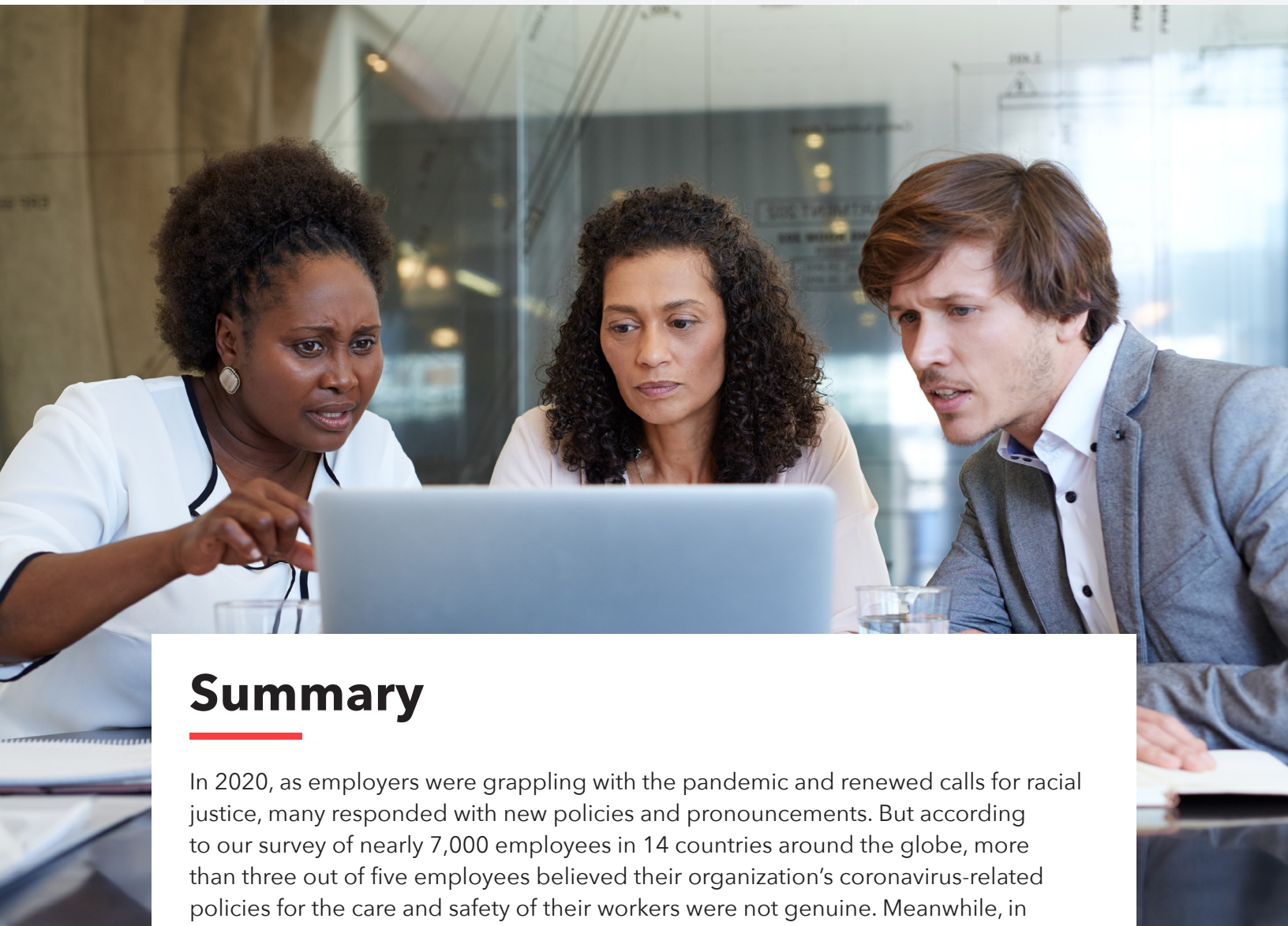# Words Aren't Enough

The Risks of Performative Policies

Tara Van Bommel, PhD, Kathrina Robotham, PhD, Danielle M. Jackson, PhD

Summary

In 2020, as employers were grappling with the pandemic and renewed calls for racial justice, many responded with new policies and pronouncements. But according to our survey of nearly 7,000 employees in 14 countries around the globe, more than three out of five employees believed their organization's coronavirus-related policies for the care and safety of their workers were not genuine. Meanwhile, in White-majority countries, an astonishing three-quarters of employees reported that their organization's racial equity policies were not genuine.

This report is a wake-up call for CEOs and other senior leaders at a time when employers are still facing high turnover due to the Great Resignation. Authors Tara Van Bommel, PhD, Kathrina Robotham, PhD, and Danielle M. Jackson, PhD, demonstrate that policies perceived as authentic or genuine predict increased positive job outcomes such as engagement and intent to stay.

The authors identify empathy as a key driver to communicate policies authentically. This report, the third in our series on *Leveraging Disruption for Equity*, lays out specific steps that CEOs and other senior leaders can take to be authentic and sincere by using empathy skills.

When the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic shut down schools and daycare centers, forcing parents, particularly mothers, to care for their children during working hours, did your organization permit some employees to work from home—yet expect zero interruptions during virtual calls?

After the horrific murder of George Floyd, did your organization release statements pledging antiracism but make no discernible change in hiring or promotion practices?

Around the globe, people are fatigued, angry, and sad—the result of living in a pandemic, violence against people from marginalized communities, extreme weather and the climate crisis, a refugee emergency, geopolitical conflict, and a constant battle for reproductive rights.

It's not enough to announce policies or issue statements. Your organization must follow through and take meaningful action. Our data show that employees are savvy and recognize when company policies are merely performative—and when that is the conclusion they reach, there are consequences for organizations. Indeed, in the last few years, employees have been vocal about organizations they see as hypocritical.[1]

The coronavirus pandemic and protests for racial equity challenged many organizations and leaders to recognize and then respond to two fundamentally different yet equally unprecedented situations. In both cases, leaders had to envision a new workplace future that reflects the unstable global landscape, changing employee and customer needs and expectations, a forward-looking business strategy, and their values.

As part of their vision, organizational leaders rolled out a wide range of policies and initiatives to safeguard employee health and improve racial equity.[2] While many were received positively, some were publicly called out for being performative.[3]

We surveyed 6,975 employees in 14 countries and found that more than two out of three employees viewed their organization's Covid-related policies for the care and safety of their workers as insincere.

> **Genuine policies**
> Policies that are aligned with the stated values of the organization, motivated by care and concern for employees, and thoughtfully implemented.

Also, an astonishing three-quarters of employees from four White-majority countries believed their organization's racial equity policies were not genuine.[4]

These findings are consequential because when employees perceived their organization's new policies related to Covid-19 and racial equity as genuine—as opposed to performative, insincere, or shallow—employees were more likely to have positive job outcomes such as engagement and experiences of inclusion. This means that CEOs and senior leaders faced with the next unprecedented disruption must be able address it with authentic, meaningful actions.

The Role of Empathy

Our results pinpoint leader empathy as a key determinant in whether or not employees perceived new policies positively.

Leaders who use their empathy skills are better able to create and communicate an authentic, equitable vision for the future and reap the employee and organizational benefits.

Empathy is a vital skill—one that can be learned, developed, and strengthened—for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and the future of work.[5] When CEOs and other senior leaders are empathic with employees, they are able to address employee priorities in a vision that will bring deep change and success to everyone.

Key Findings

Pandemic Policies

More than two out of three employees (68%) reported that their organization's Covid-19 policies were not genuine.

Employees who felt their organization's Covid-19 policies were genuine experience more inclusion, engagement, feelings of respect and value for their life circumstances, ability to balance life-work demands, and intent to stay.

Employees who perceived their organization's Covid-19 policies as genuine and had empathic senior leaders experienced less burnout than others.

