IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

PART ONE

Disparities Among Employees of Color and Women Across All Racial and Ethnic Identity Groups

WORKPLACE PEACE
INSTITUTE

REPORT

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Disparities Among Employees of Color and Women Across All Racial and Ethnic Identity Groups

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When we lean in to the fullness of who we are and what has brought us together and invite wholeness and dignity into the workplace, we experience the very best of ourselves.

—Robyn Short, CEO
Workplace Peace Institute

ABOUT THIS REPORT

The Impact of Covid-19 on Employee Engagement is a two-part series that examines the ways in which the global pandemic affected and continues to affect employee engagement in the U.S. American workforce. This first of two reports explores the disparities among employees of color and women across all racial and ethnic identity groups working in remote work environments. Part two explores the disparities between executive leadership and mid-level management and individual contributors working in a remote environment.

This report is based on Workplace Peace Institute's research which was conducted to support organizational leaders in creating workplace cultures of peace and dignity during times of extraordinary disruption and change. Peace exists in the workplace when all employees experience human security. Human security is the fulfillment of basic human needs such as psychological safety, security, including cultural security, belonging, self-esteem, personal fulfillment, participation, and the acceptance of identity. Dignity exists when all employees experience their inherent worth and value.

This first of two reports explores the disparities among employees of color and women across all racial and ethnic identity groups working in remote work environments. Part two explores the disparities between executive leadership and mid-level management and individual contributors working in a remote environment.

These findings and recommendations reflect employees' feedback on how they experienced basic human needs and dignity needs in the workplace during the period between March 2020 and March 2021. The report focuses on the U.S. American employees who shifted from an in-office work life to a remote work life during the pandemic. The report is intended to give leaders a clear understanding of what is necessary for all employees — especially Black, Latina/Latino, Hispanic, Asian American, employees of Middle Eastern and North African descent, and women employees across all racial and ethnic

identity groups — to thrive during periods of extraordinary workplace disruption, change, and social isolation.

Workplace Peace Institute developed the *Impact of Covid-19 on Employee Engagement* report using data collected from more than 200 U.S. American employees across a myriad industries and sectors via the Employee Engagement and Covid-19 online assessment. Using questions grounded in basic human needs theory and dignity theory, the assessment measured whether employee engagement had increased, decreased, or stayed the same during the Covid-19 global pandemic. Because the assessment specifically requested participants respond to questions based off their experiences in the workplace during the period of March 2020 and March 2021, it is important to note that social and political events — and how organizational leaders responded to these events — such as the murder of George Floyd and the worldwide Black Lives Matter protests that erupted as a result and the politically polarizing presidential election and the

insurrection on the U.S. Capitol that followed, likely influenced employee engagement and the results of this assessment.

Humans come together and collaborate in times of crisis.

Our primary finding is that humans come together and collaborate in times of crisis. This ability to collaborate has sustained organizations and employees throughout the Covid-19 crisis. However, there is disparity across racial and ethnic identity groups and among men and women in terms of employee engagement in a remote work environment. To successfully engage employees in a sustained remote work environment, organizational leaders will need to be intentional about cultivating dignity among employees of color and women across all racial and ethnic identity groups.

ABOUT WORKPLACE PEACE INSTITUTE

Workplace Peace Institute is on a mission to create highly engaged workplaces where dignity is consistently honored and experienced. Our organization systems design services support small- to mid-sized businesses in optimizing employee engagement, maximizing organizational productivity, and improving profitability by infusing human security and dignity as foundational attributes of their business model.

Our vision is a workplace in which human security and dignity are the bottom line.

For more information about Workplace Peace Institute's solutions for optimizing employee engagement, maximizing organizational productivity, and improving bottom line profitability, please visit www.workplacepeaceinstitute.com.

