel accepted, appreciated, recognized, supported, included, and valued in the relationship. Some common practices include frequent touch points with employees about their well-being, providing flexible work schedules, and engaging with employees beyond the routine business updates.
- **Collaborative Teams:** Collaborative teams create commitment, interdependence, and openness. Today many employees participate in multiple work groups such as intact, cross-functional, and project teams, making team dynamics extremely important. All employees need to be seen and heard during team meetings, so everyone has the opportunity to enhance the outcome of the meeting.
- **Purposeful Work:** The idea of purposeful work relates to *empowerment*. Belonging is created when the work is aligned with employees' values and the goals of the organization. Additionally, doing work that leverages employees' strengths helps to create belonging in the workplace.

According to a study by EY, "Teaming and leading inclusively helps create environments where people are likely to feel they belong. When people feel they belong, they are more likely to model inclusive behaviors." By modeling inclusive behaviors and creating a sense of belonging, leaders set the tone and shape the culture of the organization.

Leadership development mechanisms, particularly executive coaching, enhance leadership effectiveness. The focus of the coaching engagements is to explore the leaders' varying perspectives on cultural and other differences to close gaps in perception. During the coaching process, leaders examine assumptions, beliefs, and biases that have influenced them. Ultimately, the goal of this engagement is to advance the ability of leaders to leverage differences, so all employees' contributions are recognized in the organization. This helps to accelerate performance, builds engagement, fosters innovation, and creates a better work environment for all.

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