68%
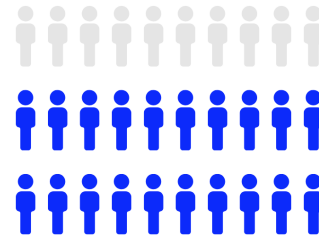
Racial Equity Policies

Three-quarters (75%) of employees reported that their organization's racial equity policies were not genuine.

Employees of color who felt their organization's racial equity policies were genuine experienced more inclusion, engagement, feelings of respect and value for their life circumstances, ability to balance life-work demands, and intent to stay.

Among employees of color, greater empathy from senior leaders was associated with increased perceptions of their organization's racial equity policies as genuine, leading to increased experiences of inclusion.

75%

These findings are especially important for organizations seeking to attract and retain women employees, especially since many have had to take on additional caregiving responsibilities and have left the workforce in higher numbers than men due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

> " The training in equality has been half-hearted and not very meaningful. It seemed like a rushed/required part of the training and not like there was actual heart and concern.
>
> —White woman, non-management/individual contributor, retail (US)

The Risks of Performative Policies

Employees view workplace policies about social issues, such as racial equity, as genuine when the policies are aligned with the stated values of the organization, motivated by care and concern for employees, and thoughtfully implemented. Genuineness is key, as studies have consistently shown that it's one of several traits (others include honesty and trustworthiness) that make up what researchers call moral character.[6] In other words, insincere policies can lead employees to question the overall ethics or values of an organization.

With the Great Resignation, employees have demonstrated that they will take their talent elsewhere if an organization's values don't match up with their own; in many cases, employees consider flexibility, inclusion, and ethical leadership as non-negotiable.[7]

In addition, research shows that job candidates prefer to work for organizations they perceive as having high moral character.[8] Organizations that are seen as moral can more effectively gain support for policies and programs[9] and enhance their brand and reputation.[10]

On the other hand, when employees think their organizations are inauthentic, trust in leaders and the organization, team performance, and employee productivity all suffer.[11] Also, policies are less effective when employees perceive that they are motivated by self-interest or to protect top management.[12]

Examples of Performative Covid Policies

1. Allowing remote work—but not providing flexibility for employees who must manage caretaking and schooling from home as well.

2. Frontline businesses putting Covid precautions in place for workers—but not enforcing social distancing, providing personal protective equipment (PPE), or conducting temperature checks.

3. Implementing a self-care wellness program to mitigate burnout— without doing anything to address unmanageable workloads and "always-on" culture.

How Employees Viewed Covid-19 Policies

Most Employees Do Not View Covid-19 Policies as Genuine…

As the Covid-19 pandemic worsened, most organizations implemented flexible and remote working options for office workers and job-specific safety measures for frontline workers.[13] Many went further, creating additional programs to help their employees continue working safely and effectively. For example, to help staff deal with children who were no longer at school all day, some extended parental leave policies[14] and others offered stipends to cover childcare and tutoring costs.[15]

But millions of people lost jobs, especially women and people from other marginalized groups.[16] Employees struggled to work from home amid extreme uncertainty while essential workers jeopardized their health to get the job done.

Many employees and customers were left trying to decipher whether companies genuinely cared about the health and safety of their employees or if they would be pressured to go back to "normal" as soon as possible.

Indeed, our research reveals that most employees doubted the sincerity of their organization's new policies:

 About 1 in 3 employees (32%) viewed their organization's Covid-related policies for the care and safety of their workers as genuine.[17]
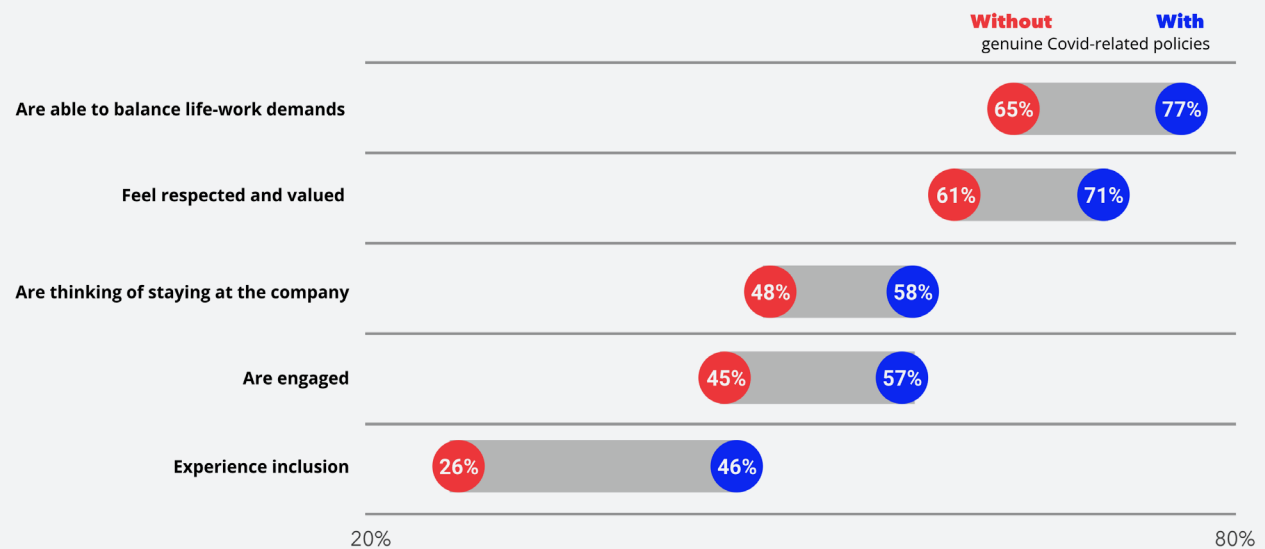
...But When They Do, They Have Better Experiences

Yet our research shows multiple benefits accrued to employees and organizations when employees perceived their organization's Covid-related policies were as genuine. In particular, employees experienced more inclusion,[18] engagement,[19] feelings of respect and value for their life circumstances,[20] ability to balance life-work demands,[21] and intent to stay at their jobs.[22]

Although our survey specifically asked about perceptions of Covid-19 policies, these findings indicate it's important for companies to create and implement genuine policies when future disruption impacts employees. Genuine policies are imperative for building more positive work experiences, life- work integration, and productivity—and especially for attracting and retaining talent.

Genuine Covid-Related Policies Lead to Better Employee Experiences

Percentage of employees reporting "often" or "always" or "true" or "very true"

Without   **With**
genuine Covid-related policies

	Without	With
Are able to balance life-work demands	65%	77%
Feel respected and valued	61%	71%
Are thinking of staying at the company	48%	58%
Are engaged	45%	57%
Experience inclusion	26%	46%

20%   80%

How Employees Viewed Racial Equity Policies

Most Employees Do Not View Racial Equity Policies as Genuine...

George Floyd's murder on May 25, 2020, unleashed the deep anguish of employees, customers, and the general public that had been simmering for decades. After Floyd's murder, which coincided with the widespread emergence of data showing that the Covid-19 pandemic was disproportionately affecting people of color, and Black communities in particular, the American Psychological Association called racism itself a "pandemic."[23]

Although the Black Lives Matter movement was started by Black Americans and stoked by anti-Black police brutality and vigilantism in the United States, Floyd's murder sparked a global response with people of color around the world standing in solidarity and speaking out against the oppression and discrimination endemic to their own countries. For example, Black Britons were keen to remind everyone that the US system of slavery and oppression was manufactured in, and exported from, Great Britain.[24]

Many organizations around the world pledged to double-down on DEI efforts, often specifically focused on Black communities, and US companies promised to spend a combined $60 billion

Examples of Ungenuine Racial Equity Policies

1. Pledging funds to support racial equity—but then not following through.

2. Putting up black squares on Instagram and tagging #blacklivesmatter—but making no meaningful changes or commitments in workplace equity and inclusion.

