



# The National Study of Workplace Equity

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**BOSTON COLLEGE**  
School of Social Work

WORK EQUITY



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## Section I: Introduction

### The National Study of Workplace Equity

Over the past few years, organizations and employees alike have turned their attention toward addressing the social inequities in the workplace made starkly visible by the pandemic. While much progress has been made in this space, this increased attention has also led to an expanded recognition that diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs can stall, fail, or even backfire if not implemented thoughtfully. Too often, when implementing DEI programs, organizations place more emphasis on diversity and inclusion than on equity despite the fact that the majority of U.S. workers (88%) believe fairness is extremely important or very important in the workplace.<sup>i</sup> What's more, equity often serves as the foundation for successful DEI strategy, improving employees' job satisfaction, work engagement, perceptions of inclusion as well as the retention of diverse talent.<sup>ii</sup> In this context, there is new urgency for innovative perspectives that bring equity front and center in U.S. workplaces.

"In today's evolving world of work, fair policies and practices together with strong and deliberate DE&I strategies are integral to breaking the barriers of bias and inequity that can be present in the workplace," said SHRM Chief Knowledge Officer Alex Alonso, Ph.D., SHRM-SCP. "We must continue to address the root causes of bias, whether it be gender, age, race, sexual orientation or disability, while building greater equity to lead workplaces into a better tomorrow."

In an effort to reframe fundamental perspectives of DEI, Work Equity, an initiative of the Center for Social Innovation at the Boston College School of Social Work, partnered with SHRM, the largest global membership organization of HR practitioners, to conduct the National Study of Workplace Equity. One of the first of its kind, the study aimed to understand the state of equity in U.S. workplaces using a nationally representative sample of 1,062 workplaces in the United States. Rather than conceptualizing the level of equity as being constant across the workplace, this study recognizes that equity can vary across employment systems. As such, this study takes a more targeted approach to DEI by focusing on the root causes of inequities in the workplace – and explores where these inequities are most likely to be embedded

across 10 different employment systems: (1) job structures, (2) recruitment and hiring, (3) compensation and benefits, (4) orientation and onboarding, (5) supervision and mentoring, (6) training and career development, (7) performance assessment and feedback, (8) employee resources and supports, (9) promotion, and (10) separation. (See Figure 1.)

By addressing inequities within and across employment systems, organizations can identify where most inequities occur and identify the action steps needed to rectify these inequities on an employment system-by-system basis. This has been a challenge for decades, as organizations have struggled to translate research findings into actionable steps to strengthen equity. To aid in this effort, this study also identified seven pathways to change (or "Levers for Change") that employers might pursue to strengthen each of the employment systems: policies, practices, planning and evaluation, roles and accountabilities, culture, climate, and communication. (See Figure 1.)

Through recognizing and identifying the breadth and depth of inequities in the workplace, the National Study of Workplace Equity provides organizations with a framework and detailed roadmap to address inequities and help their workplaces thrive.

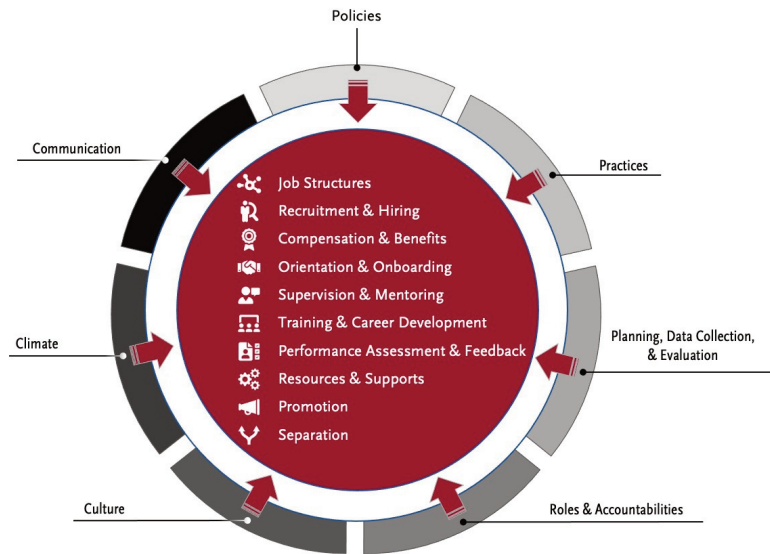
## Section II: Overall Equity at the Workplace

Leading experts – including practitioners and academics, as well as policy makers – have adopted a number of different definitions for equity at the workplace.

We consider "equity at the workplace" to refer to the fairness of organizational systems and the absence of systematic and persistent disparities in the opportunities and resources available to employees, regardless of their demographic and social identities.<sup>iii</sup>

While it is possible to identify a range of different types of organizational systems at the workplace (for example, operational systems such as advertising and marketing), Work Equity focuses on the formal and

Figure 1: 7 Levers for Change and 10 Employment Systems



informal employment systems at workplaces, including: job structures, recruitment and hiring, compensation and benefits, orientation and onboarding, supervision and mentoring, training and career development, employee performance assessment and feedback, employee resources and supports, promotion, and separation.

In this section of the report, we first present summary statistics about each of the 10 employment systems. Using the Equity of Employment Systems Index, we then identify characteristics of organizations and their workforces that are related to variation in the overall Equity of Employment Systems at U.S. workplaces.

### Selected Findings

The findings of the National Study of Workplace Equity indicate that the three employment systems with the **most** equity are:

1. Recruitment and Hiring System (mean score 3.03 on 4-point scale)
2. Compensation and Benefits System (mean score 3.02 on 4-point scale)
3. Orientation and Onboarding System (mean score 3.00 on 4-point scale)

The three employment systems with the **least** reported equity are:

8. Supervision and Mentoring System (mean

score 2.59 on a 4-point scale

9. Job Structures System (mean score 2.55 on a 4-point scale)
10. Resources and Supports System (mean score 2.46 on a 4-point scale)

Figure 2 presents information about the average scores of the 10 employment systems.

Combining the scores across all 10 employment systems, we created the Employment Systems Equity Index.

- Our analyses found an important relationship between the overall **equity** in organizations' employment systems and organizational **resilience**; that is, organizations with higher equity indicators also reported that, during the past two years, they have been able to make changes and even innovate in response to changes in the business/organizational environment, and they have remained agile and expect their organization to thrive in the future.

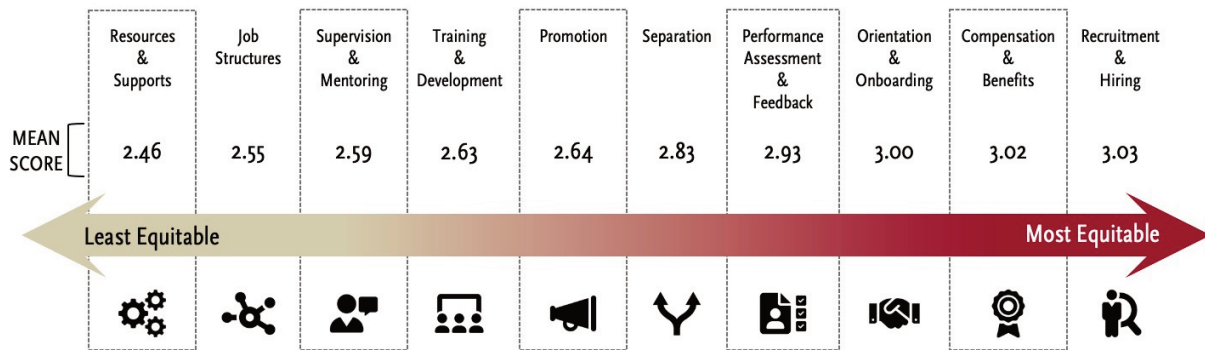
### What organizational factors influence the equity of employment systems?

Data from the National Study of Workplace Equity indicate that the equity of employment systems is stronger among:

- organizations with 50-499 employees and organizations with 500+ employees compared to small

Figure 2: Equity Scores Across the 10 Employment Systems

n = 1,062  
mean scores



organizations with *fewer* than 50 employees,

- organizations with *higher* percentages of women employees,
- organizations with *higher* percentages of employees of color,
- organizations with *fewer* organizational pressures experienced over the past two years and,
- organizations with *less* employee stress experienced over the past two years.

the **fairness and extent of employees’ access** to job structures options, and 2) the **equity of the system** related to employees’ request and use of different job

The term “job structures” refers to: “when” people work, “where” they work, expectations for “how much” they work, and the extent to which they have some “choice” over when/where/how much they work. It also refers to the ways jobs are “classified”, such as part-time/full-time, exempt/non-exempt, employee/contractor, and permanent/temporary employees.<sup>iv</sup>

### Section III: The Equity of the Job Structures System of Employment

#### Defining Job Structures as a System of Employment

The term “job structures” refers to the scaffolding of a job. Employers may specify the structure of jobs when: 1) new positions are crafted and advertised, and 2) jobs are redesigned. It is, therefore, possible to recognize the design of job structures as the primary employment system which can shape the contours of the equity of all of the other employment systems.

Employers have adopted a range of different job structures to enhance job effectiveness and efficiency. In some situations, job structure options might also reflect employees’ work-life balance priorities and needs. The equity perspective of the Job Structures System focuses on two elements of job structures: 1)

structures (including informal systems that might act as either barriers or facilitators to employees’ utilization of different types of job structures). One of the challenges often associated with the administration of different job structure options is that employee access is often dependent on supervisor approval. This can constrain the equity of employees’ ability to use flexible job structures, even if they technically have access to these options.”

#### Why does the equity of job structures matter?

There is extensive documentation of the benefits associated with employee access to and utilization of different types of job structures. For example, some studies have shown that access/use can enhance employee well-being (e.g., reduced stress, reduced burnout), and can increase job commitment as well as work engagement.<sup>vi</sup>

## The Extent of Employee Access to Flexible Job Structures

The survey used for the National Study of Workplace Equity asked respondents nine questions about the extent of employee access to specific types of job structures. As indicated by the data presented in Figure 3, the flexible job structures available to the highest percentage of employees at the greatest number of workplaces were:

- 44.2% of organizations reported that 50% or more of their employees can take a **leave/extended career break for caregiving**,
- 38.5% of organizations reported that 50% or more of their employees can take **paid/unpaid time away from work for education and training**, and
- 36.6% of organizations reported that 50% or more of their employees have **choice whether to take paid/unpaid work overtime**.

## What organizational factors influence employee access to flexible job structures?

We aggregated the organizations' responses to

employee access to flexible job structures, creating an Extent of Employee Access to Flexible Job Structures Index. The mean scores could range from 1 to 4, with an average (mean) score of 2.43 for all the respondents.

Using the Access to Flexible Job Structures Index, our analyses found that the extent of employee access to flexible job structures was associated with industry sector.

- Compared to health care organizations (the reference group), organizations in agriculture; construction; government, public administration, or the military; manufacturing; transportation or warehousing; and utilities or energy were all more likely to have *lower* scores on the Extent of Employee Access to Flexible Job Structures Index.

