the belonging book 2021

a workplace for everyone.

contents.

20%

of the UK's workforce feel they don't belong at work.

a workplace for everyone.

Across 2020 and much of 2021, we've experienced a collective rupture in our ability to connect and experience togetherness, both in our personal and professional lives. Our sense of belonging has been challenged – and this is relevant for workplaces as it's only when people feel a sense of belonging that they can share ideas, confidently speak up, and fully contribute.

Belonging is an essential element of an inclusive and diverse workplace. While diversity and inclusion are important metrics in their own right, there is evidence to suggest that a focus on belonging can most helpfully frame inclusion initiatives in the workplace. Where diversity and inclusion succeed in building representative teams and inviting everyone to have a seat at the table, belonging goes one step further. It helps people to feel that they have a valued and valuable role at that table. People are motivated by an inherent desire to form inter-personal links and connections, that sense of belonging.

For employees that feel their age, social background or gender sets them apart from their colleagues it can affect this ability to create connections in the workplace and foster a sense of belonging. As organisations focus on social mobility and seek to widen the talent they attract, bringing people together and understanding what it is to belong will be crucial.

To learn more about the state of play – not exclusively, but particularly in the wake of the pandemic, furlough and multiple lockdowns – Randstad has carried out research to discover how much the UK's workforce feel they belong in their place of work. Respondents spanned professional fields from education and healthcare to government and construction – sectors who all experienced the impact of the pandemic very differently.

And the results were conclusive – one in five (20%) of the UK's workforce feel they don't belong at work. With approximately 31,000,000 workers* in the UK, that means 6,200,000 colleagues feel excluded professionally.

At Randstad we want to close this gulf. In our 2021 Diversity and Inclusion report we found that 71% of professionals experience exclusion within the first six months of joining a company.

To counter this, the Belonging Book is designed to support you in understanding – and championing – the importance of belonging within your organisation, as well as arming you with tips and tools to foster an environment within your business in which everyone feels valued, included and heard.

Throughout this book you'll find thought-starters for you to use within your own team. We hope you find it useful in establishing or developing an open and inclusive atmosphere in your workplace.

If you would like further support or advice around the findings of this research, do get in touch with the team at customersupport@randstad.co.uk.

Laura Todd
Director of Inclusion and Wellbeing
at Randstad UK & RSR EMEA

*https://www.statista.com/statistics/281998/employment-figures-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/#:~:text=There%20were%20approximately%2030.9%20million,three%20months%20to%20April%202020.

does 'belonging' have a place in the workplace?

Belonging. It's a core element of being human. It's the third rung of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs; the fundamental desire to have a place and a community. We exist in relation to those around us, and carve out our role based on where we fit in.

self-actualisation

esteem

love and belonging

safety needs

physiological needs

But this need doesn't only apply in our personal lives. It goes further than that – a sense of belonging is also a central part of a productive and positive workplace.

Why?

Belonging leads to a sense of connection, a feeling of purpose. When we feel we are a part of something, we're motivated to work together towards shared goals. A focus on belonging helps to build a sense of inclusion and psychological safety - those invisible aspects of culture and behaviour where we feel safe to share ideas, mistakes, weaknesses and concerns.

According to 2020 research carried out by coaching and performance organisation BetterUp*, a sense of workplace belonging leads to a 56% increase in job performance, a 50% reduction in turnover risk, and a 75% decrease in employee sick days. The science backs this up, with studies associating a lack of belonging with stress, illness, decreased wellbeing and poor mental health.

So, it's about organisational efficiency and results; but it's also about being able to bring and retain team members through your doors. Much has been written about 'The Great Resignation' 2021, in which swathes of workers have chosen to leave their jobs in search of new challenges – but our findings indicate that many companies will struggle to capitalise on these new entrants to the job market. We may instead be seeing 'The Great Recruitment Race': our research found that 60% of people would turn down a job if the company's values didn't reflect their own. That's even higher for women, with 65% saying they'd stay away from a company whose values felt misaligned with their personal principles.

60%
of workers would turn down a job if the company's values didn't reflect their own.

something to consider.

How well do you know your colleagues' personal and professional values? Have you carried out formal surveys or informal conversations to discuss how these align with those of your company? As part of formal development, are line managers aware of their teams' values and motivators, and do they seek to build on these?

How do you communicate your organisation's values internally – are they displayed front and centre across communications, or are they kept separate from your day-to-day priorities?