3. Hiring a CDO or DEI expert—but giving them no power or resources in the organization, not implementing the changes they recommend, or not addressing the problems they identify.

4. Making one-time antiracism/bias training mandatory for all employees—but not taking claims of bias seriously or thinking about how the organization can be antiracist in daily interactions with employees and customers.

on racial equity initiatives. Yet one year after the murder of George Floyd, only $250 million had been spent or committed to specific initiatives.[25]

But the sudden corporate acknowledgment that Black Lives Matter—seven years after the movement started in 2013[26]—made some employees and customers question the sincerity of all the new initiatives and ask whether companies were merely engaging in superficial displays of concern and performative allyship.

In fact, our research shows that to an even greater extent than we saw with Covid-19 responses, employees were dubious of corporate responses to calls for racial equity.

...But When They Do, They Have Better Experiences

As with Covid-related policies, our research also shows that employees of color who felt their organization's racial equity policies were genuine experienced more inclusion,[29] engagement,[30] feelings of respect and value for their life circumstances,[31] ability to address life-work demands,[32] and intent to stay.[33] This was true of the entire sample, regardless of race,[34] but since racial equity policies are primarily targeted toward employees of color, we focused our analysis on people of color in four White-majority countries with shared histories of slavery, racial hierarchies, and systems of oppression: Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States.[35]

Although recent events have catalyzed organizations to prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion, the prioritization of DEI will continue to be an important trend in the future of work. Our findings, which demonstrate that genuine racial equity policies fuel positive experiences at work for employees of color, provide a key insight for organizations who wish to retain a diverse workforce.
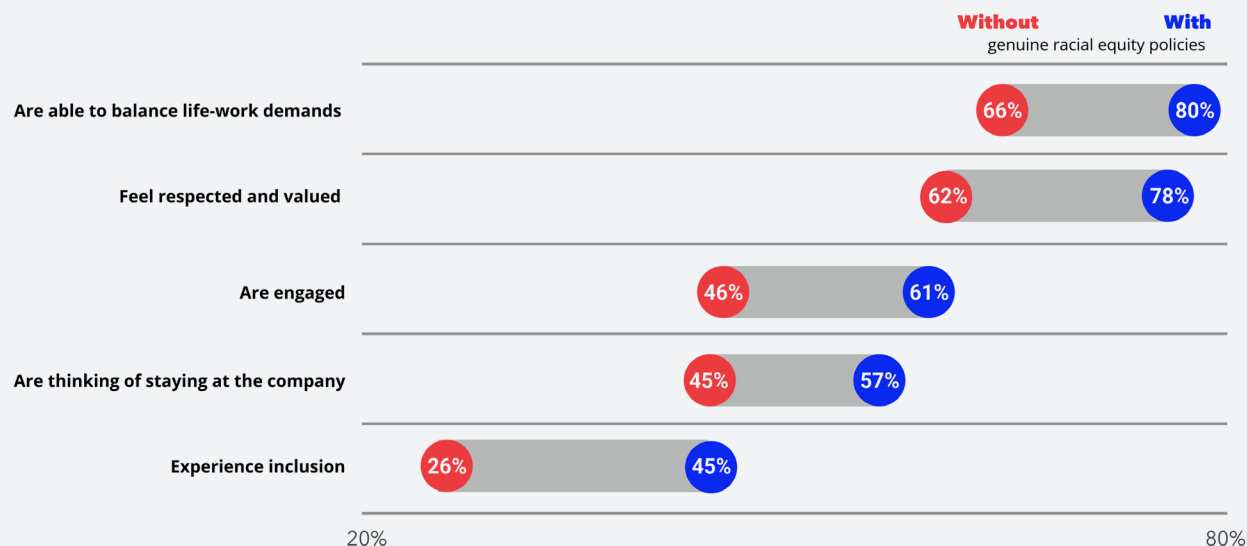

Only 1 in 4 employees (25%) viewed their organization's racial equity policies as genuine.[27]

Employees from marginalized racial and ethnic groups were less likely to view these policies as genuine (23%) than White employees (29%).[28]

Genuine Racial Equity Policies Lead to Better Employee Experiences for People of Color

Percentage of employees reporting "often" or "always" or "true" or "very true"

Without   **With**
genuine racial equity policies

	Without	With
Are able to balance life-work demands	66%	80%
Feel respected and valued	62%	78%
Are engaged	46%	61%
Are thinking of staying at the company	45%	57%
Experience inclusion	26%	45%

20%   80%

Lessons Learned

Clearly, employees are skeptical of corporate motives when organizations announce big new initiatives, especially in the context of crisis and global upheaval. But when they do perceive initiatives as genuine, both employees and companies benefit. We must note, however, that while genuine policies are associated with an almost two-fold increase in experiences of inclusion, the initial numbers are so low that even with genuine policies, fewer than half of employees experience inclusion. There is still much work to be done.

This should be great incentive for CEOs and senior leaders to multiply their efforts to respond to events with messaging and policies that both resonate with employees and align with a deeply held corporate vision.

The Role of Empathic Leadership

But how can CEOs and senior leaders generate and communicate a vision that employees can get behind? Our research shows that empathy is key and is now a must-have leadership behavior.

Empathy is a skill that leaders can build and use not only to create policies that are more attuned to employee needs but also to demonstrate a forthright interest in employee perspectives and well-being. Empathy can lead to both more effective policies and better communication of those policies with employees, as demonstrated by our data.

For example, our findings show that when leaders demonstrate care and concern for employees through personal interactions and the creation of genuine organizational policies, employees believe the organization is sincere in making decisions that prioritize their well-being and welfare.

Indeed, we found that when employees perceived their organization's Covid-related policies as genuine and they had empathic leaders,[37] they experienced the least burnout due to factors in their workplace in general (i.e., burnout regardless of the Covid-19 pandemic)[38] and burnout due to Covid-19 related factors in their workplace.[39]

Empathy

"The skill of (1) connecting with others to identify and understand their thoughts, perspectives, and emotions; and (2) demonstrating that understanding with intention, care, and concern."[36]

Empathic leader

An empathic leader demonstrates care, concern, and understanding for employees' life circumstances.

Want to Decrease Employee Burnout?

Employees who have senior leaders with **high empathy** and **genuine Covid-related policies** are less likely to experience high levels of general work burnout and Covid-19 burnout compared to employees with senior leaders who have **low empathy** and **ungenuine Covid-related policies**.

30% *less likely* to have high levels of ***general work burnout***[40]

29% *less likely* to have high levels of ***Covid-19 work burnout***[41]

This shows how important it is to combine leader empathy with genuine policies. With only one or the other, employees may discern a mismatch between words and actions.

Further, these findings show that there are pathways for organizations and leaders to ease the massive burnout employees are experiencing as stressors such as new variants, childcare issues, and inflation[42] continue to bear down on them. For leaders who want to attract and retain women, many of whom have had to take on additional caregiving responsibilities, and who have left the workforce in higher numbers than men, this is particularly important.

Previous Catalyst research demonstrated that the combination of remote-work options and manager empathy predicted lower levels of general workplace burnout, Covid-19 related workplace burnout, and personal burnout for employees.[43] The current findings complement that research and further demonstrate that senior leaders have a unique role to play in establishing sincere Covid policies—where remote and flexible work options are just one example of how organizations can demonstrate the importance of employee health, safety, and well-being.[44] Through empathy, leaders who demonstrate care and concern can provide crucial support for women's well-being, ultimately creating the conditions to retain a more gender-diverse workforce.