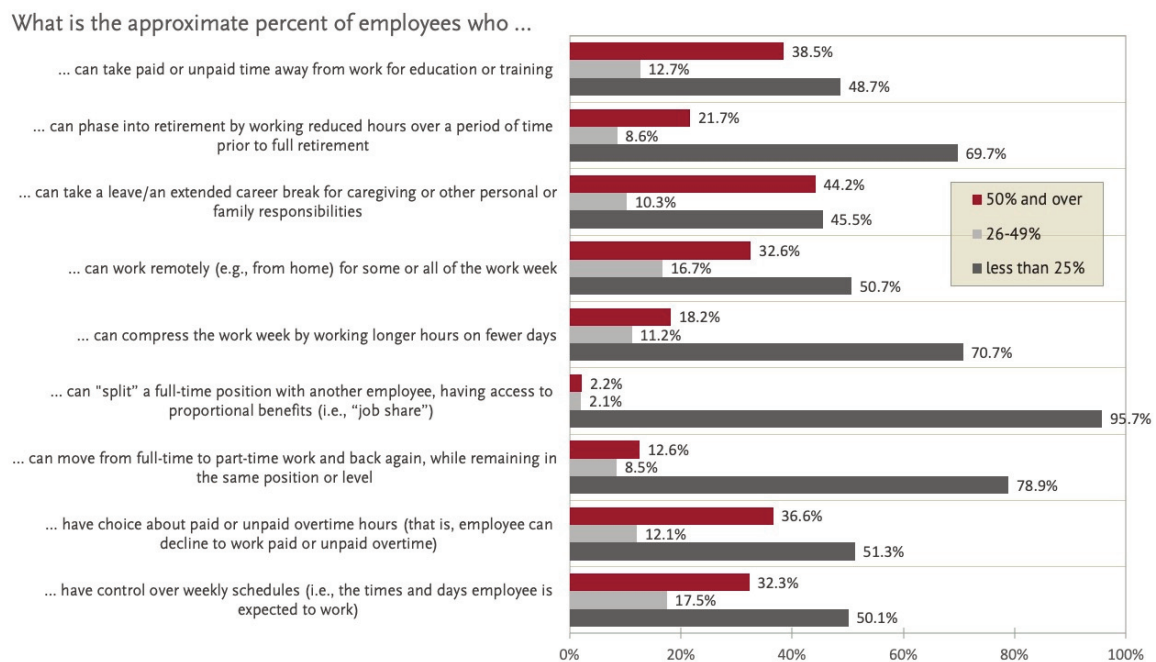
## The Equity of the Job Structures Employment System

The survey asked respondents to assess the equity of the components of the Job Structures System of employment (that is, nine items assessing the equity of the 7 Levers for Change: policies, practices,

Figure 3: The Extent of Employee Access to Flexible Job Structures

n = 1,062

% respondent organizations



planning and evaluation, roles and accountabilities, culture, climate, and communication).

As indicated by Figure 4, respondents were most likely to report that the strongest equity components in their organizations' Job Structures System were:

- encouraging employees to discuss work overload with their supervisors (40.6% reported "to a great extent"), and
- providing advice and technical support to employees who work remotely or work non-traditional hours (35.8% reported to "a great extent").

### What organizational factors influence the equity of the Job Structures System?

We aggregated the organizations' responses to items measuring the equity of their Job Structures System, creating the Equity of Job Structures System Index. The mean scores could range from 1 to 4, with an average (mean) score of 2.55 which is the second lowest mean score among the 10 employment systems.

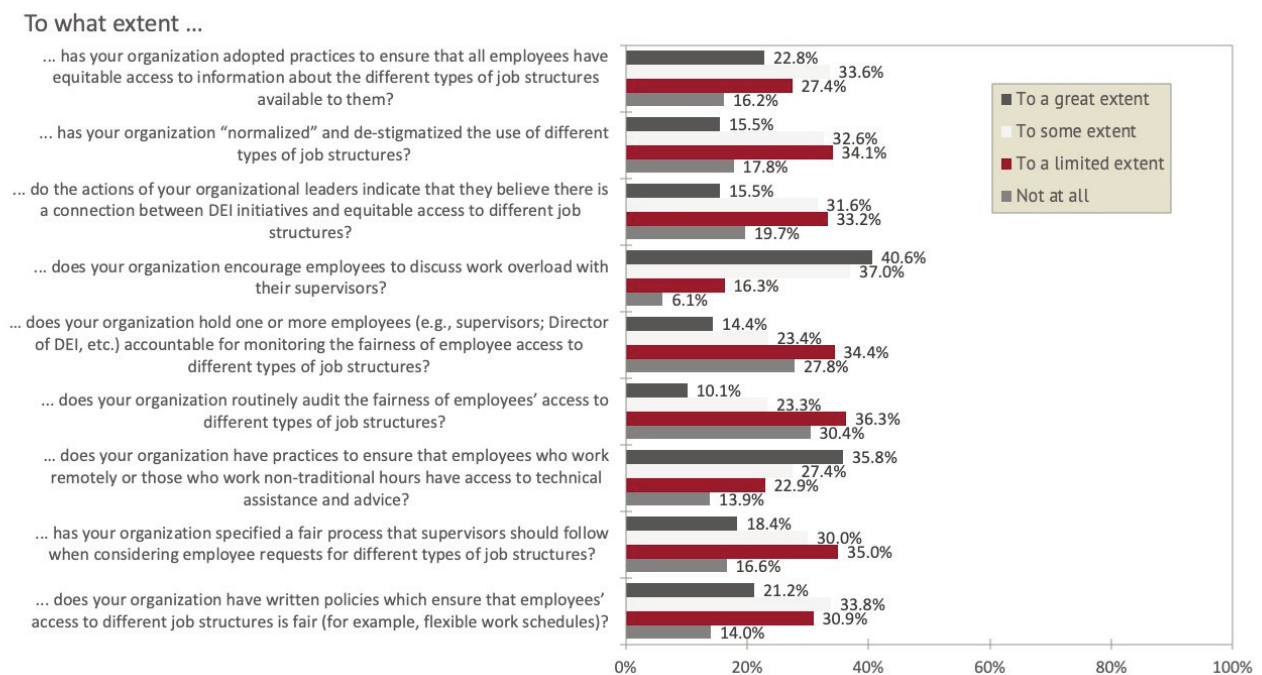
Using the Equity of Job Structures System Index, our analyses found that the equity of the Job Structures System was associated with industry sector and the extent of stress experienced by employees during the previous two years.

- Compared to healthcare organizations (the reference group), organizations in agriculture; construction; government, public administration, or military; manufacturing; transportation or warehousing; and utilities or energy were more likely to have *lower* scores on the Equity of Job Structures System Index.
- Organizations reporting more employee stressors were more likely to have *lower* scores on the Equity of Job Structures System Index.
- Importantly, organizations with more employee access to flexible job structures also had more equitable Job Structures Systems, suggesting that employers might want to consider how strengthening access to flexible job structures might impact the equity of the Job Structures System (and vice versa).

Figure 4: The Equity of the Job Structures Employment System

n = 1,062

% respondent organizations





## Section IV: The Equity of the Recruitment and Hiring System of Employment

### Defining Recruitment and Hiring as a System of Employment

Recruitment and hiring activities set many of the parameters of the relationships established between the organization and job applicants (that is, potential employees) as well as employees. Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which "... prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, and national origin",<sup>vii</sup> recognizes the fairness of recruitment and hiring as a fundamental right.

Recruitment and hiring refers to both formal and informal practices related to: disseminating job announcements, screening of applications, selecting applicants for interviews, and making job offers.

### Why does the equity of recruitment and hiring matter?

Some studies have found that employee diversity can be associated with positive outcomes such as increased team creativity and innovation. Employers have also linked the equity of recruitment and hiring to different strategic objectives, such as expanded markets that include diverse clients and customers.<sup>viii</sup>

Many organizations have adopted metrics to assess the equity of their Recruitment and Hiring System. For example, some compare the percent of applicants/percent of hires affiliated with specific social identity/demographic groups (for example, women) either to the demographics of local population statistics or to the demographics of occupational groups relevant to open positions. Other organizations mark progress that they have made with recruitment and hiring as indicated by increases in the percentage of population groups that might be under-represented in the organization's workforce.

### The Equity of the Recruitment and Hiring System

The survey included nine questions about the equity of the Recruitment and Hiring System at the respondents' workplaces (that is, nine items about the equity of the 7 Levers for Change: policies, practices, planning and evaluation, roles and accountabilities,

culture, climate, and communication).

As indicated by Figure 5, respondents were most likely to report that the strongest equity components of their organizations' Recruitment and Hiring System were:

- welcoming of diverse applicants during the recruitment and hiring process (74.4% reported "to a very extent"), and
- providing applicants with equitable access to information related to their applications (56.4% reported "to a very extent").

### What organizational factors influence the equity of the Recruitment and Hiring System?

We aggregated the organizations' responses to the equity of their Recruitment and Hiring System, creating the Recruitment and Hiring System Index. The scores could range from 1 to 4, with an average (mean) score of 3.03, which is the highest equity score among the 10 employment systems.

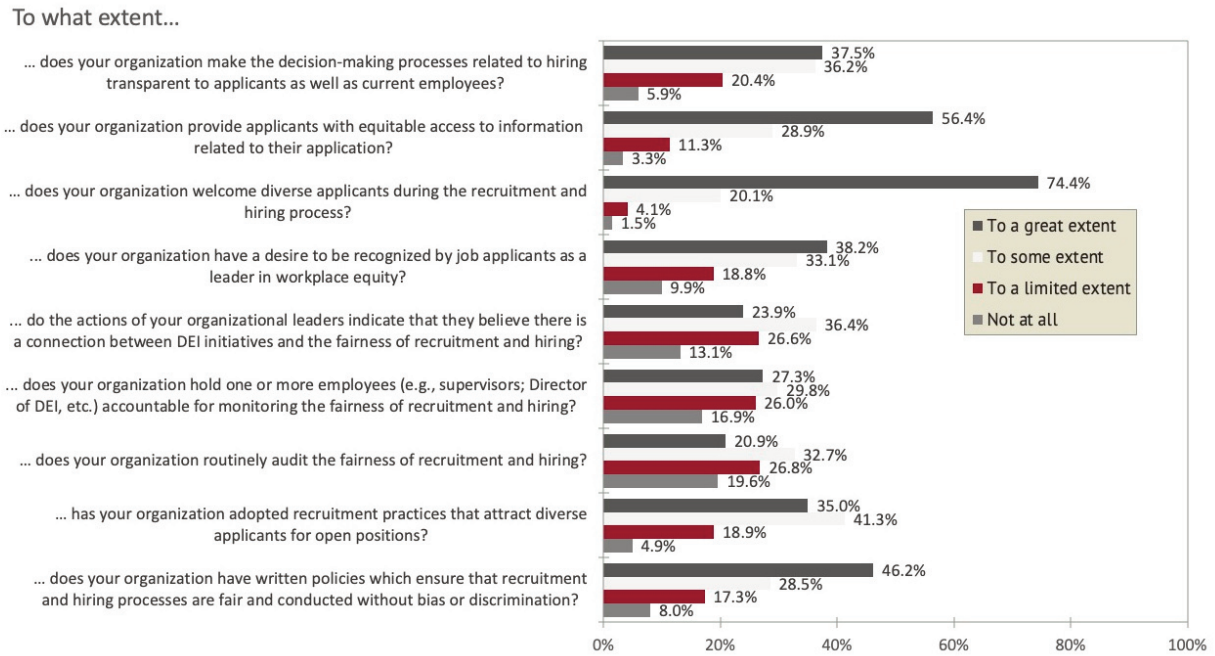
Using the Recruitment and Hiring System Index, our analyses indicate that the equity of the organizations' Recruitment and Hiring System was associated with organizational and workforce characteristics.

