



## WORKPLACE CULTURE

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Tool 1: Unpacking Workplace Culture at  
Disability Confident Organizations

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# TOOL 1: UNPACKING WORKPLACE CULTURE AT DISABILITY CONFIDENT ORGANIZATIONS

## Who is this for

### High Priority

- Executives and Senior Management

### Practical Information

- DEI and HR Professionals
- Direct Line Managers

### Useful to Know

- All Staff

## What guidance does it provide?

- Understanding what workplace culture means
- Understanding an intersectional approach to developing an inclusive workplace
- How to build a disability confident and inclusive workplace culture

## Take-home points

- Companies who succeed in developing inclusive workplace cultures strive to understand, continually learn about, and take action to remove and prevent barriers to full participation at work from an intersectional perspective.
- When workers with disabilities feel accepted, valued, respected, safe, and supported, the shift towards an inclusive workplace culture is immaculate

# DEFINING WORKPLACE CULTURE

## Defining Workplace Culture

There are various definitions of workplace culture. The one we choose to use is:

**Workplace culture is the shared values and beliefs within a workplace. Culture impacts people's attitudes, behaviours, and ways of thinking. [1]**

You can think about workplace culture as an organization's values in action. Cultural norms signal what is encouraged vs. discouraged and accepted vs. rejected within a work environment.

**“When properly aligned with personal values, drives, and needs, culture can unleash tremendous amounts of energy toward a shared purpose and foster an organization's capacity to thrive.” [2]**

Pop Up: Employers highlight that employees with disabilities enhance workplace culture and contribute to improved workplace morale. [3]

# WHAT IS AN INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE?

## What is an Inclusive Workplace?

An inclusive workplace is a working environment where every employee feels safe and comfortable being themselves at work.

**We are all unique – with different backgrounds and life experiences. Based on the identities a worker holds, different systems of oppression and discrimination can overlap to negatively impact them the workplace.**

Pop Up: This is intersectionality in action. To help broaden your understanding of the various identities, social positions, variables, and dimensions at play that may shape a person's experience of discrimination, visit our intersectionality foreword [\[Intersectionality Foreword\]](#) You may also find this infographic from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research useful. [4]

Companies who succeed in developing inclusive workplace cultures strive to understand, continually learn about, and take action to remove and prevent barriers to full participation at work from an intersectional perspective.

Pop Up: While the guidance in this toolkit focuses on the identity of disability, always keep in mind that with people have multiple, intersecting identities. Because of this, various systems of oppression and discrimination can negatively impact them in the workplace. There are steps you can take to create a workplace where everyone, including people with disabilities, feel welcomed.

# INTERSECTIONALITY AVATAR

## Intersectionality Avatars

### Salima

The culture of a workplace is crucial to making employees feel at home, staying in the same company, and investing in its future. I know this, because where I work now, I feel accepted and welcomed as a hijab-wearing single-mother of a young child, who also needs a guide-dog at work, prays during break times and requires accessible software applications on my computer.

### Dante

I know what you mean. At first, this may sound like a long list of special adjustments on the part of the company, but once you set them up, it is so easy to offer these to everyone in the company. In the end, it makes everyone's lives a lot easier

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# THE WORKPLACE CULTURE OF A DISABILITY CONFIDENT ORGANIZATION

## The Workplace Culture of a Disability Confident Organization

**How do workers with disabilities feel in an inclusive workplace culture?**

**Accepted:** A sense of belonging within a team, with coworkers, and across the wider organization, and nobody gets left behind.

**What steps do disability confident organizations take to achieve this?**

- Staff are welcoming and inclusive of colleagues with disabilities.
- The workplace is fully accessible, with accommodations available for all employees.
- People of all backgrounds are encouraged to participate equally.
- Team environments foster inclusion, with no one feeling excluded or discriminated against.
- Managers are trained in conflict resolution.
- Mentorship opportunities are available to everyone, including persons with disabilities.
- Leaders personally welcome new employees on their first day.



# THE WORKPLACE CULTURE OF A DISABILITY CONFIDENT ORGANIZATION

**Valued:** validation, where voices are heard and contributions are recognized as important, no matter an employee's differences.

- Workers with disabilities are heard and not subject to assumptions about their abilities.
- Managers recognize and reward quality work.
- Diversity in background, thought, and perspective is valued as a driver of innovation.
- Equitable career advancement opportunities are offered to all.
- Feedback is gathered through an intersectional approach to include all voices.

**Respected:** workers are treated with equity, fairness, and dignity

- An inclusive language guide is followed by all workers.
- Staff receive training on forms of oppression (e.g., ableism, sexism) to reduce discrimination.
- Confidentiality is maintained regarding workplace accommodations.
- Assistive devices and service animals are respected.
- Workplace policies are regularly reviewed for equity and fairness.



# THE WORKPLACE CULTURE OF A DISABILITY CONFIDENT ORGANIZATION

**Safe:** able to express their opinion or concerns in a workplace that is free of discrimination, harassment, or intolerance.

- All workers can join employee resource groups on intersectionality, disability, and diversity, equity, and inclusion. (DEI)
- Safe, confidential spaces are available for sharing ideas, concerns, and opinions.
- Grievance processes address harassment or discrimination, with consequences of complaints taken seriously, and support for affected individuals.
- Health, wellness, and safety are prioritized to prevent disability and injury.

**Supported:** workers are equipped with the supports they need to thrive in the workplace.

- All workers understand the accommodation policy and request process.
- A de-medicalized approach is used for determining accommodations.
- Accommodations are implemented promptly.
- Flexible work arrangements are welcomed for all employees.
- Personal and sick days support work-life balance.
- Employee assistance programs and emotional well-being supports are readily available.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Society for Human Resource Management. (2017). Managing Organizational Communication. <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/toolkits/pages/understandinganddevelopingorganizationalculture.aspx>
- [2] Cheng, J.-Y, Groysberg, B., Lee, J., & Price, J. (2018, February). The Leader's Guide to Corporate Culture. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2018/01/the-leaders-guide-to-corporate-culture>
- [3] Lindsay, S., Cagliostro, E., Albarico, M., Mortaji, N., & Karon, L. (2018). A systematic review of the benefits of hiring people with disabilities. Journal of occupational rehabilitation, 1-22.
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