Culture, Well-Being, and Inclusion

Tools and resources to further efforts toward inclusive team environments that prioritize well-being and a positive team culture.

4

What's Included in this Section?

1

Guidance on Promoting Team Culture

Tips on how to cultivate and support a positive, welcoming culture within a team that prioritizes empathy and supports team members' needs

2

Best Practices for Supporting Team Well-Being

A discussion on wellness within a team, and links to MIT resources that support employee's physical and mental well-being

3

Resources for Ensuring Inclusive Practices on a Team

Advice for managers on ensuring that inclusive practices are a priority within and across their teams (e.g., "courageous conversations," "real talk")

Promote Team Culture in the Workplace

You should prioritize practicing empathy and developing a positive team culture. Recognize that a power imbalance exists between managers and their direct reports; managers can mitigate this by showing empathy and understanding.

Flexible work environments require empathic managers

- They hone their ability to **contextualize performance** and behavior
- They proactively ask questions and seek information to place themselves in their **direct reports' contexts**
- They develop **high levels of trust and care** and a culture of acceptance within teams

Develop empathy by practicing vulnerable conversation

- Create cohorts of managers who engage in **small-group conversations** with their peers to talk through common issues and best practices
- Offer frequent opportunities to engage in conversations focused on how managers can commit to specific actions to **care for themselves** and support the well-being of their team
- **Practice empathy with manager peers**, asking specific questions to understand their own challenges

Empower a new mindset by creating a network of support

- Create a dedicated role (e.g., **team success partner**) whose responsibilities include fostering trust and supporting team health
- Work with team success partners to respond to the unique challenges that employees are facing
- Develop a **support system** and foster how organizations invest in roles designed to support them

Create capacity for empathy by optimizing reporting lines

- **Prioritize your workload** to focus on fewer, higher-impact relationships with individuals and teams
- Achieve outsized returns by being empathic and holistically addressing the three common barriers in employees — **skill, mindset, and capacity**

Source: Harvard Business Review; What Does It Mean to Be a Manager Today?

Promote Team Culture

Foster meaningful connections

1

Breaking the Ice During Meetings

Spend the first five minutes of a meeting “breaking the ice” by asking fun questions to help your employees learn about each other.

2

Hosting Team Lunches

If you can’t go out to lunch, bring lunch to you! Schedule time to “virtually eat” lunch together or challenge your team to cook a different meal each week.

3

Team Trivia or Game Sessions

Gather for a few minutes after the workday and participate in a virtual trivia session or other online game.



Share Life Experiences

Share moments that matter

Let your employees share moments that matter most to them in their lives outside of work—whether by sending photos of their workspace or people/experiences that bring them joy.

Create a team newsletter

Another alternative is to create a team newsletter or email that summarizes your team’s accomplishments, life updates, and shares other helpful information.

Make time for ‘special guests’

Many employees who are working from home are doing so with children, pets, and significant others. Carve out time for team members to introduce those who are at home with them.

Promote Team Culture through Team Member Appreciation

You should be purposeful about showing appreciation for your employees so that they are proud and feel valued for their contributions.



Everyday Recognition Means a Lot

While you may already be in the habit of recognizing employees for big achievements, sharing your appreciation for the little things they do each day can be even more meaningful in the long run. See MIT Recognition/Thanks page



Tune into Ways to Show Appreciation

When employees feel engaged by their managers, they produce a better work product. Be aware of what they're working on, what they're struggling with, and where they are succeeding, and opportunities to show appreciation will emerge.



Be Consistent

If you're leading a blended team, "out of sight, out of mind" shouldn't apply to your remote employees. When you consistently show appreciation regardless of where your employees are located, your team will be more motivated.



Be Timely

Recognition that arrives months after the fact isn't nearly as meaningful as recognition received promptly. Make employee recognition a priority and have systems in place so you can strike while the iron is hot.

