

THE WHAT IF EXPERIMENT

BELONGING

AND

INCLUSION

AT

WORK

WHAT IT ACTUALLY TAKES

WELCOME

You're here because you want to make the best work possible. You know that no one should come to work feeling excluded, overlooked, or unsafe. You also know that creating that environment isn't always straightforward.

With limited time, stretched resources, and competing priorities, belonging can feel like something you'll get to later. But the reality is that belonging shapes everything — from how people communicate and collaborate, to how decisions are made and whose ideas get heard.

Maybe you've read the screen industry guidance on **bullying, harassment and discrimination** that we developed with WorkWise. Maybe you're leading a production, a department, or an organisation and looking for practical ways to build a stronger culture. Or maybe you've already started the work and want reassurance that you're focusing on the right things.

**| EITHER WAY, YOU'RE IN
THE RIGHT PLACE.**

At The What If Experiment, we help leaders and teams build belonging into the way they operate. Belonging isn't separate from performance; it's what makes high performance possible.

When people can show up as themselves, navigate difference with care, and trust that their voices matter, teams become more creative, more accountable, and more innovative. They make better decisions, solve harder problems, and produce better work.

That's why we see belonging not as a wellbeing initiative, but as an essential ingredient of high-performing teams.

THE BUSINESS CASE FOR BELONGING

The evidence is clear. Prioritising belonging isn't a values exercise - it's a performance strategy.

56%

increase in job performance

BETTERUP

6*

more likely to be innovative

DELOITTE

4.2*

more likely to outperform on profit

MCKINSEY

Deloitte found that organisations with inclusive cultures are also twice as likely to meet or exceed financial targets, and eight times more likely to achieve better business outcomes. McKinsey's research shows that a lack of belonging is one of the top three reasons people quit – cited by 51% of employees who left post-pandemic.

Psychological safety – the belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns or mistakes – is a fundamental component to experiencing belonging at work.

When psychological safety is high, only 3% of employees plan to quit, compared to 12% when it is low.

BCG, 2023

THE OPPOSITE OF BELONGING IS 'FITTING IN'

Most workplaces weren't designed for belonging. People were invited in and then expected to 'fit in' to be accepted.

In practice, that can look like:

HOLDING BACK

your best ideas in case they get shut down.

STAYING QUIET

instead of asking questions, in case it makes you look incompetent.

WATCHING

bad behaviour happen and saying nothing because it's not safe to speak.

NOT ASKING FOR HELP

in case it makes you look weak.

NOT RAISING CONCERNS

because you already know you might not be believed.

AGREEING

because being the odd one out feels like a risk you can't afford.

Imagine what that does to someone's confidence.

Then their work. Then your culture. Then your business.

This is why belonging isn't a 'nice to have'. It's essential for building a culture where people do their best work, support each other to grow and turn their differences into strengths.

WHAT WE'RE WORKING TOWARD

The Belonging Architecture is a What If Experiment methodology that is observable, teachable and measurable:

LAYER 1

The Foundation

psychological safety & trust

power & accountability

equity, inclusion & imagining

LAYER 2

Leadership Qualities

growth & curiosity

resilience & emotional regulation

empathy & compassion

empowerment & generosity

integrity & intentionality

courage & vulnerability

LAYER 3

The Five Cultures

care

collaboration

abundance

empowerment

accountability

WHEN EVERYONE FEELS LIKE THEY BELONG:

BELIEVED

SAFE

TRUSTED

SEEN

RESOURCED

CONNECTED

DIGNITY

AGENCY

LEGITIMACY

SECURE

VALUED

ALIGNED

GETTING STARTED

Belonging isn't built overnight, and it isn't built by accident.

We work alongside teams and organisations to design tailored interventions that start small and build from wherever they are. Sometimes that work takes days. Sometimes it takes years.

We've built this toolkit to offer a practical place to start — with or without a big budget.

Here's where to begin.



STEP 1 - AUDIT

Find out what's really happening. Belonging isn't what's written in your values - it's what gets rewarded, and what gets quietly punished.



STEP 2 - DEFINE

Get clear on what you mean. Shared language turns values into everyday behaviour - through codes of conduct, working agreements, and a common understanding of intention vs impact.



STEP 3 - HOLD ACCOUNTABLE

Build the muscle to act on it. When something doesn't match what you've defined, what happens next? This is where lasting change actually gets built.

01 AUDIT YOUR CULTURE

Five questions we ask every team we work with:

- 1 What behaviours are rewarded? What behaviours are punished?

- 2 What gets prioritised over everything else?

- 3 When did you last give feedback to help someone grow?

- 4 What are the unwritten rules? What are the things everyone 'just knows' but aren't written down?