Does your organisation support charities that are valued by your staff?

Do you know how many of your people feel that they belong in your workplace?

When was the last time you asked them - do you seek this information in your staff surveys, and how do you act on the feedback received?

belonging by numbers.

In our study of 1,199 UK workers:

20%
of all workers don't feel that they belong in their workplace. That's the equivalent of 6,200,000 colleagues in the UK.
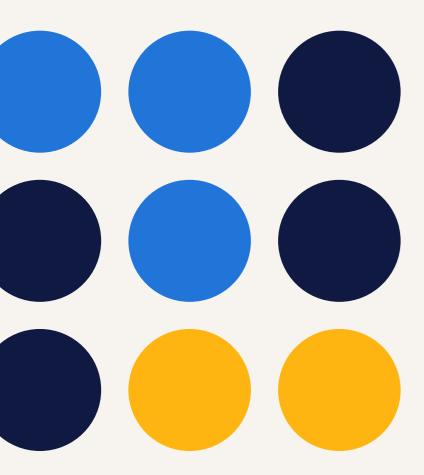
That figure rises to 27% of under 34s.

30%
feel unable to confide in their management.

23%
feel like they can't be their authentic selves at work. For those who identify as bisexual that's 38%.

35%
of people from an ethnic minority background feel unable to be the true version of themselves in the workplace.

22%
of women feel uncomfortable talking openly about miscarriage in the workplace.

'The Great Resignation' ➡ 'The Great Recruitment Race'

60% of workers would turn down a job if the company's values didn't reflect their own. That's even higher for women, with 65% saying they'd stay away from a company whose values felt misaligned with their personal principles.

climbing the social ladder.

24% believe that their career options are limited due to their background. Among those who have completed a trade apprentice qualification this number grows to almost three-fifths (58%) of workers who feel their professional futures to be restricted due to their upbringing.

Nearly half (49%) of people from an ethnic minority background feel that their career options are limited because of where they've come from.

15% of people in the world have some form of disability (source: WHO) – that's over one billion people and makes up the biggest minority group globally

52% of those with day-to-day activities limited due to health or a disability felt restricted professionally due to their background

keeping mum (and dad).

31% of people with children feel pressured to hide or change things about themselves in order to fit in at work.

sexuality and relationships.

12% of respondents feel uncomfortable being honest about their sexuality in the workplace.

Those who identify as gay or lesbian report feeling even less comfortable (28%), rising to 35% for bisexual colleagues.

gender matters.
A fifth of women (22%) are uncomfortable being honest about their reasons for taking sickness leave, compared to just 12% of men

health(y) conversations.

30% feel uncomfortable talking openly about their mental health. This increases to 41% of people who are gay or lesbian and 48% of people who are bisexual.

Do your team have forums available to them to raise concerns or suggestions, other than high visibility meetings?

Are there any anonymous channels where colleagues can freely give feedback on what they feel works well and what could be improved?

Do you have a mentorship programme where people can gain support in a non-formal setting?

Do you have mental health first aiders, and have you thought about providing access to an in-house therapist/counsellor?

Are your managers and staff trained to understand how best to work with their staff e.g., does a non-parent manager understand the demands of being a parent?

Does a non-disbaled manager understand the needs of their team member who uses a wheelchair?

a temporary problem?

With a surge in alternative ways of working (zero hours contracts, flexible hours, freelance and contract work), British employers are seeing a rise in the number of colleagues who aren't full-time, permanent members of staff.

And this is a risk factor for embedding a feeling of belonging among teams; our research found that individuals working part-time (working fewer than eight hours a week) feel less like they belong in their workplace (27%) than permanent colleagues (20%).

People on fixed-term contracts and those who are freelancing feel the most pressure to change or hide things about themselves in order to fit in, at 39% and 34% respectively.

It's a vicious circle. Within the freelance and contract community, word travels fast and far. Workplaces that prioritise belonging among all staff will become known as welcoming places to work for short-term and part-time candidates – and will put themselves in a position to attract this talent on an ongoing basis.

To ensure contract and part-time workers feel like a core part of the team, hiring managers and HR colleagues should:
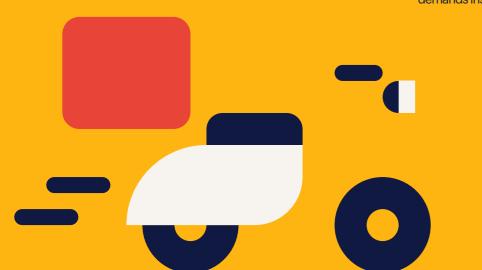
- develop a team charter on the ways the team wants to work- agreeing behaviours, how the team communicates and meeting etiquette. Consider how new contractors are engaged in this process and the possible impacts of part-time workers on what has been agreed.