Celebrate your employees

Share a Word of Thanks

Whether via a team-wide email or a shout-out during your regular staff meeting, take time to plan how you will thank your employees for their work.

Empower Your People to Celebrate Each Other

Give your people the opportunity to nominate a team member who deserves recognition. Consider utilizing the Direct Appreciation message generator

Celebrate on a Whim

Send the team a calendar invite for an impromptu Google hangout. Don't give too much advance notice or explanation—the idea is to catch them off guard with some positive feedback.

Roll Out the Red Carpet

If you want to take recognition to the next level, plan a virtual awards celebration to honor your team's accomplishments, both big and small.

Recognize via Public Channels

Public recognition helps your remote employees feel more connected, giving them a chance to celebrate wins from wherever they are located.

Promote Team Culture by Prioritizing Wellness

Below are a few quick starter ideas for you to consider implementing on your teams to promote a team culture that prioritizes wellness.

Establish Team Norms/Well-Being Commitments: As a team, establish expectations and understanding around when and how people prefer to work and personal commitments that the team should be aware of

Conduct All-Hands Meetings: Conducting weekly all-hands meetings where the agenda can split between work and team-time. Suggest team members owning fun, non-work ice breakers at the start of each to get the team to laughing and/or continuing relationship building

Block "Heads-Down Time" on Team Calendars: Whether in a remote, hybrid, or on-site setting – a packed schedule of meetings can sometimes mean less time for your team to prioritize their individual work. Blocking "heads-down time" can help ensure team members have time to do work in their working hours vs. overtime

Block "Wellness Time" on Team Calendars: Scheduling time in the week for your team to discuss anything other than work, take a walk, or do anything that allows them to check-in with their wellness gives your team time to take a mental break

Foster a Culture of Recognition: Consider ways in which you can continuously show your team appreciation. Team dinners, applause awards, utilizing the praise/celebrate zoom function, etc.

Prioritize Well-Being

It's important to prioritize your mental and physical well-being to be the most effective team member possible.

Block time to eat

Whether in a hybrid, fully remote, or on-site environment, it is important to take time to fully ensure that you are nourishing your body. Do not allow your important to-do list to eliminate your time to refuel and recharge.

Stretch while working and take mental breaks

Take time from your computer, tablets, and phones to move your body. Create time to take mental breaks as well, whether that be going for a walk or listening to some music.

Ask for video-off meetings

Screen time can take a major toll on your eyes and energy levels. It is okay to request certain meetings to be video off if you need some time to not have to engage with your computer screen full-time.

Honor your time off

If you are taking time off for a personal commitment or just logging offline to fulfill a personal commitment, feel empowered to fully be offline once you have communicated your time off to your manager.

Speak up about burnout

If you start to notice that you are nearing burnout, please prioritize speaking up to your manager about it. Your manager should work with you to help you get back to a healthy work-life balance.

Reference MIT Well-Being Resources (1 of 2)

The MIT HR Center for Work Life and Well-Being offers a wide range of programs and resources that address specific life issues and events.

Resource	Description	Link
MIT MyLife Services	MyLife Services is a free, confidential MIT benefit for staff, faculty, postdocs and their families. One call puts you in touch with a network of experts who can provide emotional and behavioral counseling, work-life consultations, and personalized referrals.	MIT MyLife Services
MIT Staff Emergency Hardship Fund	The MIT Staff Emergency Hardship Fund provides financial assistance to MIT staff and postdoctoral scholars who are experiencing an immediate, severe, and temporary financial hardship due to a sudden or non-recurring emergency.	MIT Staff Emergency Hardship Fund
WorkLife and WellBeing Webinar Series	The MIT HR Center for WorkLife and Well-Being's Webinar Series provides employees and managers with research-based strategies, tools, and information on topics including coping and adapting to change, and fostering a supportive workplace culture. See link to the right for upcoming webinars	WorkLife and WellBeing Webinar Series
MyStressTools: Improve Your Wellness Anytime, Anywhere	MyStressTools, an online suite of stress management and resilience-building resources, helps MIT employees improve their overall well-being by providing a stress assessment, podcasts, webinars, relaxation exercises, and Q&A, from any device.	MyStressTools
Campus Lactation Rooms	MIT provides a supportive environment for nursing mothers and has 23 lactation rooms on campus, as well as lactation support guidelines and resources.	Campus Lactation Rooms

Reference MIT Well-Being Resources (2 of 2)

The MIT HR Center for Work Life and Well-Being offers a wide range of programs and resources that address specific life issues and events.