- Compared to organizations with 50-499 employees, organizations with *fewer* than 50 employees were more likely to have *lower* scores on the Recruitment and Hiring System Index.
- Compared to healthcare organizations (the reference group), organizations in administrative and support services; agriculture; arts, entertainment, or recreation; construction; finance, insurance, or real estate; manufacturing; and wholesale trade were more likely to have *lower* scores on the Recruitment and Hiring System Index.
- Organizations with *higher* percentages of women employees were more likely to have *higher* scores on the Recruitment and Hiring System Index.
- Organizations with *higher* percentages of employees of color were more likely to have *higher* scores on the Recruitment and Hiring System Index.
- Organizations reporting *higher* organizational pressures experienced during the prior two years were more likely to have *lower* scores on the Recruitment and Hiring System Index.

Figure 5: The Equity of the Recruitment and Hiring System

n = 1,062

% respondent organizations



- Organizations reporting *higher* employee stress during the prior two years were *more* likely to have *lower* scores on the Recruitment and Hiring System Index.

## Section V: The Equity of the Compensation and Benefits System of Employment

### Defining Compensation and Benefits as a System of Employment

Across organizations, there is significant variation in the compensation and benefits packages offered to different employees.

The equity perspective of the compensation and benefits employment system typically focuses on two elements: 1) the **fairness and extent of employee access** to benefits, and 2) the **equity of the system** related to compensation as well as employees' request and use of benefits (particularly those that require supervisor approval).

The Equal Pay Act of 1963 establishes the foundations of sex-based wage and benefits discrimination.<sup>ix</sup>

Compensation refers to all sources of employee earnings, including hourly wages, salaries, overtime, bonuses, and commissions. For the purposes of this survey, the term "benefits" refers to options that have monetary value for employees, including health insurance, dental insurance, disability insurance, and access/contributions to pensions and retirement savings accounts.

### Why does the equity of compensation and benefits matter?

Research has documented negative outcomes associated with inequities in organizations' compensation systems, such as low job satisfaction, low work engagement, and high rates of turnover. As found by SRHM Research, pay inequities can cost organizations their talent.<sup>x</sup> Among workers who found out they were being paid less than a colleague of a different gender or race, more than one in four (27 percent) started looking for a new job.<sup>xi</sup>

## The Extent of Employee Access to Selected Benefits

We asked respondents nine questions about the extent of employee access to benefits. Organizations reported that more than 50% of their workforces had access to many of the benefits included in the survey questions.

As indicated by the data presented in Figure 6, the benefits available to the highest percentage of employees at the greatest number of workplaces were:

- **health care insurance:** 93.1% of the organizations reported that **health care insurance for the employees** (themselves) was available to 50% or more of their employees, and 86.1% of the organizations reported that **health care insurance for family members** was available to 50% or more of their employees.
- **dental care insurance:** 90.0% of the organizations reported that **dental care insurance for employees** (themselves) was available to 50% or more of their employees and 85.4% of the organizations reported that **dental care insurance for family members** was available to 50% or more of their employees.

## What organizational factors influence employee access to selected benefits?

We aggregated the organizations' responses to employee access to benefits, creating an Extent of Employee Access to Benefits System Index. The scores could range from 1 to 5, with an average (mean) score of 4.08.

Our analyses found that the extent of employee access to the selected benefits was associated with organizational and workforce characteristics.

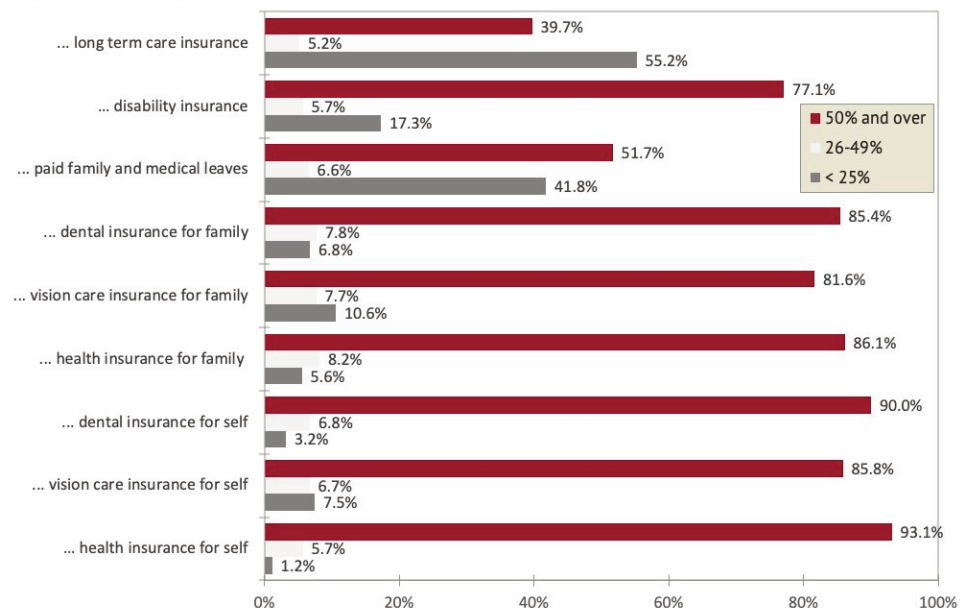
- Compared to organizations with 50-499 employees, those with fewer than 50 employees reported *lower* access to the selected benefits while those with 500 or more employees were more likely to have *higher* scores on the Extent of Employee Access to Benefits Index.
- Compared to healthcare organizations (the reference group), organizations in administration and support services; information services; construction; finance, insurance, or real estate; government, public administration, or military; professional associations and civic associations, grantmaking, and religious organizations; professional, scientific or business/technical services; and utilities or

Figure 6: The Extent of Employee Access to Selected Benefits

n = 1,062

% respondent organizations

What is the approximate percent of employees who have access to ...



energy were more likely to have *higher* scores on the Extent of Employee Access to Benefits Index. However, those in the food services were more likely to have *lower* scores on the Extent of Employee Access to Benefits Index.

- Organizations reporting *higher* organizational pressures during the past 2 years had *lower* scores on the Extent of Employee Access to Benefits Index.
- Organizations reporting *higher* employee stress during the past two years were more likely to have *lower* scores on the Extent of Employee Access to Benefits Index.

### The Equity of the Compensation and Benefits Employment System

The survey also asked respondents to assess the equity of the components of the system of compensation and benefits (that is, eight items assessing the equity of the 7 Levers for Change: policies, practices, planning and evaluation, roles and accountabilities, culture, climate, and communication).

As indicated by Figure 7, respondents were most likely to report that the strongest equity components of their

organizations' Compensation and Benefits System were:

- having practices to ensure fair access to benefits (76.8% indicated "to a great extent"), and
- offering a range of benefits to meet the needs of a diverse workforce (51.4% reported "to a great extent").

### What organizational factors influence the equity of the Compensation and Benefits System?

We aggregated the organizations' responses to items measuring the equity of their organizations' Compensation and Benefits System, creating the Equity of Compensation and Benefits System Index. The scores could range from 1 to 4, with an average (mean) score of 3.02, which is the second highest equity score among the 10 employment systems.

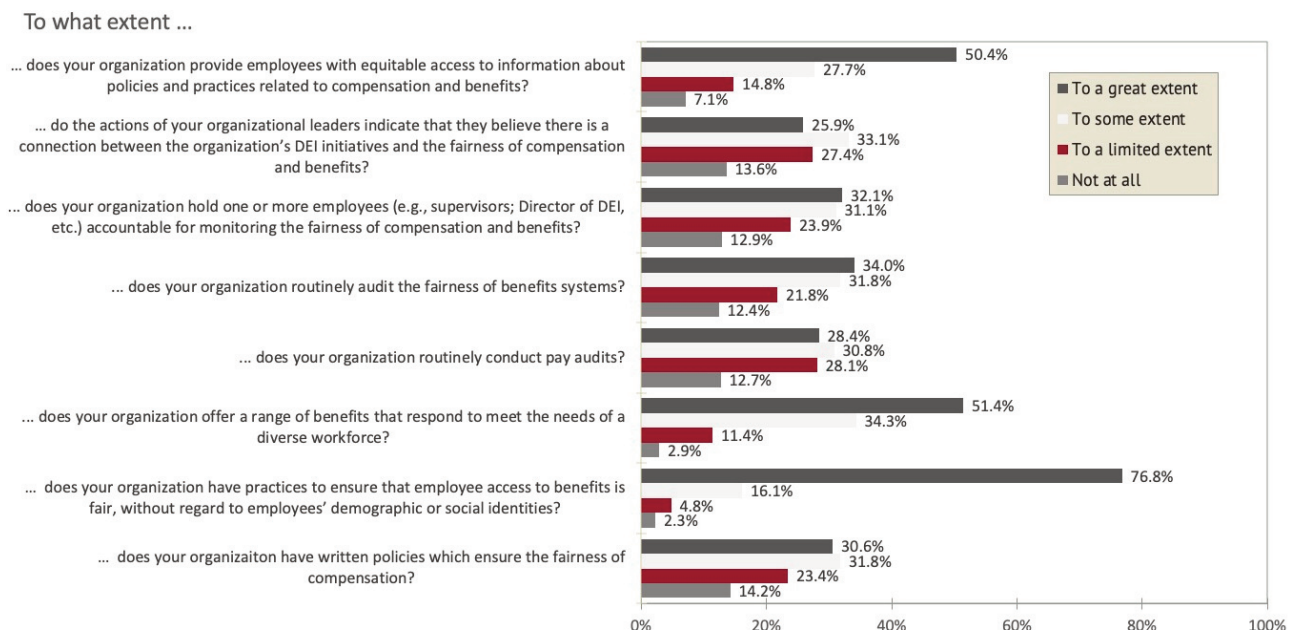
Using the Equity of Compensation and Benefits System Index, our analyses found that the equity of organizations' Compensation and Benefits System was associated with organizational and workforce characteristics.