- ensure key team and decision meetings are held at times when all team members can attend. It is important all team members feel they have had the same access to updates and that connection with the team.

- consider the benefits and support provided to all demographic groups, including contractors. For example many organisations are providing access to corporate wellbeing programmes and development programmes. This signals to all people working for your organisation that you care about their distinct needs and demands inside and outside of work.

something to consider

Do you treat part-time – and temporary – colleagues as much a part of your team as their full-time, permanent counterparts? How are they onboarded? Do they get welcome lunches too? Are they included in all work meetings, consulted for their opinions and invited on staff social events?

How do you thank them when they leave? Do you have any interactions with them after they leave? How do you keep relations with them in the hope to welcome them back when you might wish to work with them again?

returning to work.

As the pandemic hit the UK in 2020, office-based workers across Britain received a 'work from home' order from the Government. A new way of working presented itself for those who could complete their duties remotely.

These changes were received with enthusiasm from many: our 2020 employer brand research discovered that the most desired non-financial benefits included flexible working hours and being able to work from home.

Our latest research goes one step further, finding that over one third of workers (37%) in 2021 don't consider social interactions in the workplace important.

The implications for this are significant, as business leaders in industries that have been able to function with colleagues working from home plan how to encourage their teams back to their shared places of work.

Deloitte Insights' 2020 report ('Belonging: From comfort to connection to contribution') found that three factors influence an organisation's ability to create belonging:
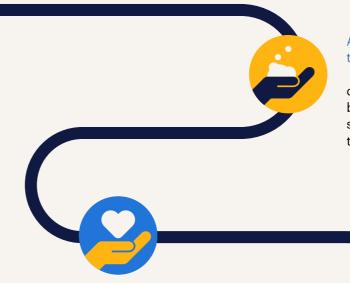
- Organisational culture
- Leadership behaviours
- Personal relationships

To be able to develop the strong personal relationships that are central to fostering belonging, team members need to experience incidental social engagements with their colleagues. Those traditional 'water cooler moments' – informal conversations that happen largely by chance in professional spaces – have been a casualty of working in a more remote way, as scheduled virtual calls overtook from unexpectedly meeting a colleague in the kitchen while making a cup of coffee.

The challenge for employers and people managers in 2021 and beyond is: how to incentivise their employees to spend informal time either physically or virtually with their teams and see the value in building back bonds with their colleagues.

37%
of workers don't consider social interactions in the workplace important.

There are a number of steps that can be taken:

Alleviate any fears that employees could feel around their health at work

communicate the safety measures taken by the business to ensure everyone's wellbeing (e.g. screens between workspaces, regular Covid testing, air ventilation, hand sanitiser stations)

Offer 'time out of work' credits

where possible, factor in time for teams to collaborate on non-job-specific activities – perhaps volunteering together in the local community or virtually, or setting up an internal newsletter to share team successes and updates

Develop mentorship and training opportunities

offer 1-2-1 programmes and development series to allow colleagues to meet with their cohort in a way that feels beneficial, personally and professionally

Create 'don't miss' moments

consider organising free breakfast/lunches as a way of encouraging conversation not centred around team members' day-to-day roles, introduce hot desking to facilitate informal interactions outside of immediate teams, and establish 'interest clubs' – e.g. running, yoga, book clubs

something to consider.

How do you encourage your teams to see the value in strengthening their personal relationships? How do you provide opportunities to connect – e.g. creating private spaces to sit and talk, or providing coffee shop gift cards to use with their colleagues?

And when it comes to those who are working remotely, or whose breaks are inconsistent, how do you establish trust and involve colleagues in creating solutions to challenges? Do you bring teams together in a forum where they learn from each other and build a good rapport?

making it happen:
belonging in action.

How can you improve belonging in your organisation? six actionable tips:

1. **Build a colleague-led forum** - give your people a voice and linkage to leadership on shaping the change.

2. **Feedback, feedback, feedback** - encourage self learning and awareness on the impacts of individual behaviours.

3. **Provide coaching on belonging and inclusion to all managers** - what are the practical questions and actions leaders can take to harness diversity and create a sense of belonging.

