WORKPLACE CULTURE

TOOL 2: CHANGING WORKPLACE CULTURE IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

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Who is this for

High Priority
- Executives and Senior Management

Practical Information
- DEI and HR Professionals

What guidance does it provide?

- Understanding important considerations when partnering with disability organizations
- How to collaborate with the disability community to spark culture change and advance your business's disability confidence

Take-home points

- For effective change to take place, leadership, management, and front-line staff are required to play a role in shaping organizational culture
- Remember that culture change does not happen rapidly, but rather, it is deeply embedded within a workplace and will slowly change – it can take months and even years to influence the way workers think, feel, and act in a workplace
- The only way to advance a disability confident workplace culture is to ignite dialogue and action that challenges stereotypes about people with disabilities

What Do We Know About Changing Workplace Culture? - It's a Group Effort!

Workplace culture cannot be developed, or changed, by one department, level of staff, or individual, alone. Genuine buy in and commitment to action is needed across an entire organization. Who are the agents of change? [1]
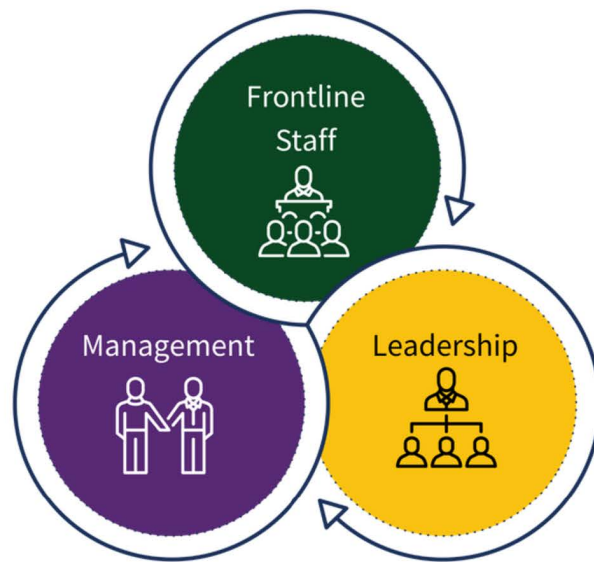
Leadership shapes and defines organizational culture through their core values and beliefs. To create a successful and sustainable workplace culture, active support from senior management is needed. Leaders can drive change and set new cultures in motion – they can impact strategic organizational direction, and work to build policies that uphold workplace culture.

Management, particularly supervisory staff, also play an important role in facilitating workplace culture. Through their management style and communication methods, managers can engage and empower frontline staff to challenge existing workplace norms.

Frontline staff fuel cultural movement. They are at the core of your organization, and their attitudes and habits shape 'the way of life' in workplace or 'how things have always been done.' To really enact change, frontline staff need to be inspired and committed to take action.

It doesn't happen overnight

Workplace culture is not tangible, making it a difficult concept to define, measure, and change: [2]

Think of it as a set of unwritten rules.
- The longer employees think and act according to these unwritten rules, the more likely their collective behaviours, mindsets, and motivations become engrained or implicit.

We're comfortable with what we know.
- Workers tend to be attracted to, selected by, and retained in organizations who have characteristics that are similar to their own. If culture becomes self-reinforcing, people become resistant to change.

Workplace cultures that are deeply embedded change slowly – it can take months and even years to influence the way workers think, feel, and act in a workplace. Fortunately, we also know that it is possible for cultural movements to take flight and change companies for the better.

The only way to advance a disability confident workplace culture is to ignite dialogue and action that challenges deeply rooted stereotypes about people with disabilities. [3] By building ongoing opportunities for senior executives and the wider workforce (i.e., all staff) to learn directly from people with disabilities, businesses can position themselves to dismantle negative attitudes and assumptions about disability.

"When I joined TD in 2017, one of the factors that drew me to the bank was our organization's focus on diversity and inclusion. It's something that I believe continues to differentiate the brand of TD. We know that the teams we build internally must reflect the rich diversity of the outside world." – Betsey Cheung, Executive Vice President, Chief Marketing Officer, TD Bank Group

How to Partner with Disability Organizations

Disability organizations are groups that are led by and represent people with disabilities. [3] An organization can operate as an advocacy group, service agency, research institution, and more. They may represent a specific group of people with disabilities, or the wide spectrum of people within the disability community. While some national organizations have been around for decades, many disability organizations are smaller grassroots organizations.

Each disability organization has different areas of focus and specialized skillsets. When approaching any type of disability organization that you would like to engage with, it is important to acknowledge that the building a partnership takes time. Both parties will benefit be getting to know one another well: [4]

- Identifying how you can work together to support one another
- Clearly identified mutually agreed upon outcomes or goals
- Collaborating to map out steps necessary to for achievement
- Choosing the actors who are best able to act upon the steps

Do not rush the partnership building process. Not only does it allow you to understand who you are getting into business with, but it strengthens rapport and trust with your potential partner. As you get to know the organization, you may find that some interests align, and some diverge. Before making any decisions, really listen to the insights and perspectives of people with lived experience.

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Understand that partnerships evolve over time. Based on your business priorities and where you are on your journey towards disability confidence, the types of partners you engage may vary over time.

Focused Collaboration with the Disability Community

For each of the below suggestions, think about how each key agent of culture change (e.g., leadership, management, and frontline staff) can be brought in to support the movement: [3]

- **Converse with disability organizations:** Start small by inviting local and national disability organizations to informal conversations about growing your disability confidence. Not sure who to contact? Check out the community partners who helped create this Disability Confidence Toolkit - Our Partners
- **Connect with jobseekers with disabilities**: Host events and open houses to introduce your company, values, and commitment to disability confidence. Create opportunities for feedback on accessibility in a safe, confidential setting.
- **Partner with like-minded businesses:** Join or start a learning exchange between businesses to foster partnerships around disability confidence. Invite colleagues to expand these initiatives across your industry. Consider The Accessibility Exchange as a resource.
- **Commit at the board level:** Establish a committee led by senior management to drive your disability confidence strategy. Engage various departments and consult external stakeholders with expertise or lived experience in disability.
- **Contract people with disabilities:** Provide paid opportunities for people with expertise or lived experience of disability to support your organization through audits, focus groups, and training.
- **Move the needle internally:** Involve workers with disabilities and experts on task forces or committees to enhance inclusion and accessibility in areas like digitalization, HR, and recruitment.

Check out these culture-shifting initiatives from leading financial institutions across the world:

Barclays 'This Is Me' video focusing on mental health
HSBC 'Connect with Difference: Dealing with Disability at Work', colleagues with disabilities sharing their stories

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[1] Yohn, D.-L. (2021, February 08). Company culture is everyone's responsibility. Harvard Business Review. https://hbr.org/2021/02/company-culture-is-everyones-responsibility

[2] Soule, S., & Walker, B. (2017, June 20). Changing Company Culture Requires a Movement, Not a Mandate. Harvard Business Review. https://hbr.org/2017/06/changing-company-culture-requires-a-movement-not-a-mandate

[3] Brown, S., & Scott-Parker, S. (2020). The disability-confident employers' toolkit. Haywards Heath: Inclusive Futures.

[4] United Nations. (n.d.). Toolkit on disability for Africa: Building multistakeholder partnerships for disability inclusion. Division for Social Policy Development. https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/disability/Toolkit/Building-multi-stakeholders.pdf