- Organizations employing fewer than 50 people were more likely to have *lower* scores on the

Figure 7: The Equity of the Compensation and Benefits System

n = 1,062

% respondent organizations



Equity of Compensation and Benefits System Index compared to those employing 50-499 people.

- Compared to healthcare organizations (the reference group), those in agriculture; manufacturing; professional, scientific, or business/technical services; and wholesale trade were more likely to have *lower* scores on the Equity of Compensation and Benefits System Index.
- Organizations reporting *higher* employee stress over the past two years were more likely to have *lower* scores on the Equity of Compensation and Benefits System Index.

Importantly, we found a relationship between the Equity of the Compensation and Benefits System Index and Extent of Employee Access to Selected Benefits Index such that organizations reporting that more of the selected benefits were available to higher percentages of employees also rated the equity of their organizations' Compensation and Benefits System as stronger as measured by the Equity of Compensation and Benefits System Index. This suggests that employee **access** to benefits might have an impact on the equity of the Compensation and Benefits Systems and the **equity** of the Compensation and Benefits System might affect the extent of employee access to benefits.

## Section VI: The Equity of the Orientation and Onboarding System of Employment

### Defining Orientation and Onboarding as a System of Employment

Once employees have been hired, employers typically want to welcome new employees and familiarize them with important aspects of “life at the organization” so that the new employees can become as productive as possible – as soon as possible. Rather than thinking about this transition as a single event, some employers view onboarding as a process that might last for a few months.

While some employers may assess the formal components of their Orientation and Onboarding System, it can be difficult to monitor the fairness of informal aspects of orientation and onboarding.

### Why does the equity of orientation and onboarding matter?

There is some wisdom in the observation that “first impressions matter.”

While we may think about first encounters as being interactions between two individuals,<sup>xiii</sup> first impressions can have a lasting effect on the sense of connection that people feel to groups and organizations, as well.

Orientation and onboarding refer to the ways that new employees are welcomed to the organization, receive information about how the organization functions on a day-to-day basis, and are introduced to others who work for the organization.

New employees can quickly get a sense about the extent to which they seem to be part of a valued “in-group” or whether they (or their jobs) might sit at the periphery of an organization. Activities related to orientation and onboarding are critical times for establishing a climate of inclusion.<sup>xiii</sup> For several decades, researchers have conducted studies about perceptions of inclusion at the workplace. Perceptions of inclusion have been associated with a range of employee outcomes, including job satisfaction and tenure.<sup>xiv</sup>

### The Equity of the Orientation and Onboarding System

The survey asked respondents to assess the equity of the components of the system of orientation and onboarding (that is, seven items assessing the equity of the 7 Levers for Change: policies, practices, planning and evaluation, roles and accountabilities, culture, climate, and communication).

As indicated by Figure 8, respondents were most likely to report that the strongest equity components of their organizations' Orientation and Onboarding System were:

- practices that provide equitable access to information about orientation and onboarding (54.5% reported “to a great extent”),
- welcoming diverse perspectives during orientation and onboarding (53.0% “to a great extent”), and

- practices that promote the inclusion of new employees (48.0% reported “to a great extent”).

### What organizational factors influence the equity of the Orientation and Onboarding System?

We aggregated the organizations’ responses to items measuring the equity of their organizations’ orientation and onboarding, creating the Equity of Orientation and Onboarding System Index. The scores could range from 1 to 4, with an average (mean) score of 3.00, which is the third highest score among the 10 employment systems.

Using the Equity of Orientation and Onboarding Index, our analyses found that the equity of organizations’ Orientation and Onboarding System was associated with industry sector and employee stress.

- Compared to healthcare organizations (the reference group), organizations in administrative and support services; arts, entertainment or recreation; government, public administration, or military; and wholesale trade were more likely to have *lower* scores on the Equity of Orientation and Onboarding Index.

- Organizations reporting *higher* employee stress during the past two years were more likely to have *lower* scores on the Equity of Orientation and Onboarding Index.

## Section VII: The Equity of the Supervision and Mentoring System of Employment

### Defining Supervision and Mentoring as a System of Employment

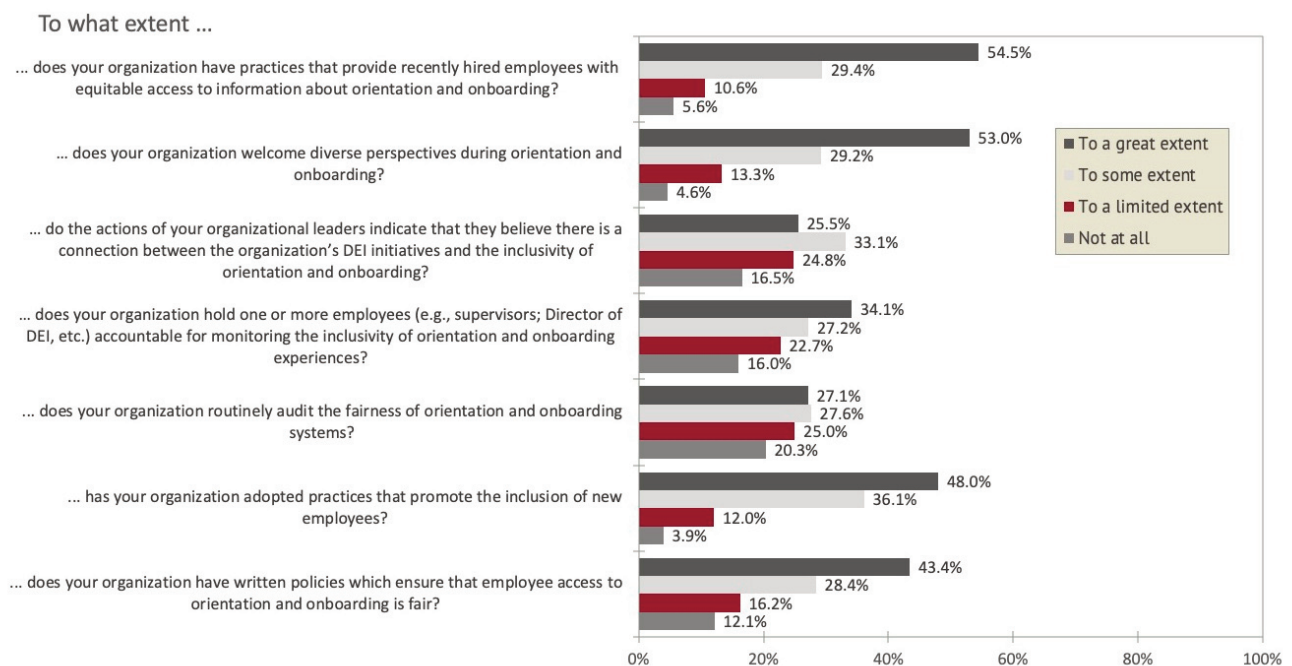
Supervisors have responsibilities for ensuring that employees on their teams meet performance expectations. Mentors accept the role of encouraging mentees to consider their job responsibilities and performance in the context of their career development. Although some supervisors might be able to also function as mentors, organizations may decide to structure these two roles so that they are (or can be) fulfilled by different people.

It is important to note that while supervisors and supervisees typically work for the same organization, in some situations, mentors and mentees might work for different organizations.

Figure 8: The Equity of the Orientation and Onboarding System

n = 1,062

% respondent organizations



In some organizations, the roles of supervisors and mentors are assumed by the same person. We consider supervision to be the oversight of employees' work, whereas mentoring is guidance provided to foster positive career development.

The equity perspective of supervision and mentoring focuses attention on the fairness of employees' access to quality supervision and mentoring that supports both their performance as well as their career planning.

### Why does the equity of supervision and mentoring matter?

Access to quality supervision and to mentoring are both associated with beneficial outcomes for employees and their organizations.<sup>30</sup> Quality supervision, which tends to focus on the timely completion of job tasks and objectives, is associated with employee performance. Mentoring, which usually focuses on the extent of current job-fit and future career aspirations, can be associated with measures of employee well-being.

## The Equity of the Supervision and Mentoring System

The survey asked respondents to assess the equity of the components of the system of supervision and mentoring (that is, nine items assessing the equity of the 7 Levers for Change: policies, practices, planning and evaluation, roles and accountabilities, culture, climate, and communication).

As indicated by Figure 9, respondents reported that the strongest equity components of their organizations' Supervision and Mentoring System were:

- expecting supervisors/managers to foster climate of inclusion in their teams (43.4% reported “to a great extent”), and
- expecting supervisors/managers to demonstrate competencies related to equity and inclusion at the workplace (41.4% reported “to a great extent”).

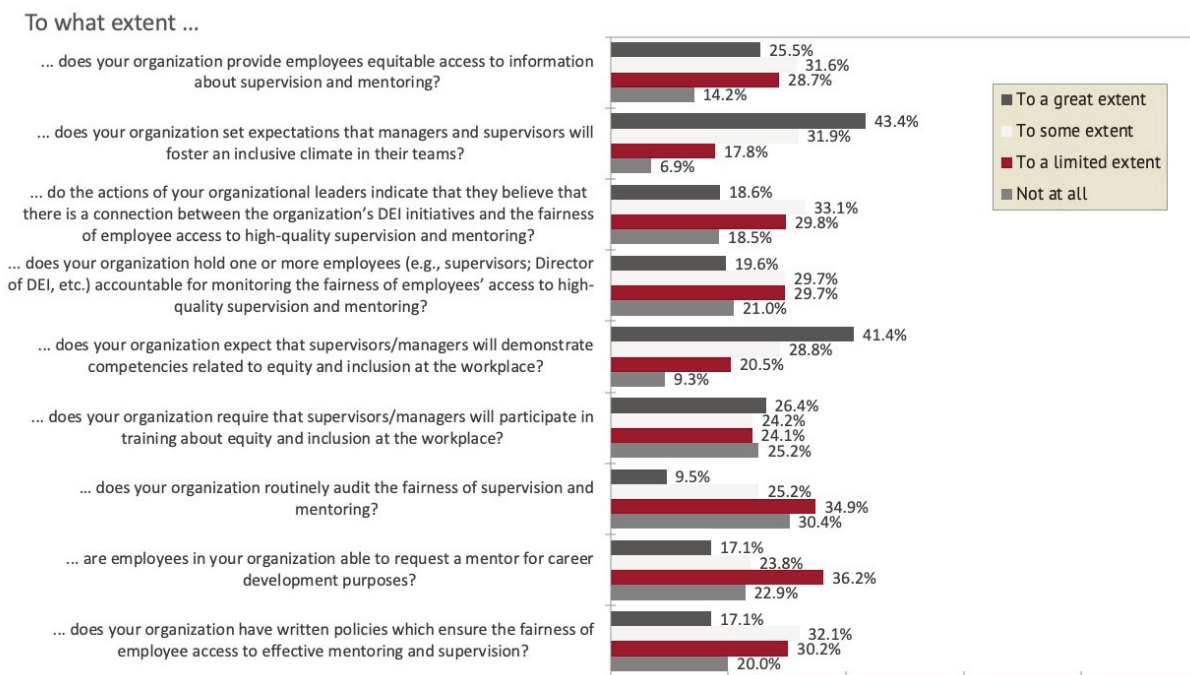
### What organizational factors influence the equity of the Supervision and Mentoring System?