Learn more about Workplace Peace Institute

INTRODUCTION BY WORKPLACE PEACE INSTITUTE CEO

According to the 2020 Gallup report, "The State of the Global Workplace," there are 100 million full-time U.S. American employees.[1] Of that 100 million employees, only 33 percent report being engaged in the workplace. Gallup defines employee engagement as, "involved in, enthusiastic about and committed to their work and workplace."[2] This means 67 percent of the U.S. American workforce is not actively involved in, enthusiastic about or committed to their work and workplace. From an organizational perspective, this lack of engagement implies an extraordinary waste of organizational productivity. From a human perspective, this implies a stunning waste of human potential.[3]

Gallup found that when organizations orient performance management systems around basic human needs, including psychological needs such as acceptance, acknowledgment, recognition, fairness, emotional safety, employees experience more engagement and contribute to the organization at higher levels. This translates directly to increased productivity and improved bottom line profit.[4] With a 33 percent employee engagement rate at the time of the Gallup study and this Workplace Peace Institute study, U.S. organizations were missing opportunities for innovation, organizational growth, and profitability. Individuals were missing opportunities for accessing their potential, and were, therefore, failing to thrive in the individual and collective human experience — and then came the global pandemic.

Cultivating workplace cultures that incorporate dignity as a key attribute is essential to addressing the basic human needs and dignity needs inherent to a highly motivated and engaged workforce.

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[1] Gallup, Inc. "Executive Summary." Essay. In *State of the Global Workplace*. New York, NY: Gallup Press, 2020.

[2] Gallup, Inc. "Gallup Daily: U.S. Employee Engagement." Gallup.com. Gallup, November 21, 2020. https://news.gallup.com/poll/180404/gallup-daily-employee-engagement.aspx.

[3] Gallup, Inc. "Executive Summary." Essay. In *State of the Global Workplace*. New York, NY: Gallup Press, 2020.

[4] Ibid.

Recognizing the baseline employee engagement of 33 percent, the goal of this research was to gain an understanding of the impact of Covid-19 on employee engagement. Participants were asked 18 questions designed to gain insight into how basic human needs and dignity were experienced and how this impacted the research participants' ability to be involved in, enthusiastic about and committed to their work and workplace during the time period of March 2020 and March 2021.

This research study sought to gain a greater understanding of the disruptions associated with Covid-19 and the impact on employee engagement. The results of this study can assist for-profit and nonprofit organizations in designing and implementing business models in which employees are able to sustain their involvement in work, their enthusiasm for work, and their commitment to their work and the workplace during periods of extreme disruption and in an on-going remote working environment.

Dr. Robyn Short

Robyn Short

Founder & CEO

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The primary finding of this research study is that humans come together and collaborate in times of crisis. This ability to collaborate has sustained organizations and employees throughout the Covid-19 crisis. However, there is disparity across racial and ethnic identity groups and among men and women in terms of employee engagement in a remote work environment. To successfully engage employees in a sustained remote work environment, organizational leaders will need to be intentional about cultivating dignity among employees of color and women across all racial and ethnic identity groups.

Key Areas of Success

1 Research participants working remotely reported an increase in their ability to experience authenticity individually and among coworkers.

2 Remote workers experienced an increase in having their expertise sought after and valued by leadership.

3 Participants working remotely experienced a significant increase in acknowledgement and recognition for their contributions to the workplace, which led to an increase in feeling appreciated.

4 Employees experienced an increase in their personal commitments to the success of their colleagues, as well as the success of the organization.

5 Employees gave credit to organizations for providing the opportunities for professional development necessary to meet the changing demands of the workplace.

Key Areas for Improvement

Disparities emerged between White men and people of color and women across all racial and ethnic identity groups as it relates to the following areas:

1 Experiencing emotional connections in the workplace

2 Respectful boundaries between work life and home life

3 Trust that decisions that impact one's work life are made fairly

4 Feeling motivated about one's work and role within the organization

5 Feeling enthusiastic about one's work and workplace

SIX KEY AREAS OF SUCCESS

Organizations experienced positive results in six key areas related to employee engagement. Research participants working remotely reported an increase in their ability to experience authenticity individually and among coworkers. Remote workers experienced an increase in having their expertise sought after and valued by leadership. Participants working remotely also noted a significant increase in acknowledgement and recognition for their contributions to the workplace, which led to an increase in feeling appreciated. Employees experienced an increase in their personal commitments to the success of their colleagues, as well as the success of the organization. And, employees gave credit to organizations for providing the opportunities for professional development necessary to meet the changing demands of the workplace.