Use Empathy to Create Better Policies and More Inclusion for Employees of Color

We also found that when senior leaders demonstrated empathy, people of color were more likely to perceive their organization's racial equity policies as genuine. In turn, genuine racial equity policies led to increased experiences of inclusion.[45] Altogether the joint effect of leader empathy and genuine policies is substantial. Together, senior leader empathy and genuine racial equity policies explain 32% of experiences of inclusion for people of color:

As senior leader empathy increases

employees of color are more likely to perceive policies as genuine

which leads to greater experiences of inclusion.
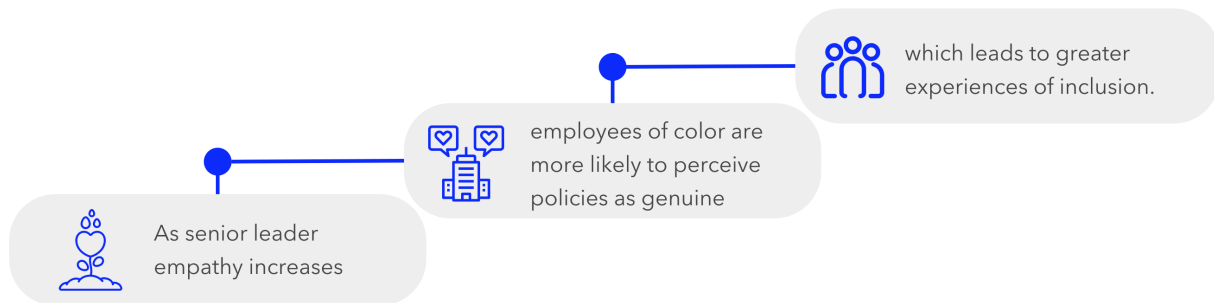
So, leaders who use empathy to truly understand what employees of color are concerned about can create policies that are more likely to be seen as genuine and that are more likely to result in experiences of inclusion for people from marginalized racial and ethnic backgrounds. This interaction is key to creating workplaces where people from all backgrounds can thrive.

Racial Equity Policies Benefit Women Across Intersections of Race and Ethnicity

People from marginalized racial and ethnic groups are not the only ones who benefit from racial equity policies. Research shows that establishing policies that benefit one marginalized group signals to other marginalized groups that the organization promotes equity more broadly, which leads to an increased sense of inclusion among people from the non-targeted group.[46]

This pattern emerged in our data: We found that when senior leaders demonstrated empathy, women across race and ethnicity were more likely to perceive racial equity policies as genuine, which in turn led to more engagement[47] and feeling that their life circumstances are respected and valued by their company.[48] Together, senior leader empathy and genuine racial equity policies explain 28% of women's work engagement and 26% of their feelings of being respected and valued by their company.

Feeling respected and valued is especially important for retention during the Great Resignation, as previous Catalyst research shows that this quality is especially important for driving down women's turnover intentions.[49]

These findings show that leader empathy and racial equity policies benefit women who are marginalized based on gender *and* race and ethnicity, and interestingly, those same benefits extend to White women who are marginalized based on gender but not race or ethnicity.

However, this pattern should not be interpreted to imply that organizations that focus their policies on only one marginalized group should expect others to flourish. People from different marginalized groups have many different needs, challenges, and opportunities; there is no one-size-fits-all approach that will lead to inclusion for everyone. These findings suggest that using empathy to inform policies and focused interventions that address the unique barriers faced by differing social identities can ultimately create workplace cultures that foster inclusion and belonging, which in turn create a more engaging, rewarding, and productive experience for all employees.

A Wake-Up Call for CEOs

As we look back on how organizations responded to the disruptions of 2020 and how employees reacted, we can see that workers were hungry for leaders who could speak authentically to the issues and craft genuine policies that showed their care and concern for employees. They wanted—and still want—leaders who will stand up for equity, embrace social responsibility, and take bold action to make measurable progress on DEI goals.

CEOs: This is a wake-up call that you can heed by becoming curious about what employees are living through, thinking, and feeling, and showing them that you value their well-being—in other words, by displaying empathy.

What else do employees crave from leaders and organizations? A flexible and/or remote workplace? Opportunities to learn new skills? Team members who support rather than compete against one another? A workplace that honors their culture and life choices? Support for employees and refugees affected by humanitarian disasters? A commitment to stewarding the earth's resources? Leaders who will take a visible stand when basic human rights are on the chopping block? Challenge yourself to learn, use your learnings to lead ethically and genuinely, and reimagine the future of work.

What Employees Think

These suggestions come from survey respondents, who described which aspects of their organization's racial equity initiatives were **least** and **most** meaningful.

What Makes Employees Think a Policy is Performative?

Announce a policy without following through.

"It's just mostly all talk and no action."
  – Filipino woman, non-management/individual contributor, healthcare (US)

Email staff expressing concern without taking action.

"A lot of emails 'virtue signaling.'"
  – White man, non-management/individual contributor, government (Canada)

Announce that you will make trainings available, and then fail to implement them.

"They were supposed to have trainings, [but] they skipped them."
  – Woman (race or ethnicity not disclosed), non-management/individual contributor, retail (US)

Pretend to create a new policy when you are just updating an existing one.

"They are not a major change from initiatives already in place."
  – Puerto Rican man, non-management/individual contributor, manufacturing (US)

What Makes Employees Think a Policy is Genuine?

Take a stand externally and internally.

"Actually want to talk about it outside of their official statement."
  – Man (race or ethnicity not disclosed), non-management/individual
    contributor, information services/IT support (France)

Be transparent. Admit that your organization is not as diverse as it should be.

"Publish data on racial gaps at work."
  – Chinese man, non-management/individual contributor, financial services (Australia)

Give employees the opportunity to report when they are not psychologically safe—and then take corrective action.

"A campaign survey where the company anonymously recorded whether employees felt racially insecure, targeted, harmed, harassed, etc. From there, managers were in charge of implementing reforms or ways of combatting any issues."
— Chinese woman, second-level manager, educational institution (Canada)

Empower employees to create ERGs (employee resource groups).

"Setting up new ERGs."
— Chinese man, first-level manager, financial services (Canada)

Take steps to remove bias from hiring practices.

"Fair recruitment and balance in employees' racial origins."
— White man, second-level manager, retail (Sweden)

Take steps to diversify senior leadership.

"More intersectionality. Minorities in power tend to be men, straight, able-bodied, etc."
— Man (race or ethnicity not disclosed), first-level manager, financial services (Canada)

Continuously train employees on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).

"Create more awareness of internal implicit biases in a professional work environment by educating all races on what types of biases can arise and under what circumstance they could likely occur."
— British Indo-Portuguese man, non-management/individual contributor, financial services (UK)

Treat everyone with respect.

"All employees are treated with due respect, and each has a certain amount of decision-making power."
— White man, senior-level manager, manufacturing (Australia)

Celebrate cultural heritage.

"Encouraging sharing of culture through recognition of cultural holidays."
— Chinese-Vietnamese woman, first-level manager, manufacturing

Hire a DEI expert.

"Hire a racial/diversity specialist that works in HR and provide us with the ability to speak with them."
— North African man, non-management/individual contributor, government (Canada)

Actions for CEOs and Leaders

Lead With Empathy

Practice building your empathy skills. Empathy is a strategic business imperative for all leaders who want to promote inclusion, engagement, and innovation in the workplace. Leaders who practice empathy can also stave off employee burnout and resignation.

Start where you are. Empathy is a skill that can be developed, so no matter where you are starting from, you can increase your ability to form connections and better understand different lived experiences.

Exercise your behavioral empathy skills. This is empathy in action. Once you've listened and learned, the next step is to act on those learnings. Indeed, prior research shows that employees view workplace benefits as an organizational act of empathy.[50] Therefore, implement policies that are informed by employee needs and support their well-being.

Invest in empathy training for all leaders to better address employee concerns, workplace challenges, and systemic inequality from a genuine place. Think of it as a superpower for building and maintaining an inclusive workplace.

