

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 take 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:

- Sen, Amartya. The Idea of Justice. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011.
- Bhabha, Homi K. The Location of Culture. Routledge, 1994
- Gilligan, Carol. In a Different Voice. Harvard University Press, 1982.
- Acker, Joan. “Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations.” *Gender and Society*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (June 1990), pp. 139-158.

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

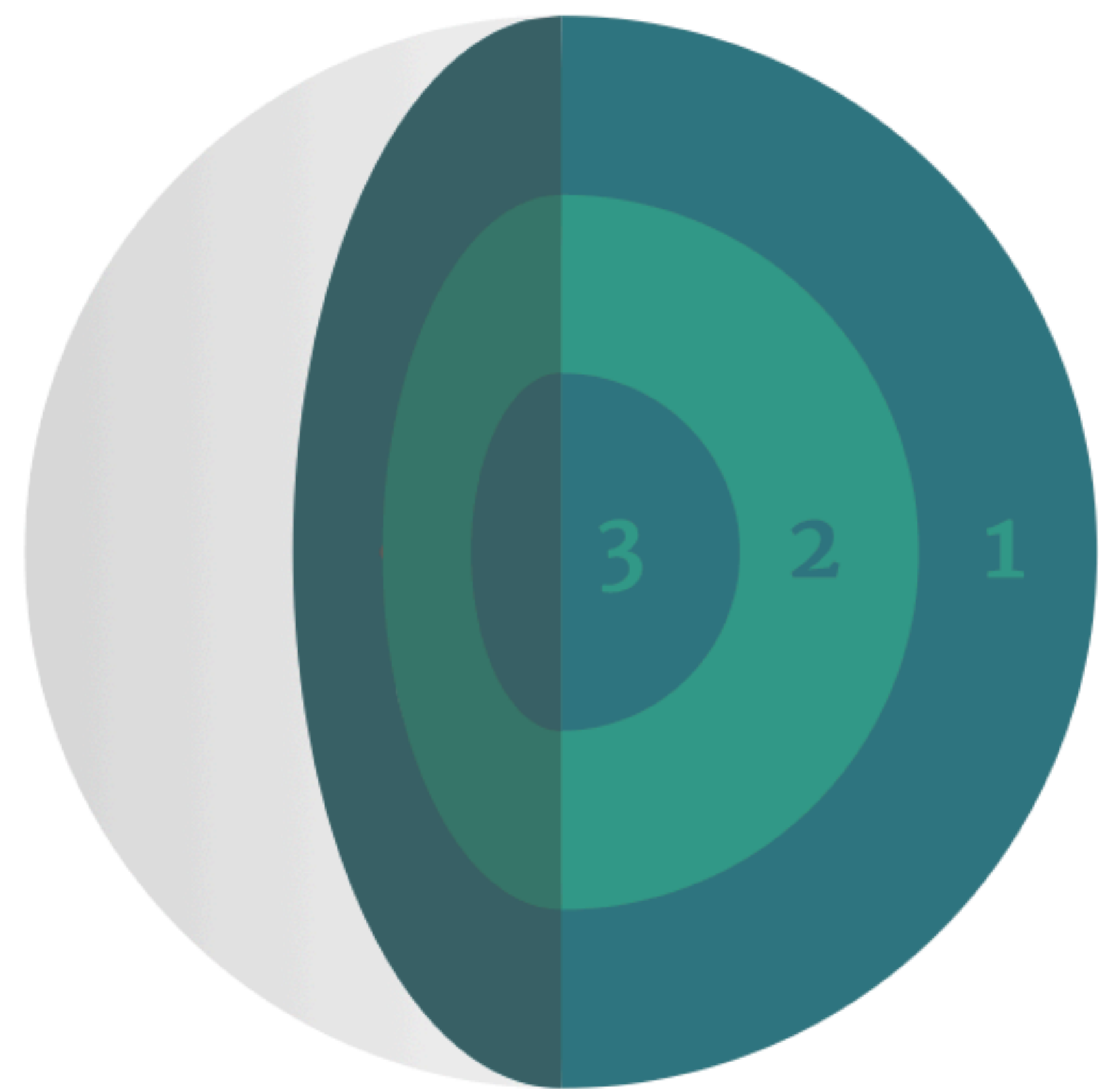
JUSTICE: We must bring people’s lived experiences into the conversation to accurately take into account the demands of justice and the systemic biases that hinder us.

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