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The Case for Belonging

At AmazeWorks, we believe that belonging is at the intersection of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) work and is deeply rooted in the historical legacy of efforts to build a fairer and more inclusive society. Over the years, the discourse around DEI has evolved from addressing explicit discrimination to recognizing and dismantling more subtle systemic biases. Today, the need for DEI work is more pronounced than ever, despite its politicization and often misunderstood goals and values. This ongoing journey is fueled by the understanding that our diverse and complex identities, experiences, and perspectives are not only essential aspects of human dignity but also integral to fostering creativity, innovation, and sustainable progress. With our mission to champion equity and belonging for all, AmazeWorks partners with organizations to transform workplace cultures in a way where diversity, equity, and inclusion are not only aspirational goals but foundational principles that influence every aspect of an organization for the better.

Why do we need belonging in the workplace? Let's address multiple parts of an organization, including the head, the hands, and the heart:



The Head

Studies show that DEI industry leaders recognize that it's more than just a social-justice imperative, but a core enabler for growth and value creation.

- It's profitable¹
- It matters to employees²³
- It fosters innovation⁴
- It helps decision-making⁵

¹ McKinsey & Co study (2019) showed that ethnically diverse companies were 36% more likely to outperform respective industry medians on profitability; 25% for gender diverse companies

² Glassdoor (2021) found that 76% of job seekers viewed a diverse workforce as an important factor when evaluating companies and considering job offers

³ US Dept of Health & Human Services (2022) 81% of workers reported that they will be looking for workplaces that support mental health in the future.

⁴ Harvard Business Review (2013) found that companies with multiple diversity traits (both inherent and acquired) were 70% more likely than competitors to capture a new market

⁵ Forbes (2017) Inclusive teams make better business decisions up to 87% of the time



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The Hands

DEI work contributes to talent retention, employee engagement, and employee well-being. Without it, there are legal risks as well as loss of time and money.

- Support employee well-being⁶⁷⁸
- Save money⁹
- Save time¹⁰¹¹



The Heart

Dignity is the foundation of how we relate to one another. Dignity is the unconditional and inherent worth of every human being. We honor each other's dignity by creating the conditions for belonging for each other so that each person can show up as their full selves and reach their fullest potential.

- What's your personal "why" for doing this work?

⁶ Accenture (2020) a study found that 68% of employers felt that they had a workplace environment where employees could be themselves, raise concerns, and innovate without fear of failure; only 36% of employees agreed

⁷ Shortlister (2023) a study found that 60% of employees reported experiencing bias in the workplace. 64% reported witnessing bias.

⁸ Textio (2014) a study about feedback given to high performing employees found that 76% of women employees received explicitly negative feedback compared to 2% of male employees

⁹ NPR (2020) the bank Citigroup estimated that the US economy lost nearly \$16 trillion as a result of discrimination against African Americans

¹⁰ HR Acuity report (2023) found employer's experience 2% of their total workforce in HR claims of bias and harassment. For a 1000 employee company that equates to roughly 497 hours of internal staff time and upwards of \$280,000 in legal fees for ~23 HR claims a year

¹¹ Paradigm (2024)



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Resources & References



The Head

- **It's profitable**
 - [McKinsey & Company study, 2019](#) (15 countries, 1000+ large companies)
 - The study found a correlation between the percentage of representation and the likelihood of outperformance
 - While overall progress on representation in companies is slow, it's clear that the gap between leaders in the industry in this area and slow-adapting companies is widening
 - These were the best practices for industry leaders around DEI:
 - Ensure representation of diverse talent
 - Strengthen leadership accountability and capability for DEI
 - Enable equality of opportunity through fairness and transparency
 - Promote openness and tackle microaggressions
 - Foster belonging through unequivocal support for multivariate diversity
 - [Nonprofit HR](#) (2024)
 - Donors are more likely to support organizations that are diverse, equitable, and inclusive. According to the 2022 Give.org Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Donor Trust Special Report, most participants felt that organizations that advanced DEI were more trustworthy and more effective at serving their mission and people
 - When asked how DEI affects donor perceptions, "53.9% of respondents say they assume DEI has a positive effect on how trustworthy a charity is, while only 4.5% say the effect is negative, and the rest say they do not know (11.6%) or think there is no effect (29.9%)
 - Half or more of participants also think DEI has a positive effect on how well the charity serves its constituents (53%), the charity's ability to focus on its core mission (53%), the



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charity's overall accomplishments (52%), and incorporating broader perspectives and experiences (50%)" (Give.org, 2022, p. 8).

