AN INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: SURVIVING AND THRIVING

A SERIES OF REPORTS ON LESSONS FROM THE PANDEMIC
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Families and Work Institute (FWI) is a nonprofit center dedicated to providing research for living in today’s changing workplace, changing family and changing community. Currently, our work addresses two major areas: the workforce/workplace and youth development.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank the employees who participated in this study and our own families, especially the young ones, who gave us some uninterrupted time to create this report.

December 2020
DEDICATION

This report is dedicated to the loving memory of James T. (Terry) Bond:

- Our studies have been on target because of the profound research questions you always asked.
- Our studies have been deeper because you never stopped seeking answers.
- Our studies have been compassionate because you cared so much about others.
- Our studies have been respected because of the rigor of your approach.
- Our studies have been newsworthy because you had your fingers on the pulse.

You continue to inspire and enrich our work every single day!
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INTRODUCTION
INTRODUCTION

OUR JOURNEY

The pandemic, recent racial unrest and an acrimonious election have brought considerable pain and hardship. But, as with other disruptions to what is considered “normal,” it’s also become a time to step back and rethink the kind of normal we would most value, or what we are calling a renewal.

That’s been the case for those of us at Families and Work Institute. For more than 20 years, we have created and then refined a research-based model of an Effective Workplace, a workplace that “works” for employers and employees alike. As we thought about the turmoil of the year, we realized that we wanted to shift to focus on Inclusive Workplaces.

We made this shift for two reasons. First, an Inclusive Workplace is about the way people treat each other, their relationships at work. Our studies have consistently shown that relationships at work are more significant in making work “work” than almost any other factor. Second, in the wake of the racial unrest, we wanted a model that involves people practices that can promote the benefits of a diverse workforce.

We are guided by the literature and our own research in identifying the components of an Inclusive Workplace. We define an Inclusive Workplaces as being a place where employees:

• feel that they belong and are supported;
• experience a climate of trust and respect;
• participate in decision-making in meaningful ways; and
• are treated as whole people, where their personal lives and their health and well-being are supported.
As our report on Health reveals, we found that employees in Inclusive Workplaces are more likely to experience better overall health and are less likely to experience stress and depression. In addition, they are better able to weather challenging life events, like the loss of a close friend or relative, unemployment, layoffs, and serious illness—just the kind of challenges that the pandemic is causing.

In this study on Employee Work Engagement, we wanted to know how employees in Inclusive Workplaces experience their jobs. Do they enjoy their work, find inspiration from their work, and get immersed—in other words, are they engaged in work? Engagement is an important issue because many employers see engagement as the precursor of productivity and because Gallup has reported that engagement over the summer of 2020 rose then dipped to an all-time low.

In this study, we seek to explore the precursors of engagement itself.

**OUR STUDY**


The NSCW has enabled us to address important research question over the past three decades using a large, representative sample of employed
people ages 18 and older in the U.S. Its wealth of information on relational aspects of the workplace makes it a natural resource for us to use to answer the following research questions.

### INTRODUCTION

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this report, we address the following questions:

- How engaged are U.S. employees?
- What is the Inclusive Workplace?
- Does working in an Inclusive Workplace affect Employee Work Engagement?
- How does working in an Inclusive Workplace affect employees engagement compared with other important precursors of engagement: wages, benefits, opportunities for advancement?
HOW ENGAGED ARE U.S. EMPLOYEES?
In the National Study of the Changing Workforce, employees are asked to rate their jobs or feelings about their work on nine questions that have been shown to measure work engagement. On a scale of 1 to 7 where a higher number represents higher engagement, we ask employees to rate the following statements:

- At my work, I feel like I have a lot of energy.
- I can continue working for long periods of time.
- When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work.
- I am enthusiastic about my job.
- My job inspires me.
- I am proud of the work that I do.
- I feel happy when I am working intensely.
- I am immersed in my work.
- Time flies when I am working.
We find that U.S. employees have average mean scores that range from 4.76 to 5.58. Similarly, around half (41% to 63%) of employees report they are “often,” “very often,” or “always” engaged on the nine questions.

(1=Never, 2=Almost never, 3=Rarely, 4=Sometimes, 5=Often, 6=Very often, 7=Always)
WHO IS MOST LIKELY TO BE HIGHLY ENGAGED AT WORK?