We aggregated the organizations' responses to items

Figure 9: The Equity of the Supervision and Mentoring System

n = 1,062

% respondent organizations



measuring the equity of their organizations' supervision and mentoring, creating the Equity of Supervision and Mentoring System. The score for this index is 2.59, which is the third lowest score among all the employment systems.

Using the Equity of Supervision and Mentoring Index, our analyses found that the equity of organizations' Supervision and Mentoring System was associated with organizational pressures and the percentage of employees of color:

- Organizations reporting *lower* scores on organizational pressures over the over the past 2 years were more likely to have *higher* scores on the Equity of Supervision and Mentoring Index.
- Organizations with *higher* percentages of employees of color were more likely to have *higher* scores on the Equity of Supervision and Mentoring Index.

## Section VIII: The Equity of the Training and Career Development System of Employment

### Defining Training and Career Development as a System of Employment

Many organizations view career development as a responsibility shared by the employee and the organization. Comparing across different workplaces, there is a wide variation in the extent of formal training opportunities offered to employees.

The equity perspective considers the fairness of employees' access to training and career development opportunities.

Training and career development refers to opportunities for employees to gain new competencies and skills.

Provisions of Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, religion and national origin in training.<sup>xvi</sup>

### Why does the equity of training and career development matter?

Training and career development opportunities increase the likelihood that employees will develop the

knowledge, skills, and competencies – not only needed to fulfill their current jobs, but also to position them for other positions, in the future.<sup>xvii</sup>

### The Equity of the Training and Career Development System

The survey asked respondents to assess the equity of the components of the system of training and career development (that is, seven items assessing the equity of the 7 Levers for Change: policies, practices, planning and evaluation, roles and accountabilities, culture, climate, and communication).

As indicated by Figure 10, respondents indicated that the strongest equity components of their organizations Training and Career Development System were:

- expectations that supervisors will encourage all employees to participate in training and career development opportunities (35.5% reported “to a great extent”), and
- giving employees fair access to information about training and career development opportunities (35.0% reported “to a great extent”).

### What organizational factors influence the equity of the Training and Career Development System?

We aggregated the organizations' responses to items measuring the equity of their organizations' Training and Career Development System, creating the Equity of Training and Career Development System Index. The scores could range from 1 to 4, with an average (mean) score of 2.63, making this system the fourth lowest among the 10 employment systems.

Using the Equity of Training and Career Development Index, our analyses found that the equity of organizations' Training and Career Development System was associated with workforce characteristics.

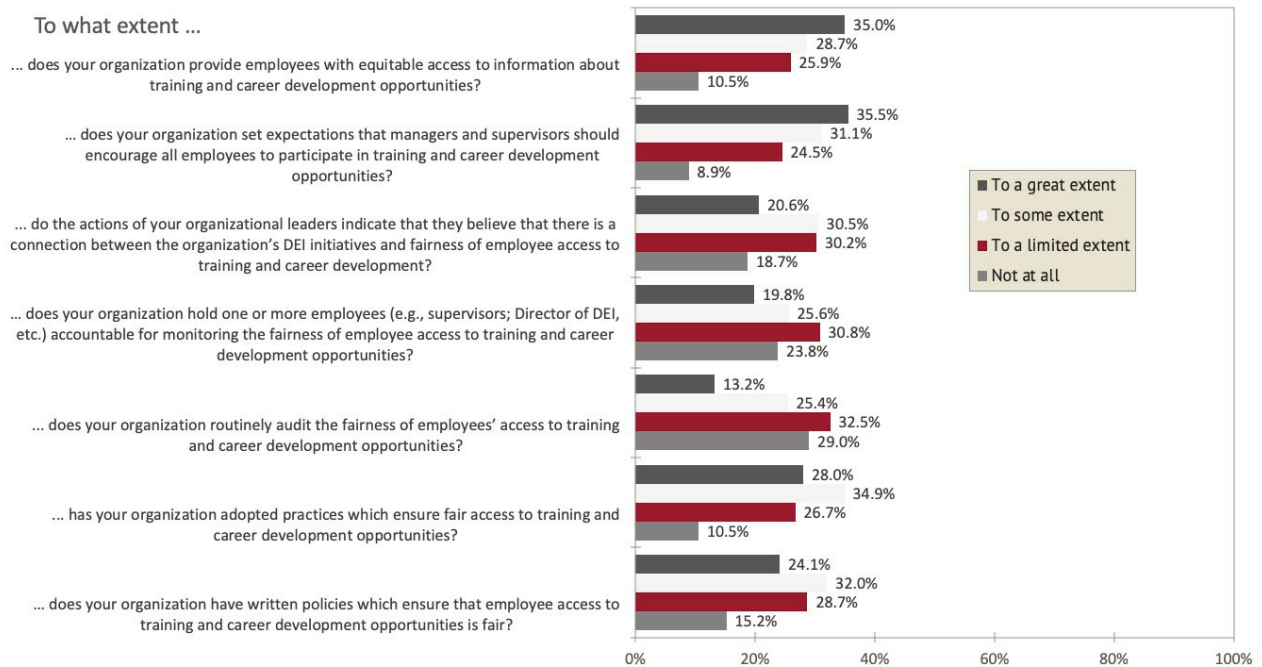
- Organizations reporting *higher* levels of employee stress over the past 2 years were more likely to have *lower* scores on the Equity of Training and Career Development System Index.
- Organizations with *higher* percentages of women were more likely to have *higher* scores on the Equity of Training and Career Development Index.



Figure 10: The Equity of the Training and Career Development System

n = 1,062

% respondent organizations



## Section IX: The Equity of the Employee Performance Assessment and Feedback System of Employment

### Defining Employee Performance Assessment and Feedback as a System of Employment

Despite the efforts made by some organizations to focus on “objective” performance indicators (for example, the amount of work completed within a specified timeframe), most performance assessments include subjective assessments of specific aspects of job performance (for example, the quality of working relationships with co-workers).

The equity of performance assessments may unintentionally reflect supervisory bias. For example, some supervisors may be reluctant to provide some types of feedback and suggestions for improvement to

employees who bring demographic and social identities to the workplace that are different from their own.

In the best of circumstances, feedback provided to employees can clarify supervisors’ perspectives of the employee’s strengths and weaknesses, their accomplishments, and suggestions about steps that the employees might take to optimize future performance.

### Why does the equity of feedback and employee performance assessment and feedback matter?

Formal as well as informal performance assessments can be related to employees’ work engagement/disengagement, as well as employees’ perceptions about whether their contributions to the organization are valued.<sup>xviii</sup>

### The Equity of the Employee Performance Assessment and Feedback System

The survey also asked respondents to assess the equity of the components of the Employee Performance Assessment and Feedback System of employment (that is, seven items assessing the equity of the 7 Levers for Change: policies, practices, planning and

We consider the assessment of employee performance to include formal reviews of performance. Feedback includes informal conversations about performance that might not be documented in employee records.

evaluation, roles and accountabilities, culture, climate, and communication).

As indicated by Figure 11, respondents reported that the strongest equity components of their organizations' Performance Assessment and Feedback System were:

- employees' ability to question the content of a performance assessment (56.3% reported "to a great extent"), and
- providing equitable access to information about performance assessment processes (43.6% reported "to a great extent").

### What organizational factors influence the equity of the Employee Performance Assessment and Feedback System?

We aggregated the organizations' responses to items measuring the equity of their organizations' Employee Performance Assessment and Feedback System, creating the Equity of Performance Assessment and Feedback System Index. The scores could range from 1 to 4, with an average (mean) score of 2.93 which is the fourth highest mean score among the 10 employment systems.

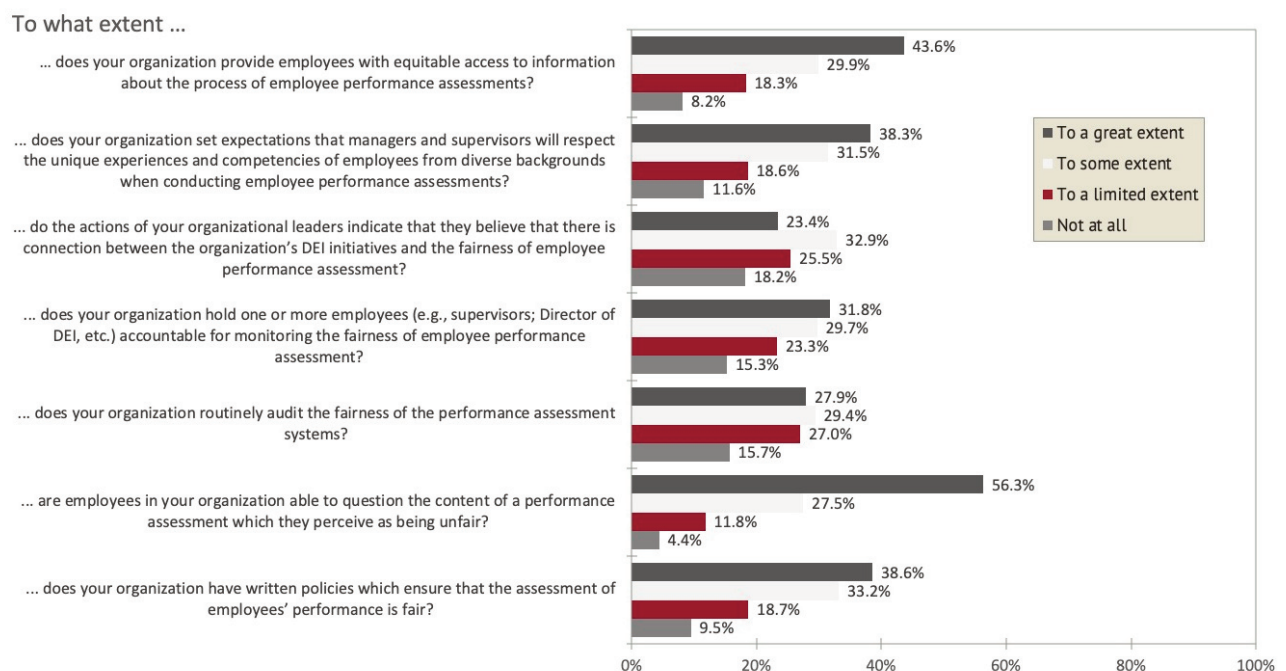
Using the Equity of Performance Assessment and Feedback System Index, our analyses found that the equity of organizations' Employee Performance Assessment and Feedback System was associated with several workforce characteristics.

- Organizations reporting more employee stress over the past 2 years were more likely to have *lower* scores on the Equity of Employee Performance Assessment and Feedback System Index.
- Organizations with *higher* percentages of employees of color were more likely to have *higher* scores on the Equity of Employee Performance Assessment and Feedback System Index.
- Organizations with *higher* percentages of women were more likely to have *higher* scores on the Equity of Employee Performance Assessment and Feedback System Index.

