AN INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE AND HEALTH: RISK AND RENEWAL

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.
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
During the pandemic, the issue of health has dominated our lives. If we step back, it may seem astounding that something so small, something invisible to the eye, a virus, can have had such a devastating effect on world health, the economy, and all of the institutions of society. It also has affected the way we live and work, putting all of us at risk, though some of us more than others.

As a result, much of the attention has been on risk factors—our genetics, our demographics and our lifestyles.

But what about how we work as both a risk and a renewal factor? Note that we intentionally use the word “renewal,” not “recovery” because we don’t want to go back to business as usual but rather use the lessons from the pandemic to create better workplaces.

It’s only natural for us at Families and Work Institute to ask the question about work. Since 1992, we have been studying how work affects our health, our well-being, our work engagement, retention, and much more. Over the years, we arrived at and then refined a model of an Effective Workplace.

In 2020, we agreed that it is a good time for us to refine our model for a number of reasons.

First, in the past, we’ve found that relationships at work matter a great deal.
This discovery led us to investigate a relationship-based model of the workplace; to ask, just what is it about relationships at work that are most important and arguably could be essential in economic renewal?

Second, in the wake of the racial unrest following the murders of George Floyd and too many others, efforts to improve workplace diversity, equity and inclusion have intensified. Diversity practices have focused on bringing women, people of color, and marginalized groups into the workplace while inclusion practices have sought to create an equitable environment at work where diverse employees feel that they belong, can be themselves, are valued and can contribute. Lynn Shore and her colleagues write in a recent review of the literature on Inclusive Workplaces:

*The focus on inclusionary practices can promote the potential advantages and opportunities of having a diverse workforce.*

Using the literature as a screen, we looked at our nationally representative dataset to determine empirically what inclusive people practices contribute most significantly to employee health and well-being, to their risk and renewal.
INTRODUCTION

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.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What is an Inclusive Workplace?
- Who has access to an Inclusive Workplace?
- Does having an Inclusive Workplace affect health?
- Is workplace inclusivity associated with less stress/better health after an adverse event? In other words, as we look into the future recovery from the pandemic, does an inclusive workplace offer a better chance for renewal?
WHAT IS AN INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE?
WHAT IS AN INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE?

Given how important the relational aspects of work are, we set about searching for a more comprehensive relationships-based model of the workplace that could support employee health, particularly in times of adversity.

Our search led us 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 a key 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 just embedded in set of policies and practices, but also 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 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 AN 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>
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<tr>
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<td>my performance.</td>
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  - 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.
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.

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.7

- 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 1 of 5 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.

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 financially secure), 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.
WHO HAS ACCESS TO HIGHLY INCLUSIVE WORKPLACES?

FIGURE 3. PREDICTORS OF HIGH OVERALL INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE INDEX SCORES


***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 HEALTH?
In this report, we first look at whether working in an Inclusive Workplace affects employees’ health. Secondly, we go deeper to look at whether working in an Inclusive Workplace affects health if they have experienced a challenging life event, the kind of event that employees are experiencing during the pandemic.

Let’s begin with the general picture.

Having identified the important components of an Inclusive Workplace, we next wondered how these might affect employees’ health. Previous studies on social relationships in general and workplace relationships, in particular, have also found them important for health and well-being. However, none of this research is based on nationally representative data.⁹

The NSCW again provides us with a chance to see if and how having an Inclusive Workplace relates to:

- Overall health
- Minor health problems
- Sleep problems that disrupt work
- Depression
- Stress
Of course, other factors impact an employee’s health that are unrelated to inclusion at work. To provide a stringent test of how each work Inclusive Workplace component affects health, we controlled for the following in all of the models in this report:

- 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.
- Chronic health issues: Currently receiving treatment for high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart conditions, diabetes, or mental health problems.
OVERALL HEALTH

An Inclusive Workplace does matter to overall health. For each of the four components, employees who report high levels of inclusion at work are more likely to report that they are in excellent health.

