The Role of Worker Voices in Advancing DEI Efforts and Improving Employment Experiences for Workers of Color

Carl Van Horn, PhD[1]; Laurie Harrington, MPAP[1]; Ronald Quincy, PhD[1], Jessica Starace, MPP[1], Anton House, PhD[2]

[1]Heldrich Center for Workforce Development, Rutgers University, [2]Delaware State University

RUTGERS–NEW BRUNSWICK
Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy

HELDRICH CENTER FOR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Research Plan

Selected Research Questions

1. What are **workers' perceptions of racial and ethnic discrimination** in the workplace?

2. How do **workers perceive** diversity vs. equity vs. inclusion?

3. What are **employer responses** to workplace discrimination?

4. What are workers' perceptions of the **value of various diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives** in their workplace?

5. Are there **promising diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies**, according to the respondents, that government, business, labor, and philanthropies should further evaluate?

Research Approach

• Funded by **WorkRise** at the Urban Institute.

• 915 Black, 802 Hispanic, 605 Asian American, and 955 white workers interviewed using **NORC at the University of Chicago's** AmeriSpeak survey panel.

• Survey includes **open-ended questions** asking about workplace discrimination experiences, reporting discrimination, and how race/ethnicity has made succeeding at work harder or easier.

• **Individual, semi-structured interviews** conducted of workers who participated in the pilot or main surveys and said racial/ethnic discrimination was a major problem in their workplaces.

Methodological Approach

Method	Sample
15-minute pilot survey	323 U.S. workers age 18+ employed full or part time
Qualitative individual interviews	18 U.S. workers via Zoom; varied demographics and work situations
20-minute main survey	3,277 U.S. workers age 18+ employed full or part time
Qualitative individual interviews	20 U.S. workers via Zoom; varied demographics and work situations

Worker Voices are Important in Social Science Research

Workers can communicate nuance, context, perspective, tone, depth, and creativity.

Responses can inform the design of the survey questionnaire.

Responses can help screen for interview selection.

Workers have the opportunity to describe experiences, situations, or relationships that closed-ended survey questions may not capture.

Worker Voices can Help Researchers Understand…

• **What survey questions couldn't measure:**
  • the **relationship between discrimination and mobility**: how discrimination experiences in previous jobs affected workers' job searches and experiences in future jobs.
• **How survey questions were perceived:**
  • how workers distinguish **discrimination versus "unfair treatment."**
• **New, innovative ideas or concepts:**
  • the **discrimination and inclusion experiences of frontline employees,** or of those in a specific department, despite reporting that their organizations had clear and consistent policies.
  • **measuring workplace culture, tied to goals**, for workers and managers.
  • **linking employee surveys/check-ins with workplace training design.**

Worker Voices in Current Heldrich Center Projects

Stakeholders – **policymakers, business leaders, labor unions, advocates** – value the voices of workers, particularly disadvantaged and vulnerable workers who face barriers to economic mobility.

Researchers will **use open-end survey questions in 2024** to understand the labor market experiences **of certified home health aides and childcare workers** in New Jersey to improve retention, satisfaction, and support of these workers, including:

• What **motivates these workers to pursue** these careers, and what **motivates them to stay in or leave** the field.
• Which **job attributes are the most satisfying and most difficult.**
• How **the career pathway manifests** for workers in each field.
• How much **confidence (self-efficacy)** these workers have in their ability to do their jobs, and what mechanisms can support them.

What Helps Reduce Discrimination/Advance DEI at Work?

Policy, Program, Practice	Idea or Concept	Workers Say…
Mandatory training vs. optional training	Electronic trainings are convenient, but not effective. Will optional training reach the managers or workers who need it most?	"…talk about real examples of things and check in on stuff like that, regularly, to say like, Okay, so where are we having issues with this? Where are we?...What are the specific things that are happening that we need to change to make this happen?"
Chief DEI officer vs. task forces	What fits the company/organization best?	"Task forces have people from different departments and have different viewpoints. It's like a jury on a trial. There's not like one person saying it. There's a higher chance of discussion about problems, higher chance that someone may have heard about it or something happened to them, or a friend has talked to you or a colleague to you. A task force would be more objective than just one person."
Corporate policies	Most workers responded affirmatively – saying these policies were essential. Others wondered how effective they could be, how they are implemented, measured, and enforced?	"The thinking is that diversity is probably easy to achieve. It's just to have a diversity. Different people. But then equity is harder to achieve so then, to prioritize that, and to be clear that point. That is put first."
Reporting pathways	Why not Human Resources? What does a robust reporting pathway look like?	"If something were to come up and you could call a corporate number to say this happened to me, I don't know how helpful that would be to reduce the problem if it already happened to me."
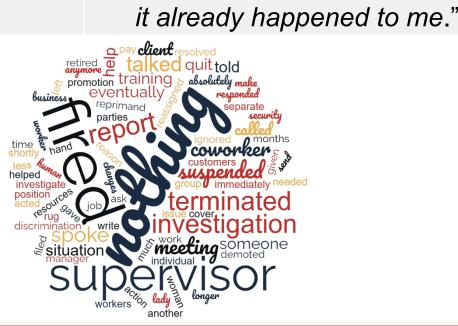
Figure 1. In an open-end survey question, workers described what happened after they reported an incident of unfair treatment/discrimination at work

Contact

Laurie Harrington, MPAP
Acting Executive Director and Senior Researcher
Heldrich Center for Workforce Development, Rutgers University
Email: lharrington@ejb.rutgers.edu
Website: www.heldrich.rutgers.edu

A Workplace Divided Project Page

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