Authenticity in the Workplace

Case Study research conducted by Workplace Peace Institute in 2020 found that a core requirement of experiencing dignity in the workplace is having one's voice genuinely heard and the experience of having one's authentic self fully embraced and honored.[5] Participants from this study reported that working from home allowed employees to be more relaxed, physically comfortable, and able to exercise control over their environment in such a way that supported authenticity. Forty percent of remote participants expressed an increased authenticity among coworkers, including their ability to be themselves in the workplace. In contrast, 30 percent of workers who remained in the office during the pandemic experienced a decrease in their ability to experience authenticity. Asian American remote workers and Black American remote workers expressed a 50 percent increase in authenticity.

Remote employees reported a **40% increase** in authenticity compared to a **30% decrease** reported by in-office employees.

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[5] Short, Robyn. "Developing and Sustaining Organizational Systems That Honor the Dignity Needs of Stakeholder," 2020.

A participant who self-identified as biracial and works at the individual contributor level commented that her ability to be authentic increased 100 percent. She reported that, "I now work 100 percent from home. I am free to be myself and express myself in an environment that suits me best. I am more comfortable interacting with coworkers via phone and video because I am more comfortable in general." A woman who identified as Black American noted that the previous work her organization had done around racial equity supported her ability to experience an increased sense of authenticity in a remote work environment. And a Latina woman who works at the director level indicated that "Leadership has become more comfortable being their authentic self in the workplace," which had a ripple effect across the organization.

Recommendation

Organizations exploring continued remote work post-pandemic should place an explicit focus on educational programs and training programs that explore behavioral practices and organizational policies that invite wholeness and authenticity among remote workers.

I am free to be myself and express myself in an environment that suits me best. I am more comfortable interacting with coworkers via phone and video because I am more comfortable in general.

Expertise Sought After and Valued

This research study found that there was an increase in organizational leadership actively seeking out and valuing the expertise across the organization. This held true regardless of the person's racial and ethnic identity group, for men and women alike, and across all functional areas of the organization, as well as up and down the organizations' hierarchy.

Humans have a profound need for human connection. During times of social disruption and stress, we tend to lean into cooperative behavior as a survival mechanism. Research by

Markus Heinrichs and Bernadette von Dawans at the University of Freiburg, Germany found that acute stress may actually lead to "greater cooperative, social, and friendly behavior."[6] This tendency for humans to collaborate during times of social stress and to seek increased opportunities for connection and compassion during times of crises is hardwired into the human species as a survival mechanism.[7]

Recommendation

Organizations exploring continued remote work post-pandemic will need to implement practices that invite the wisdom and expertise that reside within all areas of the organizations. This may include reducing hierarchical decision-making making; creating and implement problem-solving committees that form around specific organizational challenges and that dissolve once those challenges have been met or overcome; and increasing one-on-one meetings between supervisors and individual contributors to ensure the knowledge, expertise, and wisdom within the organization is acknowledged, recognized, developed, and tapped by leadership.

Increased Commitment to the Success of Colleagues and the Organization

In addition to experiencing an increase in collaboration and appreciation, 46 percent of participants working remotely reported an increased commitment to the success of their colleagues, and 50 percent of remote participants reported an increase in commitment to the success of their organization. For remote workers, this finding is associated with both a better quality of life as well as pulling through challenging times together. This commitment remains consistent across all racial and ethnic identity groups, among men and women, and across organizational roles and hierarchy.

50% of remote employees reported an increased commitment to the success of their organizations

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[6] Seppala, Emma. "How the Stress of Disaster Brings People Together." Scientific American. Scientific American, November 6, 2012. https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-the-stress-of-disaster-brings-people-together/.

[7] Short, Robyn. "Developing and Sustaining Organizational Systems That Honor the Dignity Needs of Stakeholder," 2020.