Embrace Ethical Decision-Making

Commit to social issues because it's the right thing to do.
We've all heard about the business case for diversity and remote/flexible work options. But when you make economic arguments for social issues—however convincing they may seem—you risk coming across as insincere because your support for these issues may be interpreted as dependent on the profitability of the issues and not the ethics. Employees may wonder if your organization will halt support for these issues as soon as they become costly or inconvenient.[51]

Provide both fairness-based and economic-based rationales for policies to increase the perception that you and your organization are genuine in your commitment to issues like DEI and Covid. Research shows that organizations that support social issues for fairness reasons are perceived to be more sincere, honest, and trustworthy than those that support social issues for business or economic reasons.[52]

Constantly Evolve Equity

Recognize that equity is not a "one and done" endeavor.
It's important to build in regular assessments, with different avenues for employees to share their input, and then take these learnings to revise your policies to mirror the dynamic world we live in.

- Take a hard look at whether there is diversity at all levels of the organization.
- Track and share metrics on diversity and inclusion that examine the intersections of gender, race, and ethnicity.
- Hold yourself accountable to representation goals, for example by joining Catalyst's Measuring for Change program.

Commit to the full process of equity and inclusion.
Shifting workplace dynamics in a meaningful way requires that organizational actions be—and be perceived by employees as—more than a checkbox. Employees have heightened awareness of, and increasing lack of tolerance for, organizations that promote one set of values publicly while

practicing others internally. One-time actions are unlikely to shift the dynamics that maintain workplace inequity, so you must commit to a continuous, iterative process that includes:

- Listening to and acknowledging the experiences of employees at all levels of the organization.
- Creating equitable policies.
- Dedicating company resources.
- Adjusting policies and practices as needed. [53]

Avoid performative allyship by ensuring your actions and company culture reflect your commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Leaders have a unique opportunity to leverage their power and status to effect real change.
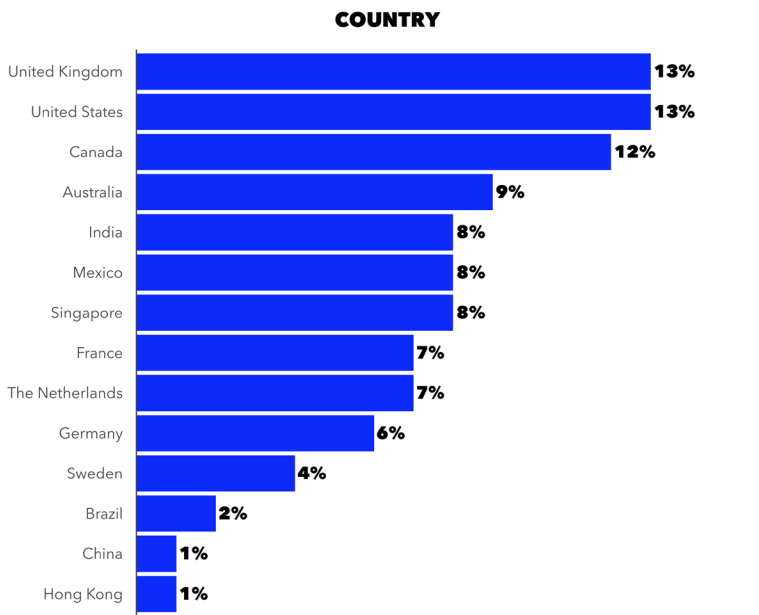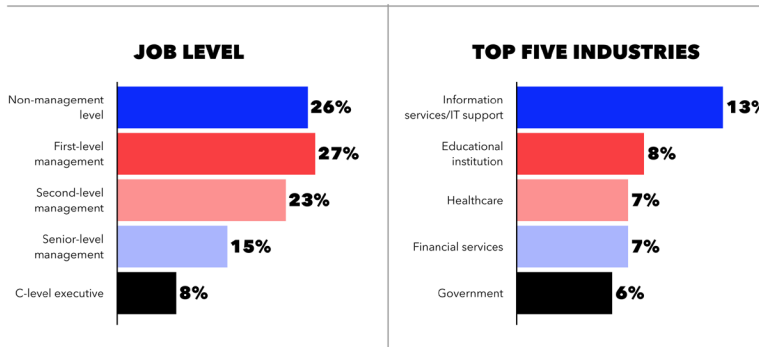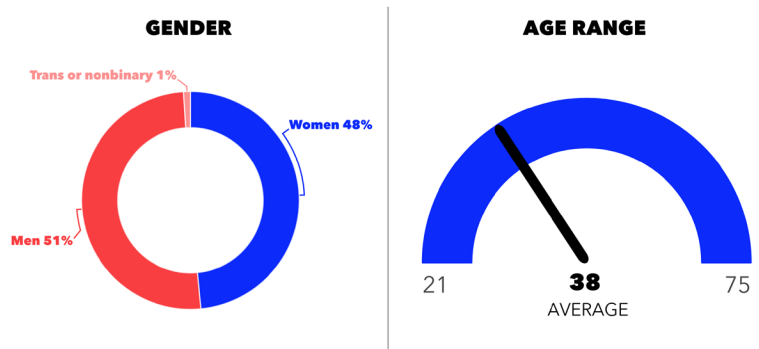
About the Authors

Tara Van Bommel, PhD, is a social psychologist who studies nonconscious bias and the role of nonverbal behavior in interracial interactions. At Catalyst, Tara leads the Women and the Future of Work research initiative and brings her background in stereotyping and prejudice to advance an intersectional approach to creating an equitable future of work.

Kathrina Robotham, PhD, is an organizational psychologist whose research aims to understand the experiences, perceptions, and consequences of workplace mistreatment for marginalized groups and discover individual and organizational factors that foster diversity, equity, and inclusion. At Catalyst, Kathy is a Senior Research Associate where she uses her expertise in DEI, research methods, and statistics to conduct rigorous research on DEI in a rapidly changing world of work.

Danielle M. Jackson, PhD, is a sociologist whose longstanding research interests include women's experiences in the labor market, entrepreneurship, and community economic development. She is passionate about projects related to equity and inclusion and is currently a Research Fellow at Catalyst in the area of Women and the Future of Work.

About the Study

We surveyed 6,975 employees in 14 countries as part of our *Leveraging Disruption for Equity* series of reports. This series comes from Catalyst's Women and the Future of Work research initiative, which examines the impact of disruptions intrinsic to the future of work and identifies the key individual, team, and organizational factors necessary to leverage these disruptions to reimagine and create equitable workplaces of the future where everyone can belong, contribute, and thrive.[54]

GENDER

Trans or nonbinary 1%
Women 48%
Men 51%

AGE RANGE

21   **38**   75
AVERAGE

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

16%
Identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, pansexual, or asexual

80%
Do not identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, pansexual, or asexual

5%
Prefer not to say

JOB LEVEL

Non-management level	26%
First-level management	27%
Second-level management	23%
Senior-level management	15%
C-level executive	8%

TOP FIVE INDUSTRIES

Information services/IT support	13%
Educational institution	8%
Healthcare	7%
Financial services	7%
Government	6%

COUNTRY

United Kingdom	13%
United States	13%
Canada	12%
Australia	9%
India	8%
Mexico	8%
Singapore	8%
France	7%
The Netherlands	7%
Germany	6%
Sweden	4%
Brazil	2%
China	1%
Hong Kong	1%

Methodology

Recruitment and Sample: Respondents were recruited through a panel service company. At the time of the survey, all respondents were full-time workers. Sample demographics are provided in the "About the Study" section.

Procedure: After obtaining informed consent, respondents completed an online survey about "technology and work-life experiences." The survey took approximately 20 minutes to complete and included questions about their experiences at work and a demographics section.

