

Roundtable Session 1 – Table 10 – What Is the Future of Belonging in the Workplace?

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Abstract:

As organizations navigate rapid shifts in technology, workforce expectations, and global dynamics, the concept of belonging has emerged as a cornerstone of sustainable workplace culture. This roundtable explores the evolving role of belonging—not as a peripheral DEI initiative, but as a strategic imperative that drives engagement, innovation, and retention. Through five themed sessions, participants will examine how leadership, peer dynamics, intersectionality, and emerging trends like AI and hybrid work influence the future of belonging. The discussion will surface practical strategies, challenge assumptions, and inspire new commitments to building workplaces where every individual feels seen, heard, and valued.

Discussion Questions:

1: Organizational Strategy & Culture

- How can belonging be embedded into the core values and mission of an organization—not just its DEI strategy?

Gain visibility by networking. Connections on linked in. Putting yourself out there ultimately leads to a culture of second nature in your area of work or in new skills/technologies.

Another level of networking can be found in others; you essentially gain their network by making that interaction and connection. Mutual connections can lead to additional ones.

Recognition systems within companies to send recognition/prize to each other. Build a sense of teamwork and respect from colleague to colleague, which strengthens the feeling of belonging.

Coffee chats across directors and managers, mentorship programs within the company, all things to benefit individual growth.

Patient speakers visiting company sites to share their stories, enhance motivation and give you purpose.

Pipeline deliverables must be met, and teams need to do their job, but a culture of implementing team building is important. Taking time outside of work to network outside of work. Set-up events and hosting poster sessions to bring people together even within the same company to present their work, showcase it in a more comfortable setting.

2: Leadership & Accountability

- What specific leadership behaviors most effectively foster a culture of belonging?

As you advance in your career and in the industry, it's important to gain more leadership skills, transitioning into more management-like roles or responsibility and potentially less time in the lab. Can't just be technical, turn that expertise into method transfer involvement or investigations.

Can be stagnant.

Management chooses the same reps to get an opportunity/rep role or specific position, and rather having the management decide, more of a choice has been brought to the colleagues where they can sign-up for the role, that way you eliminate choosing the same people repeatedly. Done in a survey format, which helps with visibility between management and colleagues.

Speak-up culture is important for more junior level colleagues to make managers aware of day-to-day issues/events that leaders wouldn't know otherwise. A lot of things may be invisible unless you communicate.

It's important when people are being acknowledged for their hard work and recognition is huge. You want to feel seen for your hard work, not all the time but enough. Motivation levels can go down if recognition is not there.

3: Peer Culture & Team Dynamics

- How can teams navigate conflict or disagreement in ways that preserve a sense of belonging?

Build peer to peer relationships, different companies encompass different cultures. Different groups/companies may face different challenges and obstacles. Some companies have a 'speak-up' culture, visibility, communication with your direct manager or even a 1:1 conversation with your colleagues depending on your style and level of comfortability. Also, initiating conversation as the manager or leader to make colleagues more comfortable speaking up.

It doesn't help you to excel if you bring someone else down. Complaining isn't well received. In our field data is what drives our decisions and is proof of x, y, or z, not someone's opinion.

Individuals should understand where they want to be. It can be very business driven seeking out a director role, versus someone who wants to be more technical. Navigating your weaknesses/strengths to determine what path suits you is part of evolving as a scientist, etc.

Different opportunities can bring perspective to different areas you can progress in as an individual and where individual creativity can come into play. This can improve one's skills in navigating differences and reaching compromise.

Accountability is also key. It is important to not point fingers when mistakes are made. Create a healthy environment so that someone else's mistake does not become a burden to the next person. It's good if you have more input from senior leadership. Crossline communication is important so that people understand what they are doing and why.

4: Inclusion & Intersectionality

- What are the unique belonging challenges faced by underrepresented or marginalized employees in hybrid or remote settings?

New role opportunities (depending on how they are delegated and distributed) can unfortunately create exclusion. It is important to be mindful of opportunities being available to all.

People can feel excluded if not on high-profile projects. Some folks in SME areas can feel left out if they aren't as recognized as folks on high-profile projects. Find ways to better recognize all colleagues across all areas.

Equitable distribution of workload among colleagues is important. High profile project shouldn't always be the same people.

5: Future Trends & Technology

- How might AI and digital tools be used to enhance—or unintentionally harm—belonging in the workplace?

Automation systems for various assays are becoming more prevalent, and now with AI software, it can be used to process data, including data analysis completion by the program itself.

It would be ideal to have AI used as a tool, like a “middleman” but still need humans to do tasks around it.

Co-pilot is not fully mature or developed yet, hard to make predictions around AI/digital tools as they are still new, developing, and evolving.

AI used in managing meetings or consolidating slides, which cuts down time on tasks which are valuable and less of a threat to headcount/belonging.

Security comes into play from company to company since we want to make sure data and information is still protected/confidential.