Resource	Description	Link
Technology Childcare Centers (TCC)	MIT has four on-site childcare centers – three on campus and one in Lexington – that accommodate infants, toddlers, and preschool children. All centers are accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), and overseen by the Center for WorkLife and Well-Being in collaboration with Bright Horizons.	Technology Childcare Centers (TCC)
Backup Child Care	Screened and trained caregivers are available to care for your children during the day or evening, seven days per week, at a subsidized rate of $8.00 per hour.	Backup Child Care
Backup Adult Care	Screened and trained caregivers are available to care for your aging loved ones during the day or evening, seven days per week, across the U.S., at a subsidized rate of $8.00 per hour.	Backup Adult Care
Peace at Home: Parent Coaching	Private consultations with a Peace at Home parenting coach are available to discuss your parenting questions or concerns.	Peace at Home
EdNavigator: School and Educational Support	Connect with an expert educational advisor to establish home routines to set-up your family for success, and develop a plan that will help your children – in elementary, middle, or high school – thrive in their current learning environment.	EdNavigator

Cultivate Inclusion

It is important that team members work toward creating inclusive teams. Below are ways in which you can commit to fostering inclusion.

Cognizance of bias

Be aware of your unconscious biases so that decisions can be made in a transparent, consistent, and informed manner.

Curiosity

Be curious and open to different ideas and experiences. Listen attentively and value the viewpoints of others.

Cultural intelligence

Not everyone sees the world through the same cultural frame. Seek out opportunities to experience, and learn about different cultures. Be aware of other cultural contexts.



Collaboration

Diverse-thinking teams are greater than the sum of their parts. Create teams that are diverse in thinking.

Commitment

Treat everyone with fairness and respect, and foster environments where team members can be themselves by modeling authenticity. Empower each other's well-being.

Courage

Talking about imperfections involves personal risk-taking. Engage in open and respectful dialogue. Identify opportunities to be more inclusive, take ownership and engage others.

Inclusion does not happen spontaneously. It must be intentional, cultivated, and nurtured. While it starts at the top, everyone plays a role in creating an inclusive culture. These six traits of inclusive leadership can help anyone to identify, personalize, model, and advance inclusion.

Create Space for “Real” Talk

Whether your team is hybrid, remote, or on-site, it is valuable to create space for honest and authentic dialogue regarding current events that may be affecting your team members’ well-being and ability to produce their best at work.

Ways managers can create space for real talk



Participate in courageous conversations

Team members should have courageous conversations amongst each other and should consider hosting team conversations on timely topics to promote courage and perspective sharing.



Share continuous learning resources

Continuous learning is a key part of creating inclusive environments. Employees should continue to self-educate on various current events and topics, while proactively creating an environment through resource sharing that values continuous learning.



Acknowledge current events in a timely fashion

Current events can affect an employee’s well-being in real-time. To the best of your ability, team members are encouraged to acknowledge the various ways in which a current event could be affecting team members and cultivate a working environment that allows for those team members to prioritize self-care, compassion, and communication when support is needed.

Conduct Courageous Conversations (1 of 3)

When courageous conversations are done effectively, they can have a dramatic impact on how you and your team members interact with one another.

Definition

Speaking up and expressing how you think or feel about something and risking the possibility of an awkward moment for the sake of clearing up misunderstanding, building relationships, and ensuring that those you work with know what you want and more importantly, what you don't. It requires us **to step out of our comfort zone** to discuss a topic that might well cause an emotional response.