One White man participant who works as a frontline worker reported, "With unemployment rising and the economy in a state of flux, I find myself worrying more and more about my colleagues and their ability to continue to thrive and even to survive. Employers historically use high unemployment rates as leverage against low wage and entry-level employees. They refuse to increase wages, improve benefits or otherwise invest in their employees and anyone who doesn't like it can join the long line of skilled and unskilled labor looking for working." A White woman executive expressed understanding regarding the plight of her organization's employees. She shared this sentiment, "Because I have to make difficult financial decisions in this environment that impact my staff, I am very connected to and committed to their success. It is more life and death than it was before." Another executive-level participant who self-identified as White commented that "shared difficulties have increased awareness of others and attention to their needs." A White woman C-suite leader commented that she is "prouder of my team and what we have been able to accomplish than ever before."

The improved quality of life that comes with remote working was also a factor in participants' reporting an increased desire to contribute to the success of colleagues and the organization as a whole. One Latina woman who works as an individual contributor noted that "there has been an increase in connectivity now that we all work from home. I am more involved with my peers. I know them better, and I care for them more now." She went on to explain that she is now "more enthusiastic in general because my quality of life is better now that I work from home. This carries over into work life." This Workplace Peace Institute study supports the fact that humans lean into cooperative and collaborative behavior during times of crisis.

... there has been an increase in connectivity now that we all work from home. I am more involved with my peers. I know them better, and I care for them more now.

Recommendation

Organizations need to be intentional about reducing the negative impact of organizational stress on employees' mental and physical well-being while also maintaining the prosocial benefits that periods of disruption can offer by implementing

management practices and organizational policies that foster a culture of collaboration. This may require leadership training and coaching to support leaders' ability to develop and implement organizationally cohesive approaches to building organizational and individual resilience while also learning new skills for building highly cooperative and collaborative teams.

Acknowledgment, Recognition, and Appreciation

An important criterion of effective collaboration is experiencing acknowledgement and recognition for one's contributions. When employees experience these two important elements of dignity, they experience the feeling of appreciation. This feeling of appreciation motivates employees to contribute at higher levels, which motivates leaders to acknowledge and recognize employees, which then increases feelings of appreciation. It is a self-perpetuating cycle that optimizes employee engagement and productivity.[8]

Forty-three percent of remote participants reported an increase in their recognition for contributions to the organization, and 36 percent reported an increase in feeling appreciated for contributions to the workplace. This increase was reported by workers across racial and ethnic identity groups, by both men and women, across functional areas of the organization, and by individuals at all levels of the organizations' hierarchy.

43% of remote employees reported an **increase in receiving recognition for contributions**

36% reported an **increase in feeling appreciated**

A woman who self-identified as White and who works as an individual contributor noted that she believes that "because we don't have our neighbors at the office to bounce ideas off of, more people are asking for my help including more senior leadership." Another person who self-identified as a White man commented that there is "somewhat more demand for expertise given the separation of team members." A lack of proximity to

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[8] Short, Robyn. "Developing and Sustaining Organizational Systems That Honor the Dignity Needs of Stakeholder," 2020.

coworkers prompted intentionality in seeking out the expertise that resides within the organization.

Recommendation

Organizations need to implement intentional practices designed to continuously and deliberately access the wisdom within the organization as a mechanism for increasing and sustaining employee engagement. People feel valued when their expertise is sought after by their peers and leadership, and people contribute at higher levels when they feel valued. Therefore, it is imperative that executive, senior, and mid-level leadership seek counsel outside their professional peer groups, act on that counsel, and recognize the value to the organization these contributions bring.

Organizations Met the Challenge

Research participants acknowledged that their organizations met the Covid-19 challenge with additional professional development opportunities designed to meet the changing demands of the workplace. Fifty-eight percent of work-from-home participants agreed that during the Covid-19 pandemic, their organizations provided opportunities for professional development. This agreement was consistent across all racial and ethnic identity groups, by men and women, and across all functional areas and roles.

The global pandemic required new skills and new ways of working for almost all employees regardless of industry and sector. Organizations responded by actively infusing training and professional development for all employees.

58% of remote employees agreed that their organizations met the challenge of a changing workplace by offering professional development and training

Recommendation

To sustain employee engagement in a post-pandemic remote working environment, organizations must continue to invent time and resources in cultivating a workplace culture of learning for all employees regardless of where the employee resides in the organization's hierarchy. Employees feel valued when the

workplace is intentional about the professional growth and development of all employees.