Analysis: We used a variety of statistical analyses to understand the relationships between a respondent's perceptions of Covid-19 and racial equity policies, senior leader empathy, and employee outcomes. Specifically, we conducted a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to examine whether the presence or absence of genuine organizational policies was associated with job outcomes such as engagement, inclusion, and intent to stay. In other words, one-way ANOVA allows us to test whether one group (e.g., those with genuine policies) scores significantly higher on a given outcome compared to another group (e.g., those without genuine policies). In addition, we conducted a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to examine the combined effect of senior leader empathy and genuine organization policies on job outcomes. Two-way ANOVA tests whether the combination or presence of two predictor variables (e.g., genuine policies and high senior leader empathy) results in higher scores on a given outcome than when only one of the predictor variables is present (e.g., low senior leader empathy and genuine policies). All descriptive statistics, one-way and two-way ANOVA, and chi- square analyses were conducted in IBM SPSS version 25. Lastly, we conducted mediation analysis using the lavaan package in R. These mediation analyses examine whether the positive effect of senior leader empathy on inclusion is enhanced or partially explained by genuine racial equity policies. That is, can the impact of senior leader empathy on inclusion be partially explained by leaders' ability to create and communicate racial equity policies that are perceived to be genuine by employees? Due to large sample size, we used a stricter p-value ($p < .01$) to determine statistical significance.

Country Demographics: The demographic breakdowns for gender in all 14 countries are presented below. We also provide breakdowns by race or ethnicity and gender for Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States; in these four White-majority countries, it is legal to collect racial and/or ethnic demographic data, and we had sufficient sample size.

Demographics for Gender by Country

	Women	**Men**	**Trans and Nonbinary Employees**
Australia n = 658	50%	49%	1%
Brazil n = 115	50%	50%	1%
Canada n = 841	50%	49%	1%
China n = 77	35%	53%	12%
France n = 475	50%	49%	1%
Germany n = 447	49%	50%	1%
Hong Kong n = 74	49%	49%	3%
India n = 591	41%	57%	1%
Mexico n = 545	49%	50%	1%
Netherlands n = 515	45%	53%	3%
Singapore n = 544	48%	51%	1%
Sweden n = 273	49%	50%	1%
United Kingdom n = 922	48%	50%	1%
United States n = 889	51%	47%	2%

Note: Total percentages for each country may exceed 100 due to rounding.

Demographics for Race or Ethnicity by Gender in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States

	Racially or Ethnically Marginalized Women and Men		White Women and Men	
	Women	**Men**	**Women**	**Men**
Australia	36%	30%	15%	19%
Canada	34%	34%	16%	16%
United Kingdom	32%	31%	17%	20%
United States	43%	23%	9%	25%

Genuine Covid-19 Policies by Gender and Country

The following data are intended to show patterns and are not presented or analyzed for cross-country comparisons. Across the board, we see that a low percentage of participants viewed their organization's Covid-19 policies as genuine, with slight variations among countries.

	Women	**Men**	**Total**
Australia	29%	37%	33%
Brazil	37%	33%	35%
Canada	44%	42%	43%
China	24%	28%	26%
France	16%	24%	20%
Germany	22%	23%	22%
Hong Kong	22%	41%	31%
India	21%	29%	26%
Mexico	27%	29%	28%
Netherlands	34%	25%	29%
Singapore	26%	33%	30%
Sweden	37%	28%	33%
United Kingdom	38%	36%	37%
United States	39%	25%	32%

Note: The breakdown of gender by country yielded very small sample sizes of trans and nonbinary respondents, so we are unable to provide percentages for them in each country. However, we are able to provide percentages of those who view their organization's Covid-19 policies as genuine when samples of trans and nonbinary respondents are five or more: Canada (n = 6, 50%), China (n = 5, 0%), India (n = 6, 50%), the Netherlands (n = 10, 20%), Singapore (n = 5, 20%), United Kingdom (n = 7, 14%) and United States (n = 7, 14%).

Genuine Racial Equity Policies by Race or Ethnicity and Gender in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States

In White-majority countries, there are some meaningful group differences based on race or ethnicity. Overall, employees from marginalized racial or ethnic groups are less likely than White employees to view their organization's racial equity policies as genuine.

% Perceiving Racial Equity Policies as Genuine by Race or Ethnicity, Gender, and Country				
	Racially or Ethnically Marginalized Women and Men		White Women and Men	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Australia	22%	27%	26%	29%
Canada	21%	22%	28%	31%
UnitedKingdom	18%	23%	29%	35%
UnitedStates	29%	23%	33%	22%

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Endnotes

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17. Among the global sample of 14 countries. Participants responded 'yes' or 'no' to the statement, "My organization has enacted new policies and/or procedures to take care of our workers due to coronavirus in the last 3-6 months." Those who answered yes were further asked if the action seemed genuine, which was also answered with 'yes' or 'no.'

18. Employee inclusion is measured with a short-form scale adapted from the Catalyst Inclusion Accelerator and Travis, D. J., Shaffer, E., & Thorpe-Moscon, J. (2019). *Getting real about inclusive leadership: Why change starts with you*. Catalyst. The highest loading item from each of the five hallmarks of inclusion (Valued, Trusted, Authentic, Psychological Safety: Latitude, and Psychological Safety: Risk-Taking) was assessed on a 1 (never) to 5 (always) Likert scale. These items were used to create a composite (α = .74) where higher ratings indicate greater experiences of inclusion. A one-way between-subjects ANOVA was conducted to examine the impact of genuine Covid-19 related policies (yes vs. no) on employees' inclusion. There was a significant effect of genuine Covid-19 related policies on employee inclusion, F (1, 4923) = 215.19, p < .001; employees who perceived their company's Covid-19 related policies as genuine had greater levels of inclusion (M = 3.78) than did those who did not perceive these policies as genuine (M = 3.48). Employee inclusion was dichotomized such that responses of never, rarely, sometimes were categorized as low levels and responses of often or always were categorized as high levels. This dichotomized variable was entered into a chi-square test to examine differences in inclusion based on the perceived genuineness of Covid-19 related policies. The observed values were significantly different than expected values, χ^2 (1) = 191.93, p < .001.

19. Employee work engagement is measured with five self-report items from the Catalyst Inclusion Accelerator assessed on a 1 (never) to 5 (always) Likert scale. These items were used to create a composite (α = .90) where higher ratings indicate greater work engagement. A one-way between-subjects ANOVA was conducted to examine the impact of genuine Covid-19 related policies (yes vs. no) on employees' engagement. There was a significant effect of genuine Covid-19 related policies on employee engagement, F (1, 4772) = 99.06, p < .001; employees who perceived their company's Covid-19 related policies as genuine had greater levels of engagement (M = 3.97) than did those who did not perceive these policies as genuine (M = 3.71). Employee engagement was dichotomized such that responses of never, rarely, sometimes were categorized as low levels and responses of often or always were categorized as high levels. This dichotomized variable was entered into a chi-square test to examine differences in engagement based on the perceived genuineness of Covid-19 related policies. The observed values were significantly different than expected values, χ^2 (1) = 56.47, p < .001.

20. Item "I feel that my life circumstances are respected and valued by my company" was measured on a five-point Likert scale (very untrue to very true). A one-way between-subjects ANOVA was conducted to examine the impact of genuine Covid-19 related policies (yes vs. no) on employees feeling respected and valued for their life circumstances. There was a significant effect of genuine Covid-19 related policies on employees feeling respected and valued for their life circumstances, F (1, 4763) = 64.81, p < .001; employees who perceived their company's Covid-19 related policies as genuine felt more respected and valued for their life circumstances (M = 3.89) than did those who did not perceive these policies as genuine (M = 3.65). The respected and valued by my company item was dichotomized such that responses of very untrue, untrue, and neutral were categorized as low levels and responses of true or very were categorized as high levels. This dichotomized variable was entered into a chi-square test to examine differences in feeling respected and valued based on the perceived genuineness of Covid-19 related policies. The observed values were significantly different than expected values, χ^2 (1) = 51.37, p < .001.