A courageous conversation about inclusion may be uncomfortable to have, but is necessary to create a space for authenticity.

How to have a courageous conversation:

Have Respectful Dialogue: Engage in dialogue – not debate	• Talk about your own experiences or feelings, and stay away from opinion statements, judgement, or generalizations • Be open, transparent, and willing to admit mistakes or gaps in knowledge • Please consider how your words might be received and be respectful
Practice Active Listening: Suspend judgement and defensiveness	• Embrace humble listening: Put ego, assumptions, and viewpoints aside to reflect on and learn from someone else's experiences • Assume positive intent: Not everyone is going to say everything perfectly, so listen thoughtfully and for intent
Acknowledge Triggers: A trigger is something seen, heard, or read that causes a person emotional distress or to feel diminished	• Acknowledge when a topic might be triggering or upsetting, and how certain language or stories can be triggers or upsetting • Remind participants of the difference between intent and impact • Work with individuals impacted afterward to discuss

Conduct Courageous Conversations (2 of 3)

When courageous conversations are done effectively, they can have a dramatic impact on how you and your team members interact with one another.

These tips are meant to **create a safe space for employees to discuss topics of inclusion** and to determine how to make MIT and your individual teams a setting where everyone **feels courageous to share their perspective**:

Do…

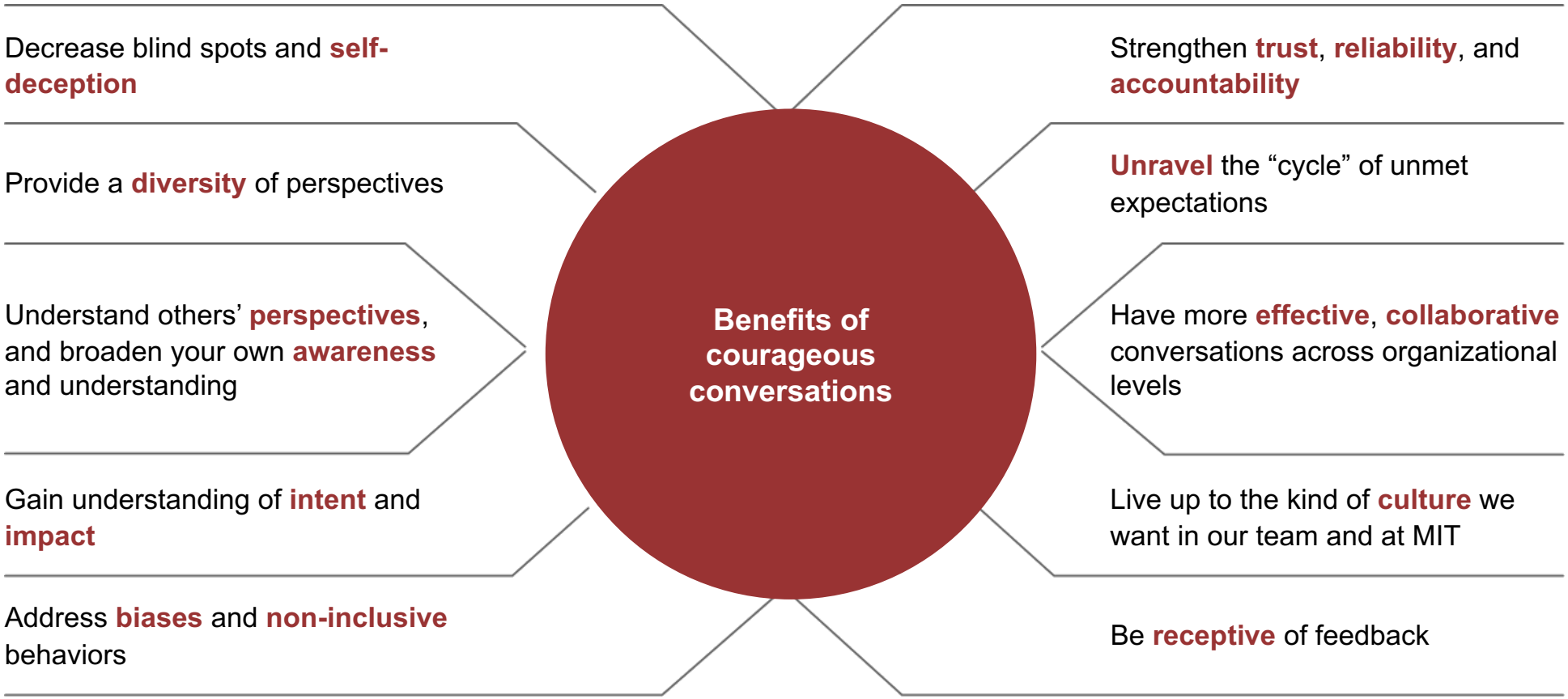
- Focus the discussion to be action-oriented in a way that makes MIT as a workplace more inclusive
- Honor and respect everything shared within the context of this conversation
- Listen with curiosity
- Acknowledge and be open to new perspectives, learning from one another