Figure 11: The Equity of the Employee Performance Assessment and Feedback System

n = 1,062

% respondent organizations



## Section X: The Equity of the Employee Resources and Supports System of Employment

### Defining Employee Resources and Supports as a System of Employment

Organizations can offer a range of resources and supports which acknowledge the diverse experiences, perspectives, and competencies that employees can contribute at work. These resources can also help diverse employees to engage in organizational life.

Employee resources and supports refer to information and programs that help diverse employees to connect to other organizational members and to fully participate in organizational life. These resources and programs might include: employee resource groups/affinity groups, peer coaches, and special events and “fairs” to recognize the members of groups that might be underrepresented at the workplace (for example, PRIDE week, Bring Your Children to Work Day, etc.).

### Why does the equity of employee resources and supports matter?

Resources and supports at the workplace can communicate to employees that “people with similar life situations and experiences” work for the organization. Some employers have established resources, such as Employee Resource Groups, to foster inclusion and employee contributions to organizational strategic directions.<sup>xix</sup>

### The Equity of the Employee Resources and Supports System

The survey asked respondents to assess the equity of the components of the Employee Resources and Supports System of employment (that is, eight items assessing the equity of the 7 Levers for Change: policies, practices, planning and evaluation, roles and accountabilities, culture, climate, and communication).

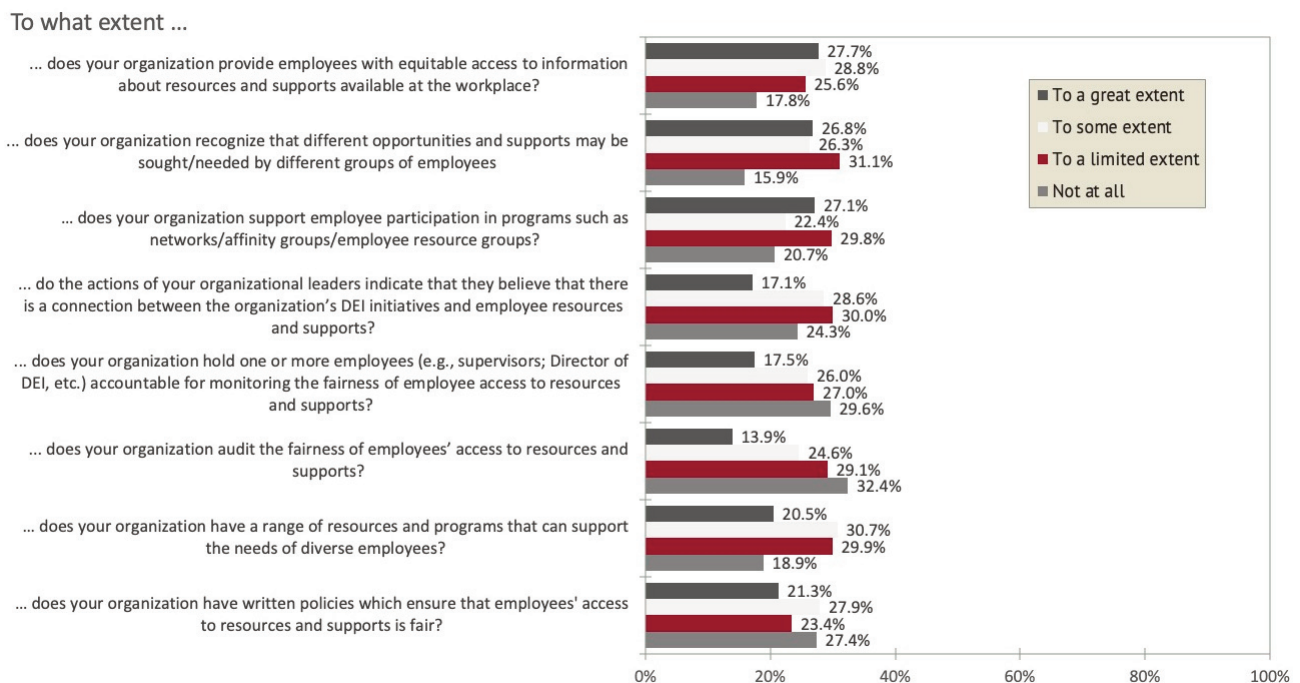
As indicated by Figure 12, respondents were most likely to report that the strongest equity components of their organizations’ Employee Resources and Supports System were:

- providing employees with equitable access to information about resources and supports

Figure 12: The Equity of the Employee Resources and Supports System

n = 1,062

% respondent organizations



available at the workplace (27.7% reported “to a great extent”),

- supporting employee participation in programs such as networks/affinity groups/employee resource groups (27.1% reported “to a great extent”), and
- recognizes that different opportunities and supports might be sought/needed by different groups of employees” (26.8% reported “to a great extent”).

### What organizational factors influence the equity of the Employee Resources and Supports System?

We aggregated the organizations’ responses to items measuring the equity of their organizations’ Employee Resources and Supports System, creating the Equity of Employee Resources and Supports System Index. The scores could range from 1 to 4, with an average (mean) score of 2.46 which is the lowest score among the 10 employment systems.

Using the Equity of Employee Resources and Supports System Index, our analyses found that the equity of organizations’ Employee Resources and Supports system was associated with workforce and organizational characteristics.

- Organizations with *higher* percentages of women were more likely to have *higher* scores on the Equity of Employee Resources and Supports System Index.
- Organizations with *higher* percentages of employees of color were more likely to have *higher* scores on the Equity of Employee Resources and Supports System Index.
- Organizations reporting *higher* employee stress were more likely to have *lower* scores on the Equity of Employee Resources and Supports System Index.
- Organizations reporting *higher* organizational pressures were more likely to have *lower* scores on the Equity of Employee Resources and Supports System Index.

## Section XI: The Equity of the Promotion System of Employment

### Defining Promotion as a System of Employment

Employees may find two pathways to promotions: internal promotions and open job announcements. Internal promotions can make it possible for employers to recognize and reward current employees for outstanding performance. Open job announcements usually require that employees submit an application for open positions.

Promotion typically refers to an increase in job responsibilities with a commensurate increase in compensation.

The equity of promotions is addressed by Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act which prohibits discrimination in employment on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.

### Why does the equity of promotions matter?

Promotion decisions are often visible within organizations; that is, other employees tend to notice whether (or not) a colleague has been promoted and whether the processes used to make promotion decisions seem fair or biased.

Studies have found that the equity of promotions is related to employees’ organizational commitment.<sup>xx</sup>

Some employers periodically assess the composition of their workforces by information they might have about social and demographic identities to gain insight about the fairness of their promotions.

### The Equity of the Promotion System

The survey also asked respondents to assess the equity of the components of the Promotion System (that is, seven items assessing the equity of the 7 Levers for Change: policies, practices, planning and evaluation, roles and accountabilities, culture, climate, and communication).

As indicated by Figure 13, respondents were most likely to report that the strongest equity component of the Promotion System was:

- expecting that supervisors and managers will make promotion decisions in an equitable and

inclusive manner (40.0% reported “to a great extent”).

### What organizational factors influence the equity of the Promotion System?

We aggregated the organizations’ responses to items measuring the equity of their organizations’ Promotion System, creating the Equity of the Promotion System Index. The scores could range from 1 to 4, with an average (mean) score of 2.64 which is the fifth lowest score among the 10 employment systems.

Using the Equity of Promotion System Index, our analyses found that the equity of organizations’ Promotions System was associated with several organizational characteristics.

- Organizations with *higher* percentages of women were more likely to have *higher* scores on the Equity of Promotion System Index.
- Organizations with *higher* percentages of employees of color were more likely to have *higher* scores on the Equity of Promotion System Index.
- Organizations reporting *higher* employee stress

over the past two years were more likely to have *lower* scores on the Equity of Promotion System Index.

- Organizations reporting *higher* organizational pressures over the past two years were more likely to have *lower* scores on the Equity of Promotion System Index.

## Section XII: The Equity of the Separation System of Employment

### Defining Separation as a System of Employment

Separation refers to temporary and permanent ends to the employment contract between employers and employees.

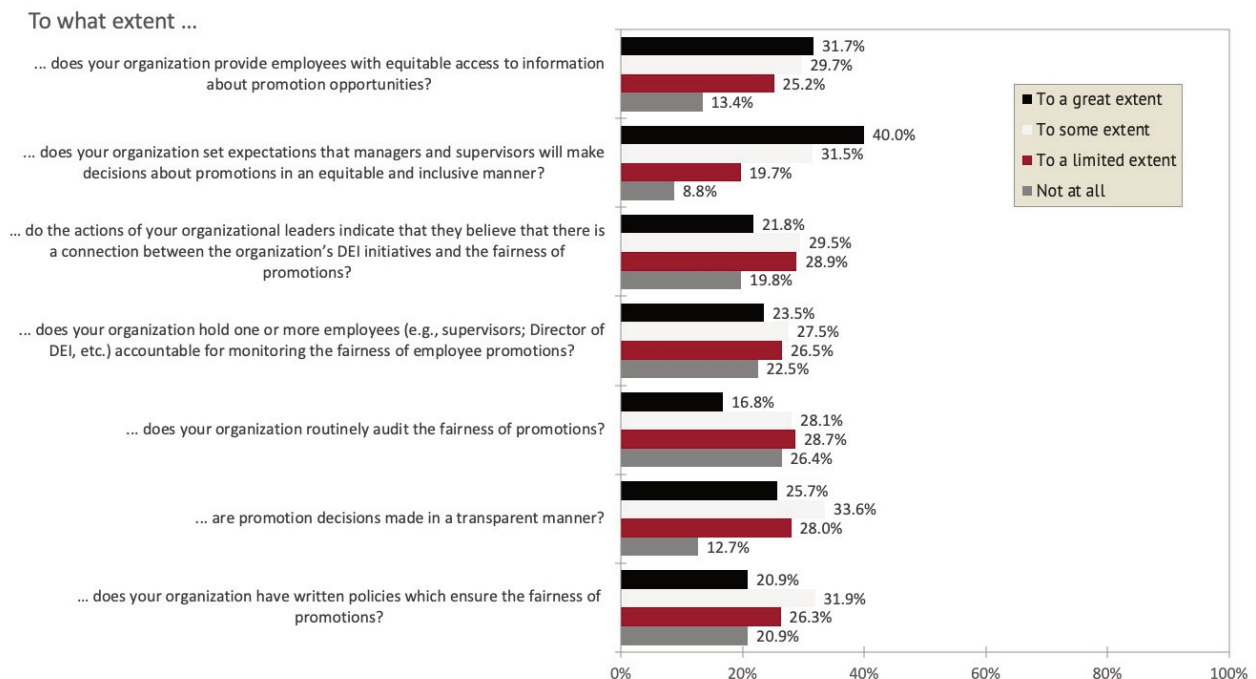
Employee separation from the organization may be initiated by the employee (for example, having accepted a position with a different employer, retirement, etc.) or initiated by the employer (for example, furloughs, lay-offs, firing, etc.).

Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act prohibits discrimination associated with “discharging

Figure 13: The Equity of the Promotion System

n = 1,062

% respondent organizations



employees” based on race, color, religion, sex, and national origin.

### Why does the equity of separation matter?

Whether initiated by the employer or by the employee, the equity of the Separation System can have an impact on the employees directly affected, employees who remain at the organization (in some situations, these can be so-called “survivors”), as well as potential job applicants who evaluate information about patterns of separation as a way to discern whether the organization appears to be an “employer-of-choice.”<sup>xxi</sup>

### The Equity of the Separation System

The survey asked respondents to assess the equity of the components of the Separation System (that is, seven items assessing the equity of the 7 Levers for Change: policies, practices, planning and evaluation, roles and accountabilities, culture, climate, and communication).

As indicated by Figure 14, respondents were most likely to report that the strongest equity components of their Separation were:

- practices that give employees opportunities to discuss possible concerns related to the fairness of separation (55.9% reported “to a great extent”),
- policies to ensure that decisions related to separation are fair (44.1% reported “to a great extent”) and,
- equitable access to information pertaining to separations (41.4% reported “to a great extent”).

### What organizational factors influence the equity of the Separation System?

We aggregated the organizations’ responses to items measuring the equity of their organizations’ separation system, creating the Equity of Separation System Index. The scores could range from 1 to 4, with an average (mean) score of 2.83, which is the fifth highest score among the 10 employment systems.

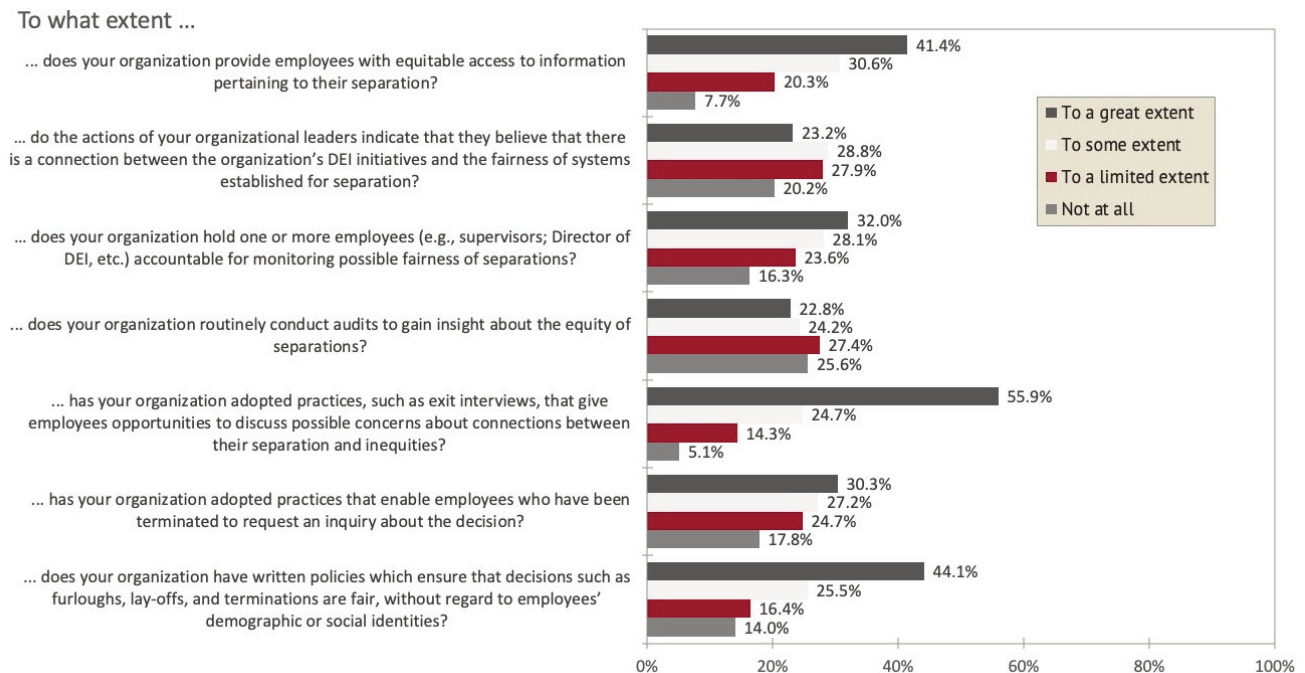
Our analyses found that the equity of organizations’ Separation System was associated with several organizational characteristics:

- Organizations with fewer than 50 employees were more likely to have *lower* scores on the Equity of Separation Index compared to

Figure 14: The Equity of the Separation System

n = 1,062

% respondent organizations



organizations with 50-499 employees, and organizations with 500+ employees had *higher* scores.

- Organizations reporting higher employee stress over the past 2 years were more likely to have *lower* scores on the Equity of Separation System.
- Organizations with *higher* percentages of employees of color were more likely to have *higher* scores on the Equity of Separation Index.

### Section XIII: Implications for Employers

There are a number of ways organizations can strengthen equity in their workplaces, both by: (1) leveraging their strengths, and (2) addressing their weaknesses within key Levers for Change.

As indicated in Figure 15, organizations were most likely to report that a climate of inclusion was the strongest Lever for Change, such that many organizations are fostering a climate of inclusion. On the other hand, few organizations are conducting equity audits (a common way organizations engage in Planning and Evaluation), suggesting that equity audits were the weakest Lever for Change.

Recognizing that equity-related strengths and weaknesses will vary from organization to organization, we provide some suggestions for action steps related to four of the Levers for Change.

## Leveraging Strengths

### Strength: Climate of Inclusion

When organizations foster a strong climate of inclusion, employees are more likely to feel like they belong, that they are respected, and that they can trust others at work. As indicated in Figure 16, we gathered data about the climate of inclusion evidenced in 8 of the employment systems and found that many organizations are fostering a climate of inclusion during the initial stages of the employee life cycle, specifically during recruitment and hiring and orientation and onboarding. First impressions matter and often set the tone for what employees can expect moving forward. While these results underscore the

#### Action Steps – Climate of Inclusion:

- Identify “success factors” associated with strong climates of inclusion in particular employment systems, such as in recruitment and hiring. For example, it is possible that managers and supervisors have received information or engaged in training that helps them to become more familiar with steps they can take to promote the climate of inclusion.
- Replicate “success factors” into other employment systems.

Figure 15: Levers for Change Across 10 Employment Systems

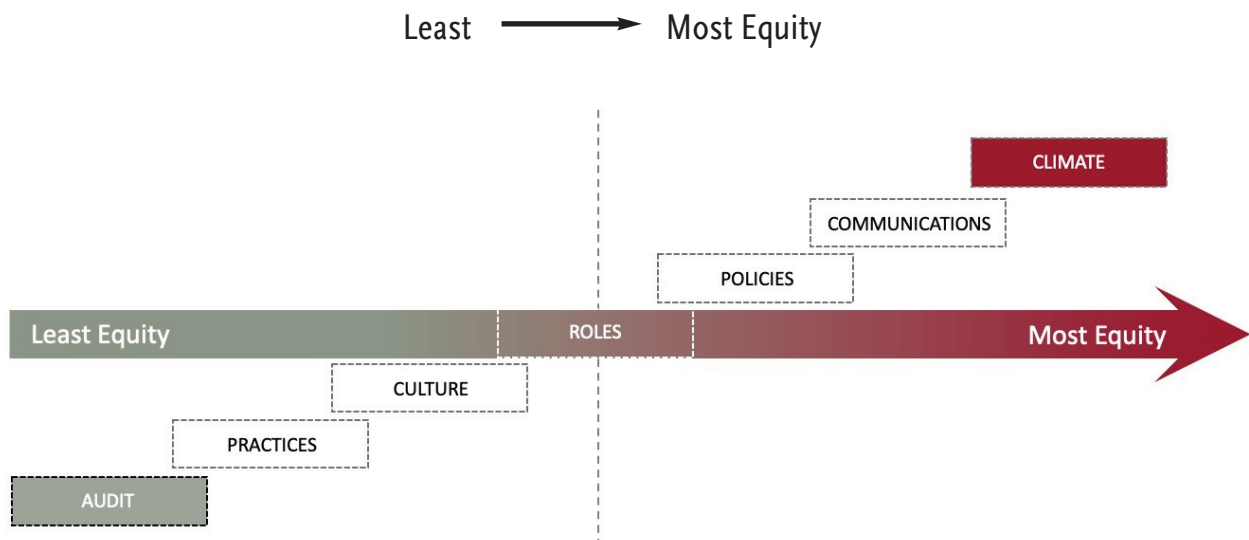
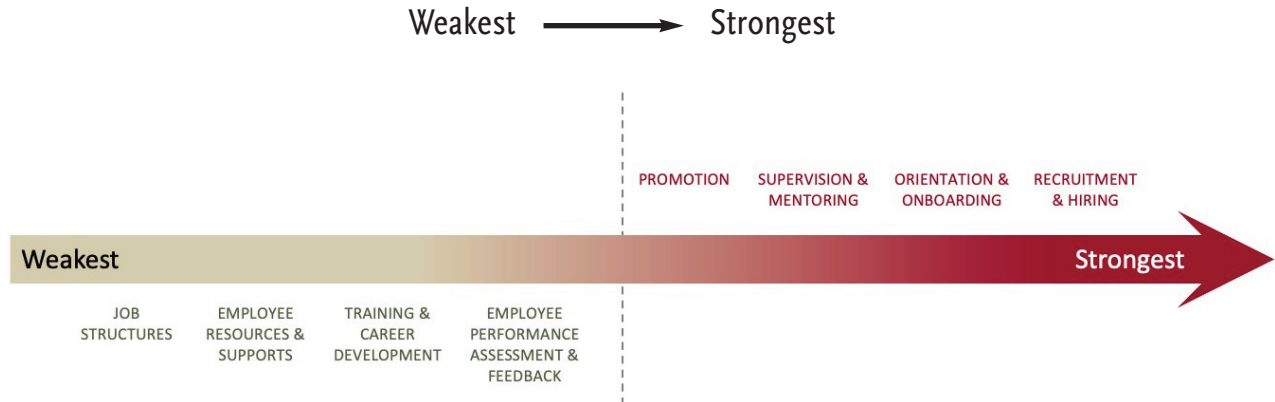


Figure 16: Strength of Climate of Inclusion Across 8 Employment Systems



importance of creating a welcoming environment during the initial interactions between an employee and the organization, organizations should also ensure that they weave this culture of inclusion into other stages of the employee lifecycle to provide positive and equitable experiences to their employees.