4. **Embed inclusion principles and behaviours across all roles** - link this to your organisation's purpose and values, hire, promote and reward based on these behaviours.

5. **Harness human bonds** - how can people be brought together to solve specific problems outside their day-to-day work; how and where are teams brought together to build social bonds.

6. **Ensure this is a consistent dialogue** - embed messaging on the importance of inclusion, it needs to be built into your culture and all people communications.

making people feel included?

it's about 'will & skill'.

How HS2 has brought belonging to work.

Mark Lomas is Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion at the high-speed railway company HS2 Ltd. (High Speed Two Ltd.).

HS2 has already made waves for its progressive approach to Diversity & Inclusion – under Mark's management, HS2 has won awards for its inclusive procurement model, as well as being named as the No.1 Gender Inclusive Employer by VERCIDA in the UK in 2018 and is the first organisation in the UK to achieve PLATINUM level against the Clear Assured accreditation framework, the highest level of accreditation possible. Clear Assured is an EDI accreditation and best practice framework used by over 500 organisations across the UK.

And Mark has always kept the idea of 'belonging' centre of mind when considering how the business operates: "In a nutshell belonging at HS2 means being comfortable bringing your whole self to work. We have created a set of core values that set the tone for this – respect, integrity, leadership and safety. These principles are the foundation of our programme."

But these values don't sit languishing in a dusty brand book at HS2 – colleagues are encouraged to engage with them regularly. Each day, every team meeting features a 'values moment', during which any team member can share a story of how HS2's values were recently brought to life, ensuring these principles are lived within the business.

Mark believes that the key to successfully implementing a successful D&I strategy is data. That's why HS2 run several "well-being" surveys each year and a major engagement survey every 1-2 years. But the surveys alone are not enough, according to Mark: "What really drives change is ensuring you act quickly and decisively on the results. This is something we feel very strongly about, and this is why more than 70% of staff stated that they were confident that HS2 acted on their feedback in our most recent survey"

That is just the tip of the iceberg, HS2 also have several key initiatives engrained across all areas of the business:

HS2 and you – each week, HS2 profiles a different member of the team offering them a chance to talk about issues close to their heart and giving them a platform to voice their views to the wider business.

HS2's reverse mentoring programme – each member of HS2's senior team is partnered with more junior team members who get to share their view on what the company should be doing to help staff belong. It's a key performance indicator for the senior team and is something they take very seriously.

Courageous conversations - This programme allows employees to have their say on the key issues they face. These conversations can be on a range of topics from mental health to diversity and developed from a format addressing race equality following the black lives matter campaign.

Values week -Each year where the whole business is involved in a number of events and programmes aimed and boosting awareness"

The approach is clearly working for the HS2 as Mark explains– "Our reverse mentoring programme has been so successful it is currently oversubscribed and engagement in our initiatives and virtual events exploded by 300% during the pandemic. We expect this high level of engagement to continue."

As for the secret behind this success? According to Mark, it's simple: "In my eyes, our success is driven by two key factors: 'will' and 'skill'. The will for change and the skill to action it. This is why we made sure the system is embedded in all areas of the business from head office to HR, the supply chain and even into site safety. D&I – and belonging – are a core part of our business strategy and not just an add on."

Mark Lomas Linkedin Profile:
https://www.linkedin.com/in/marklomas1/

Want to take a leaf out of HS2's book?

Alleviate any fears that employees could feel around their health at work communicate the safety measures taken by the business to ensure everyone's wellbeing (e.g. screens between workspaces, regular Covid testing, air ventilation, hand sanitiser stations)

Offer 'Volunteering' credits where possible, factor in time for teams to collaborate on non-job-specific activities – perhaps volunteering together in the local community, or setting up an internal newsletter to share team successes and updates

Develop mentorship and training opportunities offer 1-2-1 programmes and development series to allow colleagues to meet with their cohort in a way that feels beneficial, personally and professionally

Create 'don't miss' moments consider organising opportunities to have conversations around organisational culture w not centred around team members' day-to-day roles, introduce nudge tactics and communications to prompt engagement and encourage development outside of immediate teams, and establish 'interest clubs' – e.g. wellbeing groups, , book clubs etc.

find out more.

If you would like further support or advice around the findings of this research, do get in touch with the team at
customersupport@randstad.co.uk

Let us lead you in creating a more inclusive workplace for everyone, reach out to the team today at
marketing@randstad.co.uk