- 5 Who's in the room when decisions are made? And whose voice carries weight even when they aren't there?

To protect psychological safety, we always offer multiple ways for people to contribute e.g. an anonymous online survey tool, or blank postcards with a physical box that people can add to across the day.

These questions are just a starting point. We run full culture audits using our Belonging Architecture survey to surface what's really happening, and design bespoke interventions based on what we find.

02 DEFINE BEHAVIOURS

Example from a behavioural framework developed with a film production team.

2. RESPECT PEOPLE'S IDENTITIES

NAMES, PRONOUNS & LANGUAGE

Use people's correct names and pronunciations — ask and learn it. Use correct pronouns. If unsure, ask respectfully and then use them going forward. Do not shorten names for your convenience.

APPEARANCE, HAIR, SKIN & CLOTHING

Do not comment on or touch Black or Global Majority hair (including protective styles, wigs, locs, braids). Do not alter, lighten, mattify or 'correct' a performer's skin tone through makeup, lighting, or grading without explicit consent. Do not default to white skin when lighting, exposing or colour referencing — all skin tones must be lit correctly.

AVOID STEREOTYPES, TROPES & RACIALISED 'BANTER'

Avoid jokes, impressions, stereotypes, or assumptions based on race, culture, accent, or appearance. If the impact could be harmful, take accountability — not defensiveness.

The value isn't in the words - it's in the process: how it's built with your team, introduced, and enforced when something goes wrong. We design that process and create behavioural frameworks that make sense to the people using them.

03 HOLD ACCOUNTABLE

BUILD THE MUSCLE TO ACT ON IT

Auditing and defining get you ready. Accountability is where it becomes real.

Most people don't stay silent because they don't care. They stay silent because they haven't rehearsed. They don't know what to say, they're not sure they'll be believed, or they're worried about making it worse.

BUILD A PROCESS FOR WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

Before something happens, decide what happens next. A clear process removes the guesswork in the moment and signals to your team that concerns will be taken seriously.

YOUR PROCESS SHOULD ANSWER

Who do people go to when something goes wrong?

What if the concern is about that person?

Can concerns be raised anonymously?

What happens after a concern is raised — and how will the person who raised it be kept informed?

Map this as a simple flowchart and share it with your whole team before you need it. For detailed guidance on what to include, the **WorkWise for Screen guide on bullying, harassment and discrimination** is an excellent place to start. The **CISSA Standards** are also worth reading alongside it.

03 HOLD ACCOUNTABLE

DEVELOP THE LANGUAGE FOR THE MOMENT

The gap between knowing something is wrong and saying something is almost always a language problem. These phrases won't fit every situation, but they give you somewhere to start. Practise saying them out loud with an accountability partner so when the moment comes, you'll be ready.

CALLING OUT

When harm needs to be stopped in the moment.

“I think we should pause [and unpack your comment]”

“Hold on, can we just go back and discuss that a sec”

“I need you to know how your comment just landed with me”

CALLING IN

When you want to invest in someone's growth.

“What was your intention when you said/ did that? What do you think the impact was?”

“I'm sure you didn't realise, but the way you spoke about ___ to ___ just now, might be perceived as... / might not be the most appropriate way...”

CALLING ON

When you want to remind someone of who you know them to be.

“Knowing you as I do, I'm surprised by your comment just then, did you notice how other people reacted to it?”

“I appreciate your honesty but I found some of the things you said insensitive. I know you don't mean to cause harm, so could we talk about what you've just said?”

INTENT DOESN'T CANCEL IMPACT

When we're held accountable, the instinct is often to defend ourselves. *I didn't mean it like that. You misunderstood me. You're being too sensitive.* But all of that shifts the focus away from the person who was harmed.

Intent matters. And impact matters more.

Accountability isn't about blame - it's about reflecting on our actions, and choosing to show up differently next time.

BELONGING ISN'T A GIVEN. IT'S INTENTIONALLY BUILT.

This is a starting point, not a destination.

Belonging is built in the room — in the conversations people avoid, the feedback that never gets given, and the moments that quietly define culture.

Our approach has been shaped by more than a decade of organisational and culture change work across the creative and cultural sectors. We've trained over **800 leaders** in our methodology, developed frameworks, training and strategies for organisations including **Film and TV Charity, Somerset House, StudioCanal, Warner Bros. CrewHQ, WorkWise for Screen**, and independent film, theatre and visual art companies. We've also built sustained multi-year partnerships with the **Young Vic, Royal Court Theatre** and the **British Film Institute**.

**IF YOU'RE READY TO MOVE FROM
INTENTION TO ACTION, WE'RE READY
TO GO WITH YOU.**

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When we dare to ask what if... we begin to build the futures we all deserve.