SIX KEY AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

As noted previously in this report, Gallup research found that when organizations orient performance management systems around basic human needs, including psychological needs such as acceptance, acknowledgment, recognition, fairness, emotional safety, employees experience more engagement and contribute to the organization at higher levels. This translates directly to increased productivity and improved bottom line profit.[9] This Workplace Peace Institute study found that during the Covid-19 pandemic, organizations achieved some successes toward increasing employee engagement, specifically as it relates to acceptance (e.g., employees' ability to experience authenticity in their work life), and acknowledgment, recognition, and appreciation. However, disparities emerged between White men and people of color and women across all racial and ethnic identity groups as it relates to emotional connections, respectful boundaries, fairness, feeling motivated, and feeling enthusiastic (e.g., personal fulfillment). These disparities are explored in detail in the following sections.

Emotional Connections

Emotional connection to one's coworkers and to one's work is essential to employee engagement, which Gallup defines as "involved in, enthusiastic about and committed to one's work and workplace."[10]

When it comes to experiencing emotional connection in the workplace, **proximity matters**.

Workplace Peace Institute research found that when it comes to experiencing emotional connection in the workplace proximity matters, especially for employees of color and for women across

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[9] Gallup, Inc. "Executive Summary." Essay. In *State of the Global Workplace*. New York, NY: Gallup Press, 2020.

[10] Gallup, Inc. "Gallup Daily: U.S. Employee Engagement." Gallup.com. Gallup, November 21, 2020. https://news.gallup.com/poll/180404/gallup-daily-employee-engagement.aspx.

all racial and ethnic identity groups. While 37 percent of remote workers who participated in this study expressed a decrease in experiencing emotional connection and support in the workplace, forty percent of in-office participants expressed an increase.

Proximity matters because it creates an environment for human bodies to actually sync with one another in such a way that builds trust.

37% of remote workers reported a decrease in emotional connection and support

Neurologically, humans are hardwired for survival. Building trusting relationships and strong bonds are important ways of achieving that. An intricate feedback loop exists within the human neurological system designed to build and maintain human-to-human connection. This feedback loop begins with the sharing of a positive emotion. This exchange of positive emotion happens when dignity and basic human needs are honored. When a person experiences fairness, acknowledgment, acceptance of identity, etc., it produces a chemical reaction within the body called oxytocin. Oxytocin supports the development of strong bonds, trust, and loyalty — all necessary elements of a highly engaged workforce. When a positive emotion is shared and oxytocin is released, the person's mirror neurons fire which creates a syncing of biochemistry between the two people or groups of people. This biochemical syncing creates the urge to invest in the wellbeing of the other. This investment in the well-being of another sets into motion a self-perpetuating cycle of oxytocin production that encourages the actions and behaviors necessary for experiencing positive emotions and connections and building trust. [11]

42% of women reported a decrease in emotional connection

This study found that the ability for remote workers to experience emotional connection in the workplace differed among racial and ethnic identity groups. Fifty percent of Asian American remote participants and 45 percent of Black American participants expressed a decrease in experiencing emotional connection and support in the workplace. However, 40 percent of Latina/Latino and Hispanic participants working remotely

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[11] Short, Robyn. "Developing and Sustaining Organizational Systems That Honor the Dignity Needs of Stakeholder," 2020.

experienced an increase in emotional connection and support in the workplace. There was no significant change for White participants.

Analyzing the data by gender found that 42 percent of women participants reported a decrease in emotional connection in the workplace.

A White woman participant shared that she started a new job during the pandemic, and she found it difficult to connect with colleagues via video and phone "as they tend to be more structured, and there is less chance of interacting in the hallway, on breaks, etc." A Latina woman who works at the director level reported, "Connection comes with connecting, not providing educational material or a speaker on how to meditate. While helpful, it did nothing for connecting staff." A White man commented that, "There are fewer incidental encounters and casual interaction in the office, and these are even more difficult to arrange via internet and phone."

