WORKPLACE CULTURE

TOOL 6: STRATEGIES TO ENGAGE WORKERS WITH DISABILITIES

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TOOL 6: STRATEGIES TO ENGAGE WORKERS WITH DISABILITIES

Who is this for

High priority
- Direct Line Managers

Practical Information
- Researchers
- Quality Assurance Workers

Useful to Know
- How to identify engaged and disengaged workers
- How to support engagement among workers with disabilities

What guidance does it provide?

- Understanding the different factors that may influence behaviour change
- Understanding ableism in the context of a workplace
- How to shift attitudes, challenge workplace norms, and empower workers to build an inclusive workplace culture

Take-home points

- Employees who experience high levels of engagement are present, passionate, and motivated to work
- When improving engagement in the workplace, the top eight factors identified are:
  - Clear role models
  - Employee resource groups
  - Parental leave
  - Fair and transparent pay
  - Training
  - Flexible working options
  - Freedom to innovate
  - Mental well-being policies

What is worker engagement?

At an inclusive workplace, specific conditions are developed to help workers apply their unique talents and skillsets to advance the mission and vision of the business. This refers to worker engagement, which can also be thought of as someone's level commitment and connection to an organization. [1] Employees who experience high levels of engagement are present, passionate, and motivated to work. [2]

Identifying engaged and disengaged workers

Worker engagement can be seen as a continuum, which can make it difficult to identify when your employees might be struggling. At the same time, a worker's level of engagement can and will evolve over time and can be influenced by factors outside of work too. Take a look at these common characteristics of engaged vs. disengaged workers. [2]

Fully disengaged	Showing up	Fully engaged
- Frustrated or bored at work - Negative perceptions about the workplace - Lack of initiative to participate - Spend time on personal interests	- Unsatisfied at work - Frequently lose interest in work - Are mainly driven by compensation - May feel like they are not being challenged - Contribute when they are asked to	- Enthusiastic about work - Encourage others to become more engaged - Are open to learning and have opportunities to do so - Tend to reach outside their comfort zones

Engaged workers produce better business outcomes – no matter the industry, company size, or economic context.

What does the data say?

A recent ten-year study by Global Disability Inclusion has found that workers with disabilities are less engaged, and have poorer workplace experiences, than those without disabilities[3]. Research from Accenture has found that workers who do disclose their disability at work are 30% more engaged — in terms of career satisfaction and aspirations, confidence, and a sense of belonging — than those who don't. [4]

What's the solution?

The Valuable 500 [5] shows that disability is "still not firmly embedded in the diversity and inclusion agenda." This means that organizations are not doing enough to understand what workers with disabilities need to feel engaged and included at work.

Companies must start prioritizing disability data in their measurement of key performance indicators, such as worker engagement.

Instead of leaving out 22% of the population, [6] whose insights, preferences, and behaviours and work have a significant impact on your overall business outcomes, try this:

* Start by bringing up the lack of information on workers with disabilities to your departmental managers
* Explain how these data can help you improve engagement among workers with disabilities
* Provide resources and information to help move the message along to senior executives, like citing Accenture's research or the work of the Valuable 500

If data on the engagement of workers with disabilities cannot be collected in a timely manner, make tangible steps within your team to understand what workers need to feel engaged – organize lunch and learns, maintain an open-door policy, host focus groups, and simply ask what you can do as a manager to support their engagement.

HOW CAN BUSINESSES IMPROVE ENGAGEMENT?

Accenture's latest research shows that companies most focused on disability engagement are growing sales 2.9x faster and profiting 4.1x faster than their peers. [7]

When asking about improving engagement in the workplace, the top eight factors identified by respondents were: [4]

1. Clear role models
2. Employee resource groups
3. Parental leave
4. Fair and transparent pay
5. Training
6. Flexible working options
7. Freedom to innovate
8. Mental well-being policies

How do engaged workers feel?	Strategies for Managers to enhance engagement
Connected towards the core values and goals within an organization and the work that they do	• Establish strong communication channels and create a safe space for workers to ask questions • Suggest monthly addresses from senior executives to keep staff informed of company progress • Organize cross-departmental 'think tank' meetings to foster communication • Encourage senior executives to host 'drop-in' hours for workers to discuss the company's mission, vision, and achievements

HOW CAN BUSINESSES IMPROVE ENGAGEMENT?

How do engaged workers feel?	Strategies for Managers to enhance engagement
Proud to be a part of a disability confident organization	• Share your commitment and policies on building disability confidence and enhancing accessibility • Encourage senior executives to include disability in the diversity and inclusion agenda • Provide opportunities for workers with lived experience to advance disability confidence in the workplace
Confident and satisfied with in their role within an organization	• Ensure workers understand their essential duties during onboarding and performance management • Regularly discuss progression and development opportunities for workers with disabilities, just as you would with any employee • Be open to their ideas on evolving their roles and taking on new challenges
Acknowledged and valued when it comes to decision-making	• Involve employees in work-related decisions (e.g., notifying new team members about flexible schedules as accommodations) • Seek feedback and ideas from those with lived experience • Listen to suggestions and act on them when appropriate

HOW CAN BUSINESSES IMPROVE ENGAGEMENT?

How do engaged workers feel?	Strategies for Managers to enhance engagement
Eager to collaborate with others and accept feedback	• Train all employees, especially those working with colleagues with disabilities, on disability awareness, sensitivity, and communication (toolkit.ccrw.org) • Foster confidence through ongoing education and open dialogue about disability • Share information about employee resource groups focused on disability and DEI initiatives
Trusted among their peers and leaders	• Lead by example and foster a culture of mutual respect. • Treat workers with disabilities the same as others, granting them similar autonomy. • Seek and show that you value employees' opinions and feedback
Recognized for their achievements and contributions	• Create an internal award program or offer perks to show appreciation • Reward exceptional employees with privileges, public recognition, or key project involvement

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HOW CAN BUSINESSES IMPROVE ENGAGEMENT?

How do engaged workers feel?	Strategies for Managers to enhance engagement
Open to mentorship, learning, and growing in the workplace	• Create mentorship opportunities for all workers, including those with disabilities - refer to the Workplace Mentoring Playbook for guidance [7] • Invite workers to participate as mentors, mentees, or both
Satisfied with their manager's ability to engage them	• Routinely review disability-focused training materials as a refresher and encourage other managers and leaders to do the same • Provide training for all, but especially colleagues of workers with disabilities, on core topics related to disability awareness, sensitivity, and communication (www.toolkit.ccrw.org)

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[2] The Society for Human Resource Management (2017). Managing Employee Performance. SHRM. https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/toolkits/pages/sustainingemployeeengagement.aspx

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