21. Item "I am able to balance my work obligations with my family or personal obligations" was measured on a five-point Likert scale (very untrue to very true). A one-way between-subjects ANOVA was conducted to examine the impact of genuine Covid-19 related policies (yes vs. no) on employees' ability to balance life-work demands. There was a significant effect of genuine Covid-19 related policies on employees' ability to balance life-work demands, $F(1, 4763) = 78.20$, $p < .001$; employees who perceived their company's Covid-19 related policies as genuine were better able to balance their life-work demands ($M = 3.99$) than those who did not perceive these policies as genuine ($M = 3.74$). Employee ability to balance life-work demands was dichotomized such that responses of very untrue, untrue, and neutral were categorized as low levels and responses of true or very were categorized as high levels. This dichotomized variable was entered into a chi-square test to examine differences in ability to balance life-work demands based on the perceived genuineness of Covid-19 related policies. The observed values were significantly different than expected values, $\chi^2(1) = 74.46$, $p < .001$.

22. Item "How often do you think about leaving your current organization?" was measured on a 1 (never) to 5 (always) Likert scale; this scale was reverse-scored so that higher numbers reflect greater intent to stay (i.e., never thinking of leaving) and lower numbers reflecting greater intent to leave (i.e., always thinking of leaving). A one-way between-subjects ANOVA was conducted to examine the impact of genuine Covid-19 related policies (yes vs. no) on employees' intent to stay with their company. There was a significant effect of genuine Covid-19 related policies on employees' intent to stay with their company, $F(1, 4760) = 77.62$, $p < .001$; employees who perceived their company's Covid-19 related policies as genuine reported greater intent to stay ($M = 3.63$) than those who did not perceive these policies as genuine ($M = 3.29$). The reverse-scored employee intent to stay variable was dichotomized such that responses of never, rarely, sometimes were categorized as low levels and responses of often or always were categorized as high levels. This dichotomized variable was entered into a chi-square test was conducted to examine differences in intent to stay based on the perceived genuineness of Covid-19 related policies. The observed values were significantly different than expected values, $\chi^2(1) = 48.83$, $p < .001$.

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27. Among White-majority countries only: Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Participants responded 'yes' or 'no' to the statement, "My organization has enacted new policies and/or procedures to improve racial/ethnic equity and justice in our workplace in the last 3-6 months." Those who answered yes were further asked if the action seemed genuine, which was also answered with 'yes' or 'no.'

28. A chi-square test was conducted to examine whether people of color's perception of genuine racial equity policies differed from White employees. There was a significant difference in the percentage of people of color who perceive their company's racial equity policies to be genuine compared to their White counterparts, $\chi^2(1) = 7.00$, $p < .01$. The analysis only included people of color from Australia, Canada, the UK, and the US.

29. A one-way between-subjects ANOVA was conducted to examine the impact of genuine racial equity policies (yes vs. no) on people of color's inclusion. There was a significant effect of genuine racial equity policies on inclusion, $F(1, 1220) = 60.11$, $p < .001$; people of color who perceived their company's racial equity policies as genuine had greater levels of inclusion ($M = 3.80$) than those who did not perceive these policies as genuine ($M = 3.46$). A chi-square test was conducted to examine the differences in people of color's experience of inclusion at work based on the perceived genuineness of racial equity policies. The observed values were significantly different than expected values, $\chi^2(1) = 36.80$, $p < .001$. The analysis only included people of color from Australia, Canada, the UK, and the US.

30. A one-way between-subjects ANOVA was conducted to examine the impact of genuine racial equity policies (yes vs. no) on people of color's engagement. There was a significant effect of genuine racial equity policies on engagement, $F(1, 1162) = 27.32$, $p < .001$; people of color who perceived their company's racial equity policies as genuine had greater levels of engagement ($M = 4.05$) than those who did not perceive these policies as genuine ($M = 3.75$). A chi-square test was conducted to examine the differences in people of color's experience of engagement at work based on the perceived genuineness of racial equity policies. The observed values were significantly different than expected values, $\chi^2(1) = 20.55$, $p < .001$. The analysis only included people of color from Australia, Canada, the UK, and the US.

31. A one-way between-subjects ANOVA was conducted to examine the impact of genuine racial equity policies (yes vs. no) on people of color feeling respected and valued for their life circumstances. There was a significant effect of genuine racial equity policies on feeling respected and valued, $F(1, 1159) = 25.04$, $p < .001$; people of color who perceived their company's racial equity policies as genuine felt more respected and valued for their life circumstances ($M = 4.03$) than those who did not perceive these policies as genuine ($M = 3.71$). A chi-square test was conducted to examine the differences in people of color's feeling respected and valued at work based on the perceived genuineness of racial equity policies. The observed values were significantly different than expected values, $\chi^2(1) = 24.46$, $p < .001$. The analysis only included people of color from Australia, Canada, the UK, and the US.

32. A one-way between-subjects ANOVA was conducted to examine the impact of genuine racial equity policies (yes vs. no) on people of color's ability to balance life-work demands. There was a significant effect of genuine racial equity policies on ability to balance life-work demands, $F(1, 1159) = 20.41$, $p < .001$; people of color who perceived their company's racial equity policies as genuine were better able to balance life-work demands ($M = 4.05$) than those who did not perceive these policies as genuine ($M = 3.77$). A chi-square test was conducted to examine the differences in people of color's ability to balance life-work demands based on the perceived genuineness of racial equity policies. The observed values were significantly different than expected values $\chi^2(1) = 21.27$, $p < .001$. The analysis only included people of color from Australia, Canada, the UK, and the US.

33. A one-way between-subjects ANOVA was conducted to examine the impact of genuine racial equity policies (yes vs. no) on people of color's intent to stay at their workplace. There was a significant effect of genuine racial equity policies on intent to stay, $F(1, 1158) = 24.52$, $p < .001$; people of color who perceived their company's racial equity policies as genuine had greater levels of intent to stay ($M = 3.64$) than those who did not perceive these policies as genuine ($M = 3.20$). A chi-square test was conducted to examine the differences in people of color's intent to stay at their workplace based on the perceived genuineness of racial equity policies. The observed values were significantly different than expected values, $\chi^2(1) = 13.31$, $p < .001$. The analysis only included people of color from Australia, Canada, the UK, and the US.

34. One-way between-subjects ANOVAs examined the impact of genuine racial equity policies on inclusion ($F(1, 3910) = 247.99$, $p < .001$), engagement ($F(1, 3767) = 144.44$, $p < .001$), feeling respected and valued for their life circumstances ($F(1, 3760) = 122.16$, $p < .001$), ability to balance life-work demands ($F(1, 3760) = 82.46$, $p < .001$), and intent to stay ($F(1, 3758) = 69.13$, $p < .001$). For all outcomes, means are significantly higher among those who perceive their racial equity policies as genuine compared to those who do not. The analysis included the entire global sample of employees who indicated that their company had enacted new policies and/or procedures to improve racial equity in the workplace.

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36. Van Bommel, T. (2021a, p. 2); Clark, M. A., Robertson, M. M., & Young, S. (2019). "I feel your pain": A critical review of organizational research on empathy. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 40*(2), 166–192; Teding van Berkout, E. & Malouff, J. M. (2016). The efficacy of empathy training: A meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 63*(1), 32-41; *2019 State of workplace empathy: Executive summary*. (2019). Businesssolver.

37. Senior leader empathy was measured with a scale adapted from the medical literature that assesses patients' experiences of empathy in interactions with their doctor: the consultation and relational empathy measure (CARE); Mercer, S. W., Maxwell, M., Heaney, D., & Watt G. CM. (2004). The consultation and relational empathy (CARE) measure: Development and preliminary validation and reliability of an empathy-based consultation process measure. *Family Practice, 21*(6), 699-705; This scale was chosen because it reflects empathy experienced in interactions; many other available scales tap an individual's level of empathy as they engage with others, (i.e., first- person vs second-person empathy). This scale was adapted for interactions with senior leaders with additional items drawn Catalyst's conceptualization of empathy (e.g., Why Empathy Is a Superpower in the Future of Work (2020). Catalyst.) resulting in six items that reflect the most likely type and depth of interaction employees might have with senior leaders. Participants responded to these questions on a 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent) scale. The scale showed excellent internal reliability, α =. 95. Senior leader empathy was dichotomized such that responses of poor or fair were categorized as low levels of empathy and responses of good, very good, and excellent were categorized as high levels of empathy.

