Why is inclusion important for teams?

An inclusive and respectful team culture impacts employees in a number of ways, from their collaboration with their peers to feeling they have a voice in what work they do and their [relationship with their manager](). When we look at the data from our [Employee Pulse Surveys](), we see a strong correlation between whether employees feel that people are respected for who they are at their organization and:

- Feeling that communications among peers are honest and transparent,
- Feeling appropriately involved in decisions that affect their work,
- Feeling that they can count on their peers when they need help,
- Satisfaction with the level of autonomy they have at work, and
- Feeling that their manager cares about their opinions.

Caring about employee engagement and performance and caring about inclusion are inextricably linked. Team success requires a safe environment where people feel valued for who they are, not fearful of being judged, invalidated, or discriminated against. So, how do employees feel about workplace inclusion? According to our data,

19% of employees do not feel that people's personal identities are respected by everyone in their organization.

That's nearly 1 in 5 employees who don't feel their work environment is inclusive for all. This is why it's essential that organizations be intentional in developing cultures that not only value but embrace diverse perspectives, backgrounds, ideas, and approaches.

Every employee gets an equal voice in Officevibe. Discover our [anonymous feedback tool]() that connects managers with their teams—even on the toughest topics.

Who is responsible for inclusion?

Ultimately, every individual in a workforce is responsible for making the people around them feel safe and valued. This includes managers, teammates, colleagues in other departments, upper leadership—*everyone*. When values of equity and respect are firmly

established, they become something that each employee feels personally responsible to uphold.

A mistake that's commonly made across all industries is that organizations leave it up to HR to foster inclusive environments. When CEOs delegate the "inclusion project" to their people team, they can inadvertently send the message that it isn't a personal priority for them as a business leader. An organization's staff look to leadership for guidance not just on the company's vision and mission, but also its values and ethics. Inclusion should be central to the operations *and* direction of any business that wants to invest in it.

While diversity training and equitable values, policies, and structures are essential, efforts need to be made at both an organizational and a team level to build an inclusive culture. Team dynamics and employees' sense of psychological safety play a big role in feeling respected and valued at work, and this is where management comes in. Managers have a direct impact in the way that employees interact with one another on a day-to-day basis, so they must make inclusion a priority in how they lead their teams.

Fostering inclusion on remote teams

As many organizations have been rapidly adapting to remote work, the impact that this shift has on employees' sense of inclusion is as much of a concern as anything else. Going virtual has the power to create more balance and wellbeing, but it can also reinforce barriers if we're not mindful. For example, people who live alone might benefit from their ability to focus and be productive, while people who aren't tech-savvy can end up spending more time navigating new tools than getting work done. The fact is that each team, and each organization, will be impacted differently based on their pre-existing culture and norms.

How managers can promote inclusion on remote teams:

- Remember that employees are not just working from home, but trying to get work done at home during a time of crisis. Make space for people to speak out about how they're feeling and what they're thinking.

- Be mindful that the breakdown between home life and work life is impacting everyone differently. Offer support, connect people with mental health resources they might need, and be as flexible as you can when it comes to everything from schedules and time off to deadlines and objectives.
- Check in with all of your employees regularly, and encourage them to check in with each other, as well. Facilitate virtual team-building activities and social hours so everyone can stay connected on a human level.

As the leader of your team, you play an important role in keeping everyone connected and giving everyone an equal say. Inclusive managers listen empathetically to their employees, advocate for them, and break down barriers when needed. More on this in the next section.

Expert tips for leaders to build inclusive workplaces

Michelle Kim, the CEO of [Awaken](#) who is passionately changing the face of diversity and inclusion efforts within organizations, offers three essential tips for leaders to build inclusive workspaces.

1. See people, not just workers

There's a tendency to think that our identities in and out of the workplace are separate, but they're not. When leaders take the time to demonstrate that they see people, and not just workers, employees feel valued for who they are. Ask questions, show interest, and show support for people's personal identities and what's important to them.

Tip: Find out what religious and cultural days and holidays are significant to your employees from different backgrounds, and offer them the time off.