- **It matters to employees**

- [83% of millennials report](#) being actively engaged when they believe their organization fosters an inclusive culture. That percentage drops to 60% when their organization does not foster an inclusive culture
 - A Gallup study estimated that the cost of disengaged employees was up to \$350 billion/year in lost productivity
 - A Deloitte survey revealed that 86% of millennials feel that differences of opinion allow teams to excel, but only 59% believe their leaders share this point of view
- [81% of workers reported](#) that they will be looking for workplaces that support mental health in the future.
 - More from the US Dept of Health & Human Services
 - 84% of respondents said their workplace conditions had contributed to at least one mental health challenge
 - Five Essentials for Workplace Mental Health & Well-Being
 - Protection From Harm
 - Opportunity for Growth
 - Connection & Community
 - Work-Life Harmony
 - Mattering at Work

- **It fosters innovation**

- [Harvard Business Review](#) study, 2013 (1,800 professionals, 40 case studies, numerous focus groups and interviews)
 - 2-D diversity: having at least 3 inherent and 3 acquired diversity traits
 - Two types of diversity: *inherent & acquired*
 - Inherent: trait you are born with (ex., Gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.)
 - Acquired: gain from experience (ex. Work in another country, selling to female consumers as a male, etc.)



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- Results? Companies with 2-D diversity outperformed and outinnovated their competitors
 - 45% more likely to report a growing market share from the previous year
 - 70% more likely to report that the firm captured a new market
- Leaders who give diverse voices equal airtime are nearly twice as likely as others to unleash value-driving insights; employees in a 'speak up' culture are 3.5 times as likely to contribute their full innovative potential
- **It helps decision-making**
 - [Forbes](#), 2017 (200 different business teams, ~600 business decisions)
 - Teams that follow an inclusive process make decisions 2X faster with ½ meetings
 - Decisions made and executed by diverse teams delivered 60% better results



The Hands

- **Support employee well-being**
 - [Accenture](#), 2020 (28 countries)
 - A study found that 68% of employers felt that they had a workplace environment where employees could be themselves, raise concerns, and innovate without fear of failure; only 36% of employees agreed. If this gap were cut in half...
 - The proportion of women who feel like a key member of their team with real influence over decisions would rise from 1-in-4 to more than 1-in-3.
 - The annual retention rate would increase by 5% for women and by 1% for men.
 - The proportion of women who aim to reach a leadership position in their organization would climb by 21%.
 - [Shortlister](#), 2023



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- 60% of employees reported experiencing bias in the workplace, while 64% reported witnessing bias
- Employees who perceive bias are three times as likely to be disengaged at work compared to their colleagues
- [Textio](#) (2014)
 - A study about feedback given to high performing employees found that 76% of women employees received explicitly negative feedback compared to 2% of male employees
 - 88% of high performing women employees received 'personality-related' feedback compared to 12% of high performing male employees
 - In 2024, the report found that women are 7x more likely than men to be given feedback that they are 'emotional' and men are 4x more likely than other genders to be described as 'likable'
- [Harvard Business Review](#) (2019)
 - 40% of people say that they feel isolated at work, and the results have been lower organizational commitment and engagement
 - High belonging was linked to a whopping 56% increase in job performance, a 50% drop in turnover risk, and a 75% reduction in sick days
 - For a 10,000-person company, this would result in annual savings of more than \$52 million
 - Exclusion is damaging because it actually hurts and is akin to physical pain
- **Save money**
 - [NPR](#), 2020
 - \$13 trillion lost in potential business revenue because of discriminatory lending to African American entrepreneurs, with an estimated 6.1 million jobs not generated as a result
 - \$2.7 trillion in income was lost because of disparities in wages suffered by African Americans
 - \$218 billion has been lost over the past two decades because of discrimination in providing housing credit



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- And \$90 billion to \$113 billion in lifetime income lost from discrimination in accessing higher education
- [Accenture](#), 2020 (28 countries)
 - American companies leave \$1.05 trillion on the table by not having inclusive workplaces
- [Shortlister](#), 2023
 - Active disengagement costs US companies \$450-\$550 billion a year
- **Save time**
 - [HR Acuity report \(2023\)](#)
 - Found employer's experience 2% of their total workforce in HR claims of bias and harassment. For a 1000 employee company that equates to roughly 497 hours of internal staff time and upwards of \$280,000 in legal fees for ~23 HR claims a year.



The Heart

- *"We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all *people* are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."*- Declaration of Independence