Don't…

- Critique others' experiences; everyone is the expert of their own experiences
- Be accusatory or assume negative intent
- Be defensive/deflective

Conduct Courageous Conversations (3 of 3)

When courageous conversations are done effectively, they can have a dramatic impact on your ability to lead and how your team members interact with one another.



However, human nature means we often avoid saying the things that need to be said…

- We often go to great lengths to avoid disagreement or confrontation
- We want to be liked most of the time and therefore may avoid conversations that endanger this need
- We often choose to postpone, avoid, deny, or rationalize behaviors rather than address it and risk upsetting someone

Reference Continuous Learning Resources (1 of 2)

Resources to read and share.

Inclusive leadership
Here are six attributes of leaders who display the ability to not only embrace individual differences, but to potentially leverage them for competitive advantage.

Five ways elite universities can be more inclusive
The country's top schools are admitting more diverse student populations. How can they be more welcoming?

Intersectionality
How can leaders build inclusive cultures that leverage employee potential at work? It is time to refresh corporate efforts by taking an intersectional approach.

This Google team leader sees diversity as a retention issue
AdviceMavens founder Anita Kibunguchy wants to see more structures in place to recruit and retain diverse hires – and help them succeed.

Uncovering talent
Rediscover inclusion by understanding how your employees cover – the process through which individuals manage or downplay their differences.

How to have productive conversations about race at work
Make these three social agreements: Listen to be changed, call in don't call out, and question your first assumptions.

Unleashing the power of inclusion
Every year, organizations allocate time, resources, and budget towards efforts to foster an inclusive culture—and interest is still increasing. Yet, there often remains a disconnect between the expectations of today's workforce and inclusion in organizations.

3 ways to combat gender bias in the workplace
Learn to say no, get comfortable talking about uncomfortable topics, and help others behind you.

Reference Continuous Learning Resources (2 of 2)

Below are some resources that you can read and share with your team.

Resource	Link
Human Rights Campaign's (HRC) Tools for Equity and Inclusion by Topic	Tools for Equality and Inclusion
Books on Race and Culture	Books on Race and Culture
Documentary Films on Race and Culture	Documentary Films on Race and Culture
Narrative Films on Race and Culture	Narrative Films on Race and Culture
Articles on DEI in Higher Education	Articles on DEI in Higher Education
Documentaries to Understand the LGBTQ+ Rights Movement	Documentaries to Understand the LBTQ+ Rights Movement
HRC Report: A Workplace Divided, Understanding the Climate for LGBTQ Workers Nationwide	HRC Report
***Forbes* Article: How to Make Workplaces More Welcoming for Employees with Disabilities**	Forbes Article