FIGURE 4. INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE AND OVERALL HEALTH

Source: 2016 SHRM National Study of the Changing Workforce. This figure summarizes results from four separate logistic regressions. Each of the four Inclusive Workplace Components has a significant relationship at the 99.9% confidence level.
MINOR HEALTH PROBLEMS

Inclusive Workplaces have a partial effect on minor health problems.
• Employees who report high levels of Culture Trust and Respect are more likely to “never” or “almost never” experience minor health problems such as headaches, insomnia, or stomach upsets in the past month.
• Similarly, employees who report high levels of Participatory Decision-Making are rarely likely to be bothered by minor health problems.

FIGURE 5. INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE AND MINOR HEALTH PROBLEMS

Source: 2016 SHRM National Study of the Changing Workforce. This figure summarizes results from four separate logistic regressions. Each of the two Inclusive Workplace Components in color has a significant relationship at least at the 95% confidence level. Components in grey and without arrows do not show a significant relationship.
SLEEP PROBLEMS THAT DISRUPT PERFORMANCE

Employees in highly Inclusive Workplaces are more likely to say they “never” or “almost never” had trouble sleeping to the point that it affected their performance on and off the job.

FIGURE 6. INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE AND SLEEP

This figure summarizes results from four separate logistic regressions. Each of the four Inclusive Workplace Components has a significant relationship at the 99.9% confidence level.

DOES HAVING AN INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE AFFECT HEALTH?

Culture of Trust and Respect
Participatory Decision-Making
Workgroup Support and Belonging
Whole Employee Approach

RARELY EXPERIENCE SLEEP PROBLEMS

DEPRESSION

The NSCW asks employees two questions that are widely used to screen for depression:\(^\text{10}\)
- During the past month, have you been bothered by feeling down, depressed or hopeless?
- During the past month, have you been bothered by little interest or pleasure in doing things?

Employees in highly inclusive workplaces are more likely to report having neither of these indicators of depression.

FIGURE 7. INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE AND DEPRESSION

This figure summarizes results from four separate logistic regressions. Each of the four Inclusive Workplace Components has a significant relationship at the 95% confidence level.
STRESS

The NSCW uses a standard measure of stress, one that has been linked in other research to physical illness.\(^1\)

- In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?
- In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?
- In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?
- In the last month, how often have you felt that difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?

Employees in highly Inclusive Workplaces are more likely to report lower levels of stress.\(^2\)

- All of relationships at work (except for coworker support for job success) have a direct connection to lower stress.
DOES HAVING AN INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE AFFECT HEALTH?

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% confidence level.

FIGURE 8. INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE AND STRESS
HOW MIGHT AN INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE OFFER A BETTER CHANCE FOR RENEWAL?
The pandemic has had a negative impact on so many lives. While the NSCW does not specifically ask about the impact of COVID-19, it includes six questions that can give us a good idea of how challenging life events for employees and those close to them can impact employees' health.

More specifically, employees are asked whether or not they experienced any of the following events in the past 12 months:

- Some of my close coworkers have been laid off.
- My spouse/partner was laid off.
- A close relative or friend passed away.
- I had a serious illness.
- I started caring for someone with a serious illness or other health issues.
- I was unemployed for part of the year.
The chart below shows the percent of U.S. employees who experienced the challenging life event in the last 12 months in 2016.

**FIGURE 9. PERCENT OF EMPLOYEES WHO EXPERIENCED A CHALLENGING LIFE EVENT IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS**

- A close relative or friend passed away: 35%
- I was unemployed for part of the year: 13%
- Some of my close co-workers have been laid off: 13%
- I started caring for someone with a serious illness or other health issues: 11%
- I had a serious illness: 7%
- My spouse/partner was laid off: 4%

In 2016, nearly half (49%) of all employees experienced at least one of the six challenging life events we identify as being similar to a negative outcome of COVID-19. We look to this group as a way to get a sense of how the negative outcomes of the pandemic might play out for employees in the coming years.

FIGURE 10. PERCENT OF EMPLOYEES BY NUMBER OF CHALLENGING LIFE EVENTS

0% 20% 40% 60%
None 1 life event 2 life events 3 or more life events

51% 30% 12% 7%

HOW MIGHT AN INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE OFFER A BETTER CHANCE FOR RENEWAL?

