Enhancing Employee Belonging
A new operating system for today’s human-centered businesses

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Introduction
My Capstone presents a new, actionable definition of belonging as a process to be embedded into the operations of companies in pursuit of high growth and societal change. Corporate America, tech companies in particular, need to establish a clear definition and practice of employee belonging in order to scale sustainably and ethically.

Methods

PART I: LITERATURE REVIEW
Theories analogous to belonging throughout history:
- Bhabha, Homi K. The Location of Culture. Routledge, 1994

PART II: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS
Employees at tech companies, from entry to executive level:
- Two (2) Entry level (No direct reports)
- Two (2) Mid-level (Leads a team, has direct reports)
- Four (4) Executive level (Leads a business vertical, has direct reports, might oversee multiple teams)

What is Belonging?
Belonging is an ongoing process in which leaders and employees co-create workplace solutions rooted in care.

PLANTING THE SEEDS OF BELONGING

JUSTICE: We must bring people's lived experiences into the conversation to accurately take into account the demands of justice and the systemic biases that hinder us.

ETHICS OF CARE: People have a relational responsibility to care for one another. This requires everyone to develop a voice that joins self with relationship and emotion with reason.

CULTURAL HYBRIDITY: Cultural production takes place in the "split-space" between cultures. Cultural differences can produce conformity and oppression or collaboration and membership.

EMBODIED WORK: A real person fills every job role, with a unique identity and set of physical and emotional needs and strengths. Organizations are rich, fertile ground to nurture every employee.

A HEURISTIC OF BELONGING

1. Belonging as ownership
   - Exploitative leadership that commodifies and marginalizes employees

2. Belonging as membership
   - Ongoing process in which leaders and employees co-create workplace solutions rooted in care

3. Belonging as ownership
   - Dogmatic leadership that forces conformity and homogeneity among employees

NURTURING INDIVIDUAL VOICES (INTERVIEWEE TAKEAWAYS)

- Siloing DEI and belonging work to a single team is a massive set up for failure; it has to be collaborative and integrated
- Leadership means modeling humanity, honesty, and vulnerability to create conditions of belonging for all employees
- Anyone can exhibit these leadership qualities, even entry level employees
- Executive leadership may empower and train proxies to facilitate or mediate a process of belonging among teams
- To say “employees are diverse” is an understatement; marginalization breeds a complex range of mindsets and behaviors, from incredible social intuition to severe self-defense
- The emotional labor of care ought to be equally distributed, instead of burdening the minority members of an organization who perhaps do this work as a matter of survival