

**Improving Interpersonal Interactions to Increase Belonging at Work:
Evidence from a Field Experiment in a Technology Company**

Christianne Corbett

think2perform Research Institute Research Fellow

ABSTRACT

Creating gender and racially diverse workplaces is a stated goal of many organizations. Yet, research finds that members of lower status groups (e.g. women, racial minority men, LGBTQ individuals) often report negative interpersonal experiences and a lack of belonging at work. Belonging has been found to be both a fundamental need and associated with a desire to stay at an organization, which is critical for retaining gender and racial minorities, a key challenge for organizations.

Drawing on existing literature, I theorize that belonging can be increased among workers who feel least like they belong by improving interpersonal interactions at work. Correlational results show a strong relationship between positive interpersonal interactions, especially with higher status colleagues, and feelings of belonging. A preregistered field experiment demonstrates a causal relationship: workers lowest on belonging at baseline experienced a greater increase in belonging than others when more of their network participated in a brief, online intervention to improve interpersonal interactions.

Results suggest that organizations can cultivate environments that foster belonging among workers who feel least like they belong by encouraging workers, particularly members of higher-status majority groups, to consciously shift the way they interact with colleagues, helping to create more diverse and inclusive organizations.