Recommendation

Employers seeking to sustain a remote work environment will need to be intentional about designing virtual meetings in such a way that cultivates emotional connections and that replicate the neurological attributes of in-person meetings such as behavioral tactics that activate mirror neurons and stimulate the prosocial hormone oxytocin.

All employees will benefit from educational materials and training that enhance an understanding of neuroscience and the role of the brain in managing emotions, as well as training opportunities that provide education on biological and behavioral tactics that enhance positive emotions and emotional connection in the workplace. Organizational leaders and team leads will also need to be intentional about creating offline, in-person opportunities for meaningful collaboration and fellowship.

Respectful Boundaries Between Work Life and Home Life

Experiencing respectful boundaries between work and home life is a challenge for remote workers. Employees need resources available to create a physical space in the home that is dedicated to work, or they need resources to lease coworking space outside the home. Case Study research conducted by Workplace Peace Institute in 2020 found that in order to contribute at their highest level, employees need a work environment that allows

them to connect with coworkers in a meaningful way while also allowing the space to work independently and autonomously. This means, the environment needs to provide dedicated space where employees can work uninterrupted in quiet solitude and also space for workplace collaboration and fellowship.[12]

60% of employees of color reported a decrease in work life and home life boundaries

This study found that 51 percent of remote participants reported a decrease in respectful boundaries between work life and home life. This erosion of work and home life boundaries was especially profound for employees of color and women across all racial and ethnic identity groups with 60 percent of Asian American, Black American, and Latino/Latina and Hispanic participants all reporting a decrease in work life and home life boundaries. Although 39 percent of men reported a decrease in respectful work and home life boundaries, 56 percent of women participants reported a decrease.

56% of women reported a decrease in work life and home life boundaries

A Latina participant working remotely shared, "I work a lot more! Covid-19 has increased the amount of work I have. Instead of commuting two hours round trip, I work in my home office, and I find myself extending my hours because 'the office' is much more accessible now." A Latino man reported, "This has been a greater challenge than ever before. It is challenging to create boundaries for myself and my direct reports when we are all working various work hours." A White woman working remotely commented that "It is challenging to navigate this separation given I am working at my dining room table in the middle of my living room. It is stressful to look at the work monitor, paperwork, etc. during off time." A Latina woman shared, "This has melded into one long never-ending day." A White woman working at the director level reported, "There are no boundaries for me. I am available 24/7 and that is hard. Mostly this lack of boundaries is my own fault. It's hard to stick to setting and keeping boundaries when your workplace is on your phone." (White woman / remote Director)

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[12] Short, Robyn. "Developing and Sustaining Organizational Systems That Honor the Dignity Needs of Stakeholder," 2020.

This has melded into one long never-ending day.

Recommendation

Remote workers must have clearly defined work hours that are respected by the employer as well as colleagues. Additionally, the employer and employee must honor those boundaries. Employees need to exercise personal self-care and self-restraint as a part of honoring boundaries. Creating and sustaining a work and home life boundary is a shared responsibility between employers and employees. Healthy boundaries can only exist when both sides honor them. Employers must be especially cognizant of honoring these boundaries across all racial and ethnic identity groups as well as honoring work and home life boundaries for women of all racial and ethnic identity groups.

Additionally, organizations should consider one day of the week that is "meeting free" to allow for dedicated work time and an important brain break from virtual meetings. Meetings that would normally last one hour could be reduced to 50 minutes to allow meeting participants space between meetings to stand up, stretch, take a quick break, and reset their mindset before "zooming" into the next meeting space.

Trust That Decisions That Impact Work Life Are Made Fairly

For the purposes of this study trust is defined as "the belief that workplace processes will produce results that are in the best interest of the organization's members, mission and purpose" [13] and fairness is defined as "determined in an even-handed way according to agreed-on laws, rules, guidelines, policies, and procedures." [14]

40% of **Black American** remote employees experienced a **decreased trust that decisions that impact work life are made fairly**

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[13] Short, Robyn. "Developing and Sustaining Organizational Systems That Honor the Dignity Needs of Stakeholder," 2020.

