

Employers that foster employee belonging boosting engagement, retention, but more work to be done: survey - Benefits Canada.com

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Executive Summary

This article addresses the relationship between employee belonging and key organizational outcomes including engagement, retention, stress management, and revenue growth, drawing on a report by McLean & Company. The central argument is that belonging is not a passive cultural byproduct but a deliberate organizational design challenge, and that underinvestment in belonging-related initiatives is widespread despite measurable returns. Key findings cited include: employees who feel a sense of belonging are 5.7 times more likely to be engaged and 70 per cent more likely to remain with their employer; employees whose contributions feel significant are 3.5 times more likely to handle stress effectively; and teams in organizations that increased belonging investment were 54 per cent more likely to rate revenue growth highly. Despite this, only 31 per cent of HR leaders reported increasing investment in belonging initiatives. Practitioner commentary from Paola Accettola of True North HR Consulting corroborates the findings through practice-based examples, including structured meeting participation and stay interviews. The article concludes that belonging is a measurable driver of performance and resilience, particularly as workforce loneliness rises.

Key Insights

1. Employees who feel a sense of belonging are 5.7 times more likely to be engaged and 70 per cent more likely to stay with their employer, according to McLean & Company's report.
2. Only 31 per cent of HR leaders reported increasing investment in belonging-related initiatives, suggesting a significant gap between the evidence base and organizational prioritization.
3. Teams in organizations that increased belonging investment were 54 per cent more likely to rate revenue growth highly, framing belonging as a financial performance lever rather than solely a welfare concern.

Practical Takeaways

- Structured participation practices — such as requiring every team member to contribute to at least one topic in weekly meetings — are cited as low-cost interventions that over time increased voluntary idea-sharing among quieter employees.
- Stay interviews, described as short conversations with employees about what keeps them in their roles and what could improve their work lives, are presented as a mechanism for surfacing minor frustrations that, once addressed, improved workflows and reduced stress.

Critical Analysis

Strengths: The article integrates quantitative survey data with practitioner observations, grounding statistics in real organizational examples. The figures cited are specific and carry face validity consistent with broader engagement research. **Limitations:** The article does not disclose McLean & Company's methodology, sample size, geographic scope, or how 'belonging' was operationalized — all critical for evaluating the reliability of the multipliers cited. The practitioner examples are anecdotal and drawn from a single consultant's client base, introducing selection bias. The article is structured as a news summary, not a research analysis, so depth is inherently constrained. **Bias:** McLean & Company is a research and advisory firm with commercial interests in HR consulting; the report's conclusions directionally support investment in the type of consulting services such firms provide. Accettola's commentary, while relevant, represents a single practitioner perspective without counterbalancing voices.

Organizational Practice

Two organizational practices are described: (1) a structured meeting participation policy requiring every team member to contribute to at least one topic during weekly meetings, resulting in increased voluntary participation over time; (2) stay interviews — short, informal conversations between leaders and employees focused on what retains employees and what could improve their work experience — used to identify and resolve minor operational frustrations.

Strategic Implications

The data presented positions belonging as a quantifiable driver of engagement, retention, and revenue growth, suggesting that organizations treating belonging as a cultural amenity rather than a strategic investment may be leaving measurable performance gains unrealized. The low rate of HR leader investment in belonging initiatives (31 per cent) points to a potential gap between evidence and organizational prioritization. Rising workforce loneliness is framed as an environmental pressure that amplifies the relevance of belonging as a retention and resilience variable in PMS design.

Validation Status: passed