38. Burnout was assessed on a ten-point scale (1 = not at all burned out, 10 = extremely burned out). Hansen, V. & Pit, S. (2016) The single item burnout measure is a psychometrically sound screening tool for occupational burnout. Health Scope, 5(2), e32164. A two-way between-subjects ANOVA examined the impact of senior leader empathy (high vs. low) and genuine Covid-19 policies for worker safety and well-being (yes vs. no), and the interaction effect on respondents' experiences of burnout because of factors in their workplace in general. The main effect of genuine Covid-19 policies was significant, F (1, 3041) = 83.33, p < .001; employees who perceived their company's Covid-19 policies as genuine had lower levels of general workplace burnout (M = 4.60) than did those who did not perceive these policies as genuine (M = 5.56). The main effect of senior leader empathy was significant, F (1, 3041) = 18.99, p < .001; employees whose senior leaders demonstrated high levels of empathy reported less general workplace burnout (M = 4.85) than those who demonstrated low levels of empathy (M = 5.31). The interaction between senior leader empathy and genuine Covid-19 policies was significant, F (1, 3041) = 38.62, p < .001; employees who perceived their companies Covid-19 policies as genuine and their senior leaders demonstrated high levels of empathy had the lowest levels of general workplace burnout (M = 4.04, LLCI = 3.72, ULCI = 4.36); post-hoc tests with 99% confidence interval revealed that this mean was significantly lower than each of the other 3 conditions: those who did perceive Covid-19 policies as genuine but had senior leaders with low levels of empathy (M = 5.16, LLCI = 4.84, ULCI = 5.48), those who did not perceive these policies as genuine and had senior leaders that demonstrated high levels of empathy (M = 5.66, LLCI = 5.44, ULCI = 5.89), and those who did not perceive Covid-19 policies as genuine and had senior leaders that demonstrated low levels of empathy (M = 5.47, LLCI = 5.25, ULCI = 5.68). Consistent with previous studies (e.g., Hansen & Pit, 2016), high burnout was characterized as five or higher in the current data. A chi-square analysis with a Breslow-Day test (a three-way chi-square) was conducted to show that the percentage of those experiencing high levels of general workplace burnout varies significantly across levels of high vs. low senior leader empathy and whether Covid-19 polices are perceived as genuine. The odds ratios differed significantly, Breslow-Day χ^2 (1) = 21.62, p < .001.

39. A two-way between-subjects ANOVA examined the impact of senior leader empathy (high vs. low) and genuine Covid-19 policies for worker safety and well-being (yes vs. no), and the interaction effect on employees' experiences of burnout because of factors in their workplace related to Covid-19. The main effect of genuine Covid-19 policies was significant, F (1, 3041) = 58.44, p < .001; employees who perceived their company's Covid-19 policies as genuine had lower levels of Covid-19 workplace burnout (M = 4.74) than did those who did not perceive these policies as genuine (M = 5.55). The main effect of senior leader empathy was not significant, F (1, 3041) = 1.10, p > .05). However, the interaction between senior leader empathy and genuine Covid-19 policies was significant, F (1, 3041) = 30.55, p < .001; employees who perceived their company's Covid-19 policies as genuine and their senior leaders demonstrated high levels of empathy had the lowest levels of Covid-19 workplace burnout (M = 4.39, LLCI = 4.07, ULCI = 4.70); post-hoc tests with 99% confidence intervals revealed that this mean was significantly lower than each of the other 3 conditions: those who did perceive Covid-19 policies as genuine but had senior leaders with low levels of empathy (M = 5.09, LLCI = 4.76, ULCI = 5.41), those who did not perceive these policies as genuine and had senior leaders that demonstrated high levels of empathy (M = 5.79, LLCI = 5.56, ULCI = 6.01), and those who did not perceive these policies as genuine and had senior leaders who demonstrated low levels of empathy (M = 5.31, LLCI = 5.10, ULCI = 5.52). A chi-square analysis with a Breslow-Day test (a three-way chi-square) was conducted to show that the percentages of those experiencing high levels of Covid-19 related workplace burnout varies significantly across levels of high vs. low senior leader empathy and whether Covid-19 polices are perceived as genuine. The odds ratios differed significantly Breslow-Day χ^2 (1) = 17.59, p < .001.

40. A binary logistic regression analysis examined the impact of genuine Covid-19 policies (0 = not genuine and 1 = genuine), senior leader empathy (0 = low and 1 = high), and their interaction on self-reported general work burnout, which was dichotomized (0 = low levels of burnout 1 = high levels of burnout) for entry in the model. In validation of the Single-Item Burnout scale (Hansen & Pit, 2016), a cut-off of five or higher was determined to align with previous measures of burnout and to accurately characterize "high burnout"; thus, high burnout was characterized as five or higher in the current data. The overall model was significant, nagelkerke R² = .02, χ^2 (3) = 53.09, p < .001. When employees have genuine Covid-19 policies and their senior leaders demonstrate high levels of empathy, the probability of having high levels of general work burnout decreases by 30% (Wald (df = 1, N = 6975) = 7.73, OR = .70, p <. 01) compared to employees without genuine Covid-19 policies and whose leaders have low levels of empathy.

41. A binary logistic regression analysis examined the impact of genuine Covid-19 policies (0 = not genuine and 1 = genuine), senior leader empathy (0 = low and 1 = high), and their interaction on self-reported Covid-19 related work burnout, which was dichotomized (0 = low levels of burnout 1 = high levels of burnout) for entry in the model. The overall model was significant, nagelkerke R² = .01, χ^2 (3) = 38.17, p < .001. When employees have genuine Covid-19 policies and their senior leaders demonstrate high levels of empathy, the probability of having high levels of Covid-19 related work burnout decreases by 29% (Wald (df = 1, N = 6975) = 7.22, OR = .71, p <. 01) compared to employees without genuine Covid-19 policies and whose leaders have low levels of empathy.

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44. Van Bommel, T. (2021b).

45. Mediation analysis was conducted to examine if genuine racial equity policies mediated the relationship between senior leader empathy and experiences of inclusion, for employees of color specifically. Because the mediator (genuine racial equity policies: yes, no) is categorical and other methods can neither accommodate categorical mediators (e.g., Hayes PROCESS macro), nor provide a test of the indirect effect when paths a and b are *not* independent (e.g., a Sobel test), we tested our mediation model using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) via the lavaan package in R, which can both accommodate categorical mediators and provide a test of the indirect effect. The total effect of senior leader empathy on inclusion was significant ($b = .322$, $SE = .014$, $p < .001$), and the direct effect was also significant ($b = .298$, $SE = .014$, $p <.001$), indicating partial mediation. The indirect effect of senior leader empathy through genuine racial equity policies and increased experiences of inclusion was also significant ($b = .024$, SE = .007, $p < .001$, LLCI = .011, ULCI = .037).

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48. Mediation analysis was conducted to examine if genuine racial equity policies mediated the relationship between senior leader empathy and feeling that your life circumstances are respected and valued by your company. Again, we tested our mediation model with SEM via the lavaan package in R. The total effect of senior leader empathy on feeling respected and valued was significant ($b = .437$, $SE = .019$, $p < .001$), and the direct effect was also significant ($b = .401$, $SE = .019$, $p < .001$), indicating partial mediation. The indirect effect of senior leader empathy through genuine racial equity policies predicting increased experiences of feeling respected and valued was also significant ($b = .036$, $SE = .008$, $p < .019$, LLCI = .019, ULCI = .052). The analysis only included women from our global sample.

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