We then wondered whether certain subgroups of employees are more likely to be engaged at work. To answer this question, we first created an Employee Work Engagement Scale Score by averaging the nine item scores. Employees are classified as “highly” engaged if their score is within the top 25% of all scale scores. We then compare those in this “high” grouping with other employees on the following:

- Personal demographics: Gender, generation, race/ethnicity, has a partner, has children, and completed college.
- Personal financial stability: Earnings from work, having enough or more to make ends meet at the end of each month.
- Job characteristics: Manager/Professional, Service Industry, full-time status, and whether the employee is in a union.

We find very few differences in demographics.

- There are no differences in high engagement based on gender, education, marital status, or parental status.
- Black employees (35%) are more likely than other employees (22%) to be highly engaged.
- Baby Boomers — those born between 1946 and 1964, are more likely to be highly engaged than Millennials, those born between 1981 and 1995 (30% versus 19%).
WHO IS MOST LIKELY TO BE HIGHLY ENGAGED AT WORK?

Financial standing also does not seem to make a difference in engagement.

- There are no differences by family income or in earnings.
- Employees had similar levels of engagement regardless of whether they report having enough money to make ends meet at the end of the month or not.

There are also few differences in job characteristics.

- There are no differences in high engagement based on full-time status, tenure, whether or not employees are managers or professionals, or whether or not employees are union workers.
- Employees working in service industries are more likely to be highly engaged compared with other employees (25% versus 17%).

Given that most employee demographics, relationship status, and job characteristics are not predictors of employee engagement, we can assume that what determines how engaged an employee is more likely to be related to how employees perceive their jobs or their on-the-job conditions. In particular, we wondered how inclusiveness might be a precursor of employee engagement.
WHAT IS THE INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE?
WHAT IS THE INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE?

In light of the importance of the relational aspects of work turned out to be for flexibility (as described above), we set about searching for a more comprehensive relationships-based model of the workplace that could support employee health, particularly in times of adversity.

This search led us directly to the ways in which researchers have previously approached inclusion as well as to a more recent emphasis on the relational aspects of work as keys to understanding workplace inequality more generally. In a recent review, researchers highlight three key dimensions and themes of inclusiveness:

- The first is “involvement in the work group” or “work group inclusion,” which refers to “feeling like an insider” and “having access to critical information and resources.”
- The second dimension of inclusiveness is “feeling respected and valued.”
- A third theme that emerges from the literature review on inclusion is “participation in decision-making processes.”
Similarly, we conceptualize inclusion not as something embedded in a set of policies and practices, but as something resulting from the relational culture of a workplace. Thus, we pay attention to employees’ perceptions of being respected, being valued as whole persons, being supported by and belonging with the people they work with, of having their voices included in decision-making, and of having access to the resources they need to succeed.

Drawing on this literature and our decades of experience in conducting research that can be translated into actionable steps for employers, we looked at our nationally representative dataset to empirically determine how inclusive relational practices contribute to employee health and well-being, especially in their recovery from adversities and, in fact, renewal.

Below are the four components that constitute our definition of an Inclusive Workplace and the actual items included in each component.
## WHAT IS THE INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE?

### WORKGROUP SUPPORT AND BELONGING

- My supervisor or manager is supportive when I have a work problem.
- My supervisor or manager recognizes when I do a good job.
- My supervisor or manager keeps me informed of the things I need to know to do my job well.
- My supervisor provides me with feedback that helps me to improve my performance.
- I have the support from coworkers that I need to do a good job.
- My coworkers and I work well together.
- My coworkers and I appropriately share credit for success and responsibility for shortcomings.
- My coworkers and I generally resolve conflicts with respect and attention to everyone's needs.
- I feel I am really a part of the group of people I work with.

### CULTURE OF TRUST AND RESPECT

- I can trust what managers say in my organization.
- I can trust what the highest level of management in my organization says.
- My supervisor treats me with respect.
- I can trust what my immediate supervisor says.
- I can trust what my coworkers say.

### PARTICIPATORY DECISION-MAKING

- Managers at my workplace actively seek out information and new ideas from employees at all levels of the organization to guide their decision-making.
- I can openly share my ideas and opinions with any level of management.
- I have regular opportunities to provide feedback on organizational decisions.

### WHOLE EMPLOYEE APPROACH

- My supervisor or manager really cares about the effects that work demands have on my personal and family life.
- My supervisor or manager is responsive to my needs when I have family or personal business to take care of.
- I have support from coworkers that helps me to manage my work and personal or family life.
- I feel comfortable bringing up personal or family issues with my supervisor or manager.
- Employee health is a top priority for my manager.
- Employee health is a top priority for my organization.