**Strength: Communication**

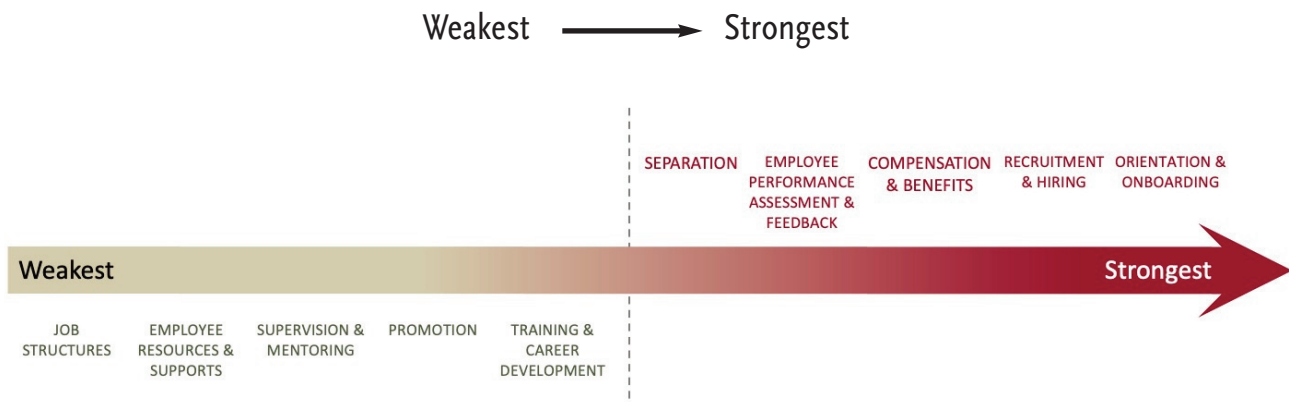
The findings of our research suggest that many employers are devoting time and resources to ensure that employees have fair access to information about their organizations’ employment systems, especially during the initial stages of the employee lifecycle. For example, many organizations provide recently hired employees with equitable access to information about orientation and onboarding. Further, many organizations are making the decision-making processes related to hiring transparent to applicants as well as current employees. However, employers

should be mindful that they carry these clear and consistent communication practices throughout their different employment systems to avoid introducing inequities later in the employee lifecycle. For example,

**Action Steps – Communication:**

- Assess the extent to which your organization has the appropriate information about each employment system.
- Understand the steps employees need to take to request information.
- Identify any barriers that employees may encounter when trying to access information related to employment systems.
- Create a communication plan that outlines employees’ access to information related to employment systems.

Figure 17: Strength of Equitable Communication Across 10 Employment Systems





previous SHRM research found that female managers are less likely than male managers to say employees in their organization are made aware of internal job openings (78% versus 86%) and that this trend is reflected in promotion rates.<sup>xxii</sup>

## Addressing Weaknesses in Equity Systems

### Weakness: Auditing

The findings of our study suggest that auditing the equity of the 10 employment systems is the Lever for Change organizations are least likely to be leveraging. The survey asked questions about the extent to which organizations regularly audited the equity of each employment system, and our results suggest that few organizations are doing so. As depicted in Figure 18,

#### Action Steps – Auditing:

- Set goals and get buy-in from senior leadership.
- Collect the relevant data, including measures that capture employee participation/engagement in each of the employment systems and employee satisfaction with the fairness of each system.
- Analyze the data.
- Take actions to remediate equity issues.
- Routinely monitor equity.

we found that organizations were least likely to routinely monitor the fairness of Job Structures System and Supervision and Mentoring System. Importantly, organizations cannot improve what they do not measure. By regularly auditing the equity of their employment systems, organizations can ensure that they target their efforts in the right places to achieve the greatest impact.

### Weakness: Accountabilities

The findings of our study suggest that across employment systems, few organizations are holding someone accountable for monitoring fairness. And even when organizations assign the role for Diversity-Equity-Inclusion (DEI) to one or more people, typically the responsibilities are designated for the organization overall, rather than specific employment systems. As a result, DEI leaders may focus more on some of the employment systems, such as pay equity, and not on others, such as job structures. As depicted in Figure 19, organizations are least likely to assign roles and responsibilities for the equity of Job Structures and Supervision and Mentoring.

#### Action Steps – Accountability:

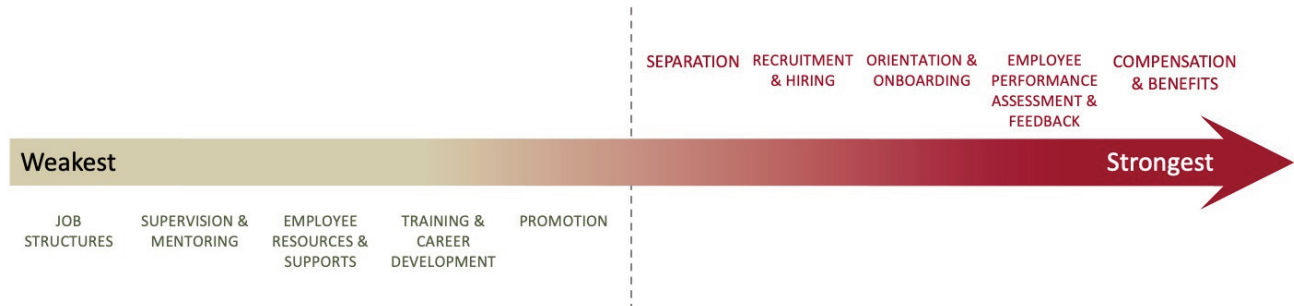
- Involve leaders in setting goals
- Define and measure success, including all 10 employment systems.
- Tie fairness of these systems to business goals.
- Choose accountability partners.

Figure 18: Strength of Auditing Equity Across 10 Employment Systems

Weakest → Strongest



Figure 19: Strength of Accountability Equity Across 10 Employment Systems  
Weakest → Strongest



## Conclusions

The findings of the National Study of Workplace Equity underscore the importance of examining the equity of specific employment systems so that appropriate action steps can be taken to strengthen equity at the workplace.

## Appendix: Methodology

In August 2022, a sample of 1,062 organizations were surveyed using the SHRM Voice of Work panel. (<https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/trends-and-forecasting/research-and-surveys/pages/shrm%20research%20panel.aspx>)

To be eligible to participate, respondents had to be “somewhat familiar” or “very familiar” with their organization’s employment systems.

The data were weighted so that the respondents reflect the distribution of U.S. organizations. The margin of error is approximately  $\pm 3.76$  percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

### Industry Sectors % respondents

Administrative and Support Services...	3.9
Agriculture (including farming, agriculture engineering and design, or agriculture shipping)	1.9
Arts, Entertainment, or Recreation (such as publishing, broadcast, advertising, media, fitness, or athletic training)	4.2
Information Services...	4.8
Construction	6.9
Education (such as K-12 teachers or administrators, colleges or universities, or business or trade schools)	7.6
Finance, Insurance, or Real Estate...	4.2
Food Services (such as restaurants and other food services, or drinking places)	2.7
Government, Public Administration, or Military...	9.4
Healthcare...	11.0
Hospitality (such as hotels or other accommodations)	1.6
Manufacturing	7.2
Professional associations and civic associations, grantmaking, and religious organizations.	7.6
Professional, Scientific or Business/Technical Services...	6.2
Other Services...	2.3
Retail Trade (such as auto dealers, household or electronics stores, grocery stores, clothing stores, etc.)	4.3
Transportation or Warehousing...	4.2
Utilities or Energy	5.0
Wholesale Trade...	5.0
Total	100.0

As indicated by the table below, among the respondent organizations, the majority reported having between 21 and 250 employees.

	% of respondent organizations
20 employees or less	0.3%
21-49 employees	29.0%
50-99 employees	40.6%
100-249 employees	11.3%
250-499 employees	7.9%
500-999 employees	3.4%
1,000-2,499 employees	2.8%
2,500-4,999	1.7%
5,000 + employee	3.0%

### Workforce Population Descriptives

28.59 % employees of color

52.48 mean % women

<sup>i</sup> SHRM Research. (2018). November omnibus. Unpublished.

<sup>ii</sup> For example, see: Le, H., Zheng, C., & Fujimoto, Y. (2016). Inclusion, organisational justice and employee well-being. *International Journal of Manpower*, 37(6), 945-964. DOI 10.1108/IJM-12-2015-0212; Iftikhar, U., Shams, M., & Raja, A.A. (2019). The influence of organizational justice on organizational effectiveness: Mediating role of trust. *International Journal of Psychology*, 54(3), 15-25.

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<sup>iii</sup> Discussions about the equity of employment systems should be put into the context of relevant federal and state policies. At the federal level, the 1964 Title VII of the Civil Rights Act which "... prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex and national origin." (<https://www.ftc.gov/policy-notices/no-fear-act/protections-against-discrimination>). Title VII has provisions that cover recruitment/hiring, access to training, as well as separations. The 1963 Equal Pay Act, "prohibits sex-based wage discrimination between men and women in the same establishment who perform jobs that require substantially equal skill, effort and responsibility under similar working conditions."(<https://www.eeoc.gov/statutes/equal-pay-act-1963>)

<sup>iv</sup> Hill, E. J., Grzywacz, J. G., Allen, S., Blanchard, V. L., Matz-Costa, C., Shulkin, S., & Pitt-Catsoupes, M. (2008). Defining and conceptualizing workplace flexibility. *Community, Work and Family*, 11(2), 149-163. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13668800802024678>

<sup>v</sup> Eaton, S. (2003). If you can use them: Flexibility policies, organizational commitment, and perceived performance. *Industrial Relations*, 4(92), 145-167. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-232X.00285>

<sup>vi</sup> For example: Bal, P. M., & De Lange, A. H. (2015). From flexibility human resource management to employee engagement and perceived job performance across the lifespan: A multisample study. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 88(1), 126-154. DOI:10.1111/joop.12082; Carlson, D. S., Grzywacz, J. G., & Kacmar, K. M. (2010). The relationship of schedule flexibility and outcomes via the work-family interface. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 25(4), 330-355. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02683941011035278>;

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<https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.21822>

<https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.21822>

<sup>vii</sup> <https://www.ftc.gov/policy-notices/no-fear-act/protections-against-discrimination>

<https://www.ftc.gov/policy-notices/no-fear-act/protections-against-discrimination>

<sup>viii</sup> <https://www.ftc.gov/policy-notices/no-fear-act/protections-against-discrimination>

<sup>ix</sup> For example: Blouch, R., & Azeem, M.F. (2019). Effects of perceived diversity on perceived organizational performance Mediating role of perceived organizational justice. *Employee Relations: The International Journal*, 41(5),1079-1097. DOI 10.1108/ER-05-2018-0150. Jofhuis, J., van der Zee, & Otten, S. (2016). Dealing with differences: the impact of perceived diversity outcomes on selection and assessment of minority candidates. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 27(12), 1319-1339. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2015.1072100> . Herring, C. (2009). Does diversity pay?: Race, gender, and the business case for diversity. *American Sociological Review*, 74(2), 208-224. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240907400203>

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<sup>x</sup> <https://www.eeoc.gov/statutes/equal-pay-act-1963>

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