In general, we find that having an Inclusive Workplace is associated with better outcomes for employees who had experienced a challenging life event in the past 12 months. For these analyses, we group employees into three groups: those on the top 25% of experiencing an Inclusive Workplace (labeled “high” in the figure below); those in the middle 50% (labeled “moderate”), and those in the bottom 25% (labeled “low”).

Accounting for demographics, job characteristics, financial stability, and chronic health conditions, we find that those who report low levels of inclusiveness in their workplaces have consistently lower likelihoods of reporting they are in excellent health.
How might an inclusive workplace offer a better chance for renewal?

This chart displays the predictive margins from four logistic regressions where the Inclusive Workplace Component is a significant predictor.
We also find that those who report low levels of inclusiveness at their workplaces are less likely to say they rarely experience sleep problems.

**FIGURE 12. RARELY EXPERIENCE SLEEP PROBLEMS BY LEVELS OF INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE COMPONENTS AMONG EMPLOYEES WHO EXPERIENCED CHALLENGING LIFE EVENTS**


This chart displays the predictive margins from four logistic regressions where the Inclusive Workplace Component is a significant predictor.
For preventing depression, we find that two components of inclusive workplaces are likely to be helpful in a post COVID-19 era: Workplace Support and Belonging and Whole Employee Approach. The other two components do not reach statistical significance.

Among employees who experienced a challenging life event in the last year, those who also experience lower inclusiveness at work are less likely to report they do not have either of the two depression symptoms.

**FIGURE 13. NO SIGNS OF DEPRESSION BY LEVELS OF INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE COMPONENTS AMONG EMPLOYEES WHO EXPERIENCED CHALLENGING LIFE EVENTS**

This chart displays the predictive margins from two logistic regressions where the Inclusive Workplace Component is a significant predictor.
Inclusive Workplaces may also help to reduce stress in a post-pandemic era. We find that employees who experienced a challenging life event reported lower stress scores if they are also in workplaces with high inclusiveness on all four components of our measure.

**FIGURE 14. PERCEIVED STRESS SCALE SCORE BY LEVELS OF INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE COMPONENTS AMONG EMPLOYEES WHO EXPERIENCED CHALLENGING LIFE EVENTS**

Source: 2016 SHRM National Study of the Changing Workforce. This chart displays the predictive margins from four logistic regressions where the Inclusive Workplace Component is a significant predictor.
IMPLICATIONS
In the coming months and years, we will be entering a period of recovery and hopefully a renewal from the pandemic and it will be challenging. These challenges are numerous—and involve multiple losses, from personal losses to economic losses. The toll this is taking can be seen in a recent poll conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

*Based on Pulse Survey data from May 14-19, 2020, the CDC found that 28.2% of adults in the U.S. had symptoms of anxiety disorder, 24.4% had symptoms of depressive disorder, and 33.9% had symptoms of one or both disorders in the prior 7 days.*

These figures represent a significant increase from a year ago. Furthermore, that’s one out of every three adults experiencing mental health challenges!

For the economy, the challenges are numerous too and include real shifts, such as the meltdown in the service sector.* These economic shifts have disproportionately affected women, lower wage employees, and people of color.*
For the employer community, the results of our analyses make a compelling case for focusing renewal efforts to take account of the inclusivity of their workplaces. 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 the risks, the people practices in an Inclusive Workplace offer a path toward renewal.
Part of this study was conducted while the author was a fellow of the Columbia Population Research Center at Columbia University.


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.

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

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


12 For the Perceived Stress Scale score, we average the four items as long as three or all are answered by the respondent, reverse-coding two items so that for all items the greater the perceived stress the higher the score (from 1 to 5).

13 Consistent with prior work on the NSCW, we convert Inclusive Workplace components into a three-point scale in which the low group represents the bottom quartile, the moderate group represents the middle two quartiles, and the high represents the top quartile. Cutoffs are based on weighted data. The high and low groups include the highest and the lowest response at a minimum, and then any additional responses up until but not including 25%.