### TABLE 1. NSCW INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE QUESTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workgroup Support and Belonging</th>
<th>Participatory Decision-Making</th>
<th>Whole Employee Approach</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My supervisor or manager is supportive when I have a work problem.</td>
<td>Managers at my workplace actively seek out information and new ideas from employees at all levels of the organization to guide their decision-making.</td>
<td>My supervisor or manager really cares about the effects that work demands have on my personal and family life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My supervisor or manager recognizes when I do a good job.</td>
<td>I can openly share my ideas and opinions with any level of management.</td>
<td>My supervisor or manager is responsive to my needs when I have family or personal business to take care of.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My supervisor or manager keeps me informed of the things I need to know to do my job well.</td>
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</tr>
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<td>My supervisor provides me with feedback that helps me to improve my performance.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>My coworkers and I appropriately share credit for success and responsibility for shortcomings.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>My coworkers and I generally resolve conflicts with respect and attention to everyone's needs.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I feel I am really a part of the group of people I work with.</td>
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Overall, and perhaps surprisingly, most employees in the U.S. see their workplaces as inclusive. On a scale of 1 to 4, employees in the U.S. rate their workplaces around a 3 for inclusiveness.

**FIGURE 2. MEAN SCORES OF INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE COMPONENTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Average Score</th>
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<tr>
<td>Workgroup Support and Belonging</td>
<td>3.23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Culture of Trust and Respect</td>
<td>3.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participatory Decision-Making</td>
<td>2.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole Employee Approach</td>
<td>3.06</td>
</tr>
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</table>

To get a better sense of how many employees work in Inclusive Workplaces, we calculated an Overall Inclusive Workplace Index Score by averaging the component scores.14

- A little over a quarter (28%) of employees rate their employers with the most Inclusive Workplace Index score of 4.
- Almost half of employees (42%) give their employers a score of 3.
- Nearly one in five employees (19%) give their employers a score of 2.
- Few U.S. employees rate their employers very low on inclusiveness. Only 1% give their employers an overall score of 1.

**FIGURE 3. OVERALL INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE INDEX SCORES**

To find out which employees are more likely to have access to Inclusive Workplaces, we compare how the personal demographics, job characteristics, and family financial circumstances above relate to high Overall Inclusive Workplace Index Scores. More specifically, we determine which employees rate their employers within the top 25% of Overall Inclusive Workplace Scores and perform a logistic regression to see which of the following are statistically predictors:

- Personal demographics: Gender, generation, race/ethnicity, has a partner, has children, and completed college.
- Personal financial stability: Family income, having enough or more to make ends meet at the end of each month.
- Job characteristics: Manager/Professional, service industry, and full-time status.

As depicted below, all other factors being equal, when employees are able to make ends meet at the end of the month, they are more likely to report high levels of inclusiveness. That is, employees who can make ends meet have 3.63 times greater odds of having a high Overall Inclusive Workplace Score than if they cannot make ends meet.

Surprisingly, all other things being equal, college-educated employees are less likely to feel high levels of inclusion. Their odds of having a high Overall Inclusive Workplace Score are reduced by nearly half (48%) compared with less well-educated employees.

Finally, all things being equal, being Asian reduces an employee’s likelihood of feeling high levels of inclusion. The odds of having a high Overall Inclusive Workplace Score are reduced by 71% for Asians versus non-Asian groups.
FIGURE 4. PREDICTORS OF HIGH OVERALL INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE INDEX SCORES

WHO HAS ACCESS TO HIGHLY INCLUSIVE WORKPLACES?

***Significant at the 99.9% confidence level; **Significant at the 99% confidence level; *Significant at the 95% confidence level.
If “whiskers,” or the lines extending from each point, cross over 1, the confidence interval includes 1, or equal odds, and therefore the odds ratio is not significant.
DOES HAVING AN INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE AFFECT EMPLOYEE WORK ENGAGEMENT?
As shown earlier, most demographics, relationship status, and job characteristics are not predictors of Work Engagement. Rather, it is likely that engagement is determined by how employees view their jobs.

To see how inclusion is related to engagement, we look at how each Inclusive Workplace component predicts whether an employee has “high” Employee Work Engagement Scale scores, or scores within the top 25%.

To provide a stringent test, we controlled for the following in all of the logistic regressions:

- Personal demographics: Gender, generation, race/ethnicity, has a partner, has children, and completed college.
- Personal financial stability: Earnings from work, having enough or more to make ends meet at the end of each month.
- Job characteristics: Manager/Professional, service industry, full-time status, and whether the employee is in a union.
Working in an Inclusive Workplace is, indeed, related to employee Work Engagement. For each of the four components, employees who report high levels of inclusion at work are more likely to report high levels of Work engagement.