2. Lead through tension

Remember that your workplace does not exist separately from the world, and world events affect your employees. Whether it touches on race, gender, religion, sexuality, or other identity-based issues, it's key for managers and HR leaders to check in with their teams, make a formal company statement, and create a safe space to hold discussions or ask for support.

Tip: When major events targeting specific communities occur, gather your team and let them know that you recognize the impact. Ask if anyone needs some time off, and remind them you have an open door policy should they need to talk.

3. Use your power to level the playing field

People look to their leaders to set the norm, so managers must model inclusive behaviour for their teams. Here are some examples of how:

- Interrupt harmful language or behavior in the moment. This includes noting your own, as we all have bias. Speak up!
- Listen to and amplify underrepresented voices.
- Give credit where credit is due; to the people who actually did the work.
- Delegate work equitably and thoughtfully—give everyone the chance to shine.
- Question and then challenge norms established by and for privileged groups.
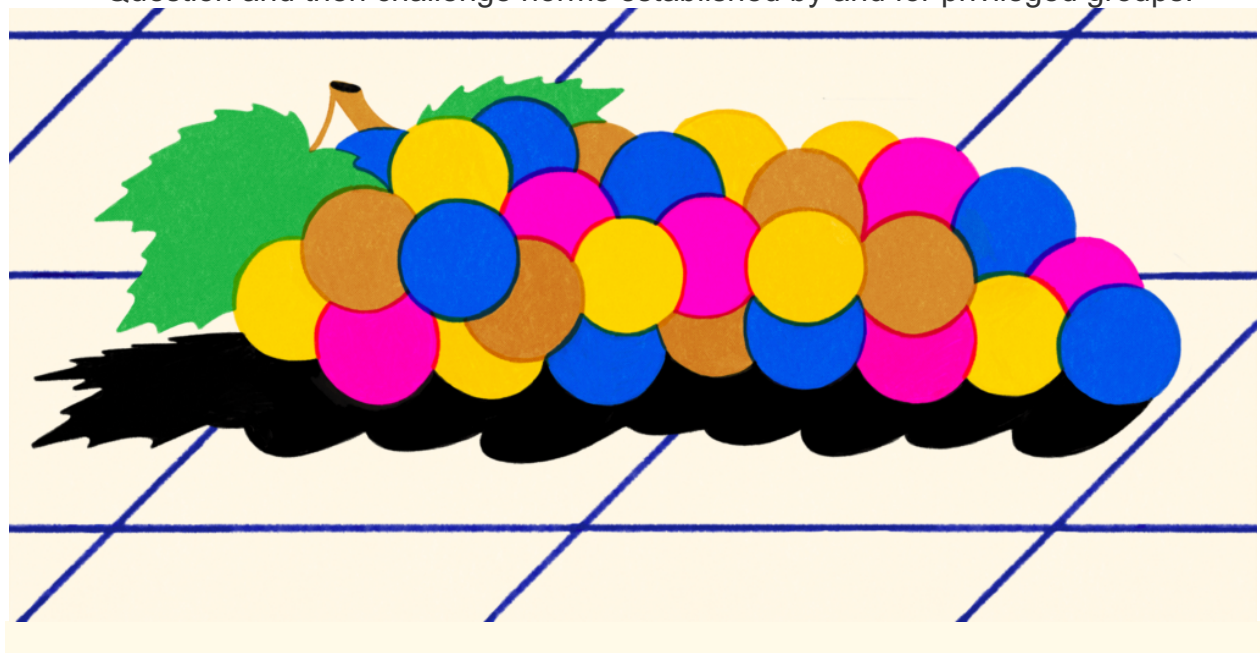
- Do you feel that your team is inclusive (integrates people regardless of their differences)?
- Do you think that people with different ideas and points of view are valued in your team?
- Can you go to work without feeling the need to hide part of who you are?

To retain and engage your employees, you need to create an environment they feel comfortable to be themselves in—one where they feel heard, included, and valued. And when leaders, managers, and employees are all on the same page and prioritize building a sense of belonging, teams and organizations thrive.