[14] Hicks, Donna. Leading with Dignity: How to Create a Culture That Brings Out the Best in People. New Haven,, CT: Yale University Press, 2018.

This study found that 25 percent of remote participants experienced an increase in their ability to trust that decisions that impact work life are made fairly. However, 40 percent of Black American participants working remotely experienced a decrease in their ability to trust that decisions that impact work life are made fairly, and 28 percent of women remote workers across all racial and ethnic identity groups also experienced a decreased trust in fairness.

28% of **women** working remotely experienced a **decreased trust that decisions that impact work life are made fairly**

Case Study research conducted by Workplace Peace Institute found that the single most important factor of cultivating trust in the workplace is creating an environment in which all voices are heard. Additionally, employees need to personally experience equity — fairness and impartiality in all aspects of their work — and they need to witness the same equity among their coworkers across the organization.[15]

The single most important factor of cultivating trust in the workplace is creating an environment in which all voices are heard.

Organizations must place intentional effort toward ensuring the voices of all the employees of color and the voices of all women are amplified across the organization. Women of all racial and ethnic identity groups and employees of color must also experience equity and witness equitable treatment in order to fully trust that decisions that impact their work life are made fairly.

Recommendation

Organizations should deploy an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) audit of the organization to gain a full understanding of how employees of color and women across all racial and ethnic identity groups experience dignity in the workplace. Leadership should strategically align all business goals and initiatives to a clearly defined and publicly stated EDI commitment. All staff

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[15] Short, Robyn. "Developing and Sustaining Organizational Systems That Honor the Dignity Needs of Stakeholder," 2020.

should participate in on-going EDI training. On-going tracking and measuring must be implemented to ensure progress.

This work must be led by either a full-time employee who is a subject matter expert and whose full-time job it is to lead the initiative, or it should be led by an outside consultant. It should not be left to a volunteer committee of passionate employees who are well-intended but lack the professional credentials to lead a successful, effective, and meaningful EDI initiative. Like all strategic initiatives that bring value back to the organization, its employees, and stakeholders, the appropriate resources, expertise, and time allocation must also be applied to EDI work.

Experiencing Motivation

This study found significant disparity in workplace motivation among employees of color and women of all racial and ethnic identity groups. There was no significant change among White research participants working remotely.

 Sixty percent of Asian American, 45 percent of Black American, and 40 percent of Latina/Latino and Hispanic remote participants all reported a decrease in feeling motivated in their roles. Forty-two percent of women across all racial and ethnic identity groups working remotely also reported a decrease in motivation.

42% of women **reported a decrease in motivation**

A Latino man working in education reported, "Over time I have felt less motivated and notice my team is feeling the same way because of our missed connections and opportunities to do more team building. This is a really big challenge that is hard to address." An Asian American woman shared, "My job used to involve a great deal of travel so now my job feels more monotonous." A White woman commented, "I find it difficult to maintain motivation consistently. It tends to come and go in waves."

60% of Asian Americans employees
45% of Black Americans employees
40% of LatinX employees
reported a decrease in motivation

The decrease in experiencing motivation in the workplace for employees of color and women of all racial and ethnic identity groups correlates to the erosion of home and work life boundaries, as well as the reported decrease in experiencing emotional connections in the workplace.

Recommendation

In order to sustain motivation as it relates to employee engagement among people of color and women of all racial and ethnic identity groups, organizational leaders must be highly cognizant of creating a workplace environment in which all people experience their inherent worth and value in the workplace. While ensuring equitable allocation of work, implementing respectful boundaries with regard work hours, and creating protocols to ensure fairness with regard to acknowledgment and recognition in the workplace are all important aspects of experiencing one's worth and value, deploying an organization-wide survey to gain insight into the specific needs of employees will allow organizational leaders to develop a custom approach to their workforce.

Finding Personal Fulfillment in Work

While C-suite, executive leadership, and director-level remote leaders all experienced an increase in personal fulfillment, employees working at the manager, independent contributor, administrative, and front lines roles reported a decrease in feeling personally fulfilled in their work. This decrease is particularly notable among Black American employees and women across all racial and ethnic identity groups. Forty-five percent of Black American remote participants reported a decrease in feeling personally fulfilled by their work. And 42 percent of women remote participants of all racial and ethnic identity groups reported a decrease in feeling personally fulfilled by their work.