**FIGURE 5. INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE AS PREDICTORS OF HIGH EMPLOYEE WORK ENGAGEMENT**

Does Having An Inclusive Workplace Affect Employee Work Engagement?

Source: 2016 SHRM National Study of the Changing Workforce. This figure summarizes results from four separate linear regressions. Each of the four Inclusive Workplace Components has a significant relationship at least at the 99.9% confidence level.
HOW DOES WORKING IN AN INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE AFFECT EMPLOYEE WORK ENGAGEMENT COMPARED WITH OTHER PERCEIVED PRECURSORS
Most assume that what most motivates employees are wages, benefits, and opportunities for advancement. We wondered how working in an Inclusive Workplace affects Employee Work Engagement compared with these possible motivators, or what we call precursors of engagement.

To see the relative importance of inclusion versus wages, benefits, and advancement opportunities, we repeated the logistic regressions predicting high engagement, or when employees have “high” Employee Work Engagement Scale scores, or scores within the top 25%. We looked at how well each Inclusive Workplace component predicted high levels of Employee Work Engagement beyond control variables (demographics, financial stability, and job characteristics) and compared with the following:

- Whether the employee reports being “very” or “somewhat” satisfied with “how much you earn in your job.”
- Whether the employee reports being “very” or “somewhat” satisfied with “the benefits your job provides, like health insurance.”
- Whether the employee “strongly” or “somewhat” agrees with the statement “I am satisfied with my opportunities for advancement.”
Having Workplace Support and Belonging is more likely to predict Employee Work Engagement versus satisfaction with wages, benefits, and advancement opportunities.

- All other things being equal, an employee with more Workplace Support and Belonging has nearly five times greater odds of reporting high levels of employee engagement than if he/she has less Workplace Support and Belonging.
- For satisfaction of wages, benefits, or advancement opportunities, the odds of reporting high levels of Employee Work Engagement are statistically equivalent, whether or not employees report they are satisfied with these motivators, when we hold constant Workplace Support and Belonging and other controls.

In other words, while satisfaction with wages, benefits and opportunities are, of course, important to employees and to Employee Work Engagement, when we also consider Workgroup Support and Belonging, we find these money- and status-related job features become less important to high engagement. This is important because it suggests that regardless of how employees feel about their wages benefits and opportunities for advancement, this component of an Inclusive Workplace has good potential to have a multiplier effect on how feeling energetic about, dedicated to, and absorbed by their work.
FIGURE 6. WORKPLACE SUPPORT AND BELONGING VERSUS SATISFACTION OF WAGES, BENEFITS AND ADVANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES AS PREDICTORS OF EMPLOYEE WORK ENGAGEMENT

Odds Ratios of control variables are not shown.
***Significant at the 99.9% confidence level.
If "whiskers," or the lines extending from each point, cross over 1, the confidence interval includes 1, or equal odds, and therefore the odds ratio is not significant.
Having a Culture of Trust and Respect is more likely to predict Employee Work Engagement than satisfaction with wages, benefits, and advancement opportunities.

- All other things being equal, an employee who perceives a stronger Culture of Trust and Respect has three times greater odds of having high Employee Work Engagement than if he/she perceives lower Culture Trust and Respect.
- When we take into consideration Culture, Trust and Respect, money- and status-related job features seem to matter less when it comes to feeling enthusiastic about one’s work. For satisfaction of wages, benefits, or advancement opportunities, the odds of reporting high levels of employee engagement are statistically equivalent whether or not employees report being satisfied with these motivators.
**Figure 7. Culture of Trust and Respect versus Satisfaction of Wages, Benefits and Advancement Opportunities as Predictors of Employee Work Engagement**

CULTURE OF TRUST AND RESPECT

Odds Ratios of control variables are not shown.

***Significant at the 99.9% confidence level.
If "whiskers," or the lines extending from each point, cross over 1, the confidence interval includes 1, or equal odds, and therefore the odds ratio is not significant.
Experiencing Participatory Decision-Making is more likely to predict Employee Work Engagement than satisfaction with wages, benefits, and advancement opportunities.