45% of Black American employees and 42% of women reported a decrease in feeling personally fulfilled by their work

A Latina woman reported, "Due to COVID, my work has changed. It has moved from more big-picture and long-term impact to day-to-day operations, which feels monotonous and unrewarding." A White woman commented, "I started a new job during the pandemic, and I have found it difficult to connect to our mission virtually. Although I am passionate about what we do, I find there is a lot I don't know that I don't know."

Recommendation

Employers seeking to sustain a remote work environment will need to be intentional about creating personal connections with individual employees, especially employees of color and women of all racial and ethnic identity groups, to identify personal motivators and create opportunities for team members to experience their inherent worth and value in the workplace. Leadership and management coaching and training designed to enhance emotional intelligence, cultural intelligence, dignity intelligence, and effective communication may be necessary.

Feeling Enthusiastic

Although 31 percent of remote participants reported feeling an increased enthusiasm for their workplace, 32 percent reported a decrease. This decrease is most notable among Asian Americans remote workers, 30 percent of whom reported a decrease. Fifty percent of Black American remote workers reported also reported a decrease, and 35 percent women of all racial and ethnic identity groups who reported decrease.

30% of Asian American employees
50% of Black American employees
35% women employees
reported a decrease in feeling enthusiastic

One Latina remote worker commented, "I miss the spontaneous, personal interaction with others." A White woman shared this sentiment, reporting, "I miss face-to-face, in-person interaction, collaboration, and the variation of work location and travel." Another White woman shared, "I need greater physical connection, better separation between work life and home life, and more 'fun' culture moments." A Black American woman working at the director-level reported, "The boundaries of my home life has blurred into my work life. Working late nights and

weekends are common; however, before the pandemic and the work-from-home mandate there was a respected work life balance." An Asian American woman explained, "I need more inclusion into strategic decisions. While I'm on the executive leadership team, I am often used as an outsourced resource or being given projects to react to rather than being brought in on the outset of an issue or before a decision is made when I can be proactive instead." Another Black woman working at the director level indicated, "I feel less connected. There is far less opportunity for informal communication, and to feel 'in the know' about what's happening in the office or what's being planned by senior leadership."

I need greater physical connection, better separation between work life and home life, and more 'fun' culture moments.

Recommendation

A lack of enthusiasm leads to burnout. Organizations need to pay particular attention to creating clear lines of communication between leadership and employees; designing and implementing equitable decision-making protocols that ensure all voices are heard and expertise within the organization is sourced; creating

opportunities for employee fellowship that cultivates a culture of belonging; and prioritizing work and home life boundaries for all employees.

CONCLUSION

This *Impact of Covid-19 on Employee Engagement* report is a two-part series that examined the ways in which the global pandemic affected and continues to affect employee engagement in the U.S. American workforce. This first of two reports explored the disparities among employees of color and women across all racial and ethnic identity groups working in remote work environments.

The primary finding of this research study is that humans come together and collaborate in times of crisis. This ability to collaborate has sustained organizations and employees throughout the Covid-19 crisis. However, there is disparity across racial and ethnic identity groups and among men and women in terms of employee engagement in a remote work environment.

To successfully engage employees in a sustained remote work environment, organizational leaders will need to be intentional about cultivating dignity among employees of color and women

across all racial and ethnic identity groups. This will involve educational and training programs that build leadership competencies in emotional intelligence, cultural intelligence, and dignity intelligence. It will also require that organizations make an intentional effort to infuse strategic Equity, Diversity, and Inclusions initiatives to meet the needs of a diverse workplace. Organizations will need to build competencies in power-sharing and the democratization of decision-making to ensure that all voices are heard and that the wisdom, knowledge, skills, and expertise that resides within the organization is leveraged and valued. This will be challenging but necessary work for organizations seeking to sustain an equitable and highly engaged remote work environment or hybrid work environment post-pandemic.

Part two of this report series explores the disparities between executive leadership and mid-level management and individual contributors working in a remote environment.

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