- All other things being equal, an employee who perceives stronger Participatory Decision-Making has three times greater odds of having high Employee Work Engagement than if he/she perceives lower Participatory Decision-Making.
- When we take into consideration Participatory Decision-Making, money-and status-related job features seem to matter less when it comes to feeling enthusiastic about one’s work. For satisfaction of wages, benefits, or advancement opportunities, the odds of reporting high levels of employee engagement are statistically equivalent whether or not employees report being satisfied with these motivators.
FIGURE 8. PARTICIPATORY DECISION-MAKING VERSUS SATISFACTION OF WAGES, BENEFITS AND ADVANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES AS PREDICTORS OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Odds Ratios of control variables are not shown.
**Significant at the 99.9% confidence level.
If “whiskers,” or the lines extending from each point, cross over 1, the confidence interval includes 1, or equal odds, and therefore the odds ratio is not significant.
Having a Whole Employee Approach is more likely to predict Employee Work Engagement than satisfaction with wages, benefits, and advancement opportunities.

- All things being equal, an employee who perceives a stronger Whole Employee Approach has nearly four times greater odds of having high Employee Work Engagement than if he/she perceives lower Whole Employee Approach.
- When we take into consideration Whole Employee Approach, money- and status-related job features seem to matter less when it comes to feeling enthusiastic about one’s work. For satisfaction of wages, benefits, or advancement opportunities, the odds of reporting high levels of employee engagement are statistically equivalent whether or not employees report being satisfied with these motivators.
FIGURE 9. WHOLE EMPLOYEE APPROACH VERSUS SATISFACTION OF WAGES, BENEFITS AND ADVANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES AS PREDICTORS OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Source: 2016 SHRM National Study of the Changing Workforce. Odds Ratios of control variables are not shown.
***Significant at the 99.9% confidence level.
If “whiskers,” or the lines extending from each point, cross over 1, the confidence interval includes 1, or equal odds, and therefore the odds ratio is not significant.
IMPlications
No one would ever argue that wages, benefits and opportunities to advance are unimportant—they are essential to employees’ well-being and, in fact, to survival.

One can think of providing an Inclusive Workplace environment as a multiplying factor, ensuring that the money spent on wages, benefits, and advancement is well spent, but multiplying their effect from three to five times. An Inclusive Workplace helps employees not only to just survive, but also to thrive!

In order to work toward a more Inclusive Workplace, employers can:

- Review the components of an Inclusive Workplace or conduct a pulse survey or focus groups to determine where to target their efforts;
- Work with employees on creating a more inclusive workplace as well as on developing metrics to ensure these efforts are being achieved; and
- Create a mutually responsible and accountable culture where employees are responsible and accountable to each other for enabling employees to be their authentic and whole selves at work, providing opportunities for everyone to contribute to decision-making in meaningful ways, and treating each other in trustworthy, respectful, and supportive ways.

Given that engagement is seen as crucial in productivity, the magnitude of the potential return in the people-practice of an Inclusive Workplace should be considered especially essential to helping employees and their employers thrive.
ENDNOTES

1 Part of this study was conducted while the author was a fellow of the Columbia Population Research Center at Columbia University.


7 These nine employee engagement questions are based the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale but slightly modified to be more relevant to American employees. Before creating and implementing the 2016 NSCW, we tested the language modifications in the 2014 employee survey used for the When Work Works award and found that our modifications correlated very strongly with the original language. The internal consistency of the Employee Work Engagement items is high with a Cronbach alpha of .95.

8 To create the Employee Work Engagement Scale Score, we average all existing items as long as more than half (or five) are answered.

9 Consistent with prior work on the NSCW, we classify employees who have an Employee Work Engagement Scale Score in the top 25% as having “high” engagement. Cutoffs are based on weighted data. This high group includes the highest response at a minimum, and then any additional responses up until but not including 25%.

10 We report differences when the difference is statistically significant (at least at the 95% confidence level) and when there is at least a “small” effect size (Cohen’s d is .2 or larger).


13 For each Inclusive Workplace Component, we average all existing items as long as more than half are answered, reverse-coding any items so that for all items the more inclusive the higher the score (from 1 to 4). All of the components had high internal consistency with Cronbach alphas ranging from .83 to .90.

14 We averaged the four component scores as long as three of the four scores existed for the respondent.

15 We classify respondents as being in a high Overall Inclusive Workplaces, if the respondent’s Overall Inclusive Workplace Index score is within the top 25% of scores, based on weighted data.
See Endnote 5, 8, and 9.

The control variables for these models are gender, generation, race/ethnicity, has a partner, has children, completed college, earnings from work, having enough or more to make ends meet at the end of each month, Manager/Professional, service industry, full-time status, and whether the employee is in a union.