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Is EDI under global threat? Almost a third of employees say their organisation rejects others for being different

- New research from Mental Health First Aid England® shows almost a third of employees (30%) say people in their organisation sometimes reject others for being different
- 1 in 10 employees (9%) do not feel their team treat each other with respect
- Since 2020, there's been a 25% drop in the number of people who feel they can bring their whole self to work

New research from Mental Health First Aid England, released to mark My Whole Self Day (11 March 2025), reveals almost a third of employees (30%) say people in their organisation sometimes reject others for being different. 1 in 10 employees (9%) said they do not feel their team treat each other with respect.

The new research was carried out in partnership with Henley Business School, among 2,000 employees. It also revealed the number of people who feel they can bring their whole self to work has dropped dramatically in the past five years, as equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) initiatives come under threat globally. Companies such as Google, Meta, McDonald's and Amazon have announced they are scaling back EDI initiatives.

There's been a 25% drop in the number of people who feel they can bring their whole self to work, (66% in 2020, 41% in 2024) risking employee wellbeing and productivity. Of the employees surveyed around a third agree that not being your whole self at work has an impact on productivity (31%), mental health (34%), and engagement with work (36%), demonstrating the knock-on wellbeing, purpose, and performance.

My Whole Self is the campaign for workplace culture change, led by MHFA England®. The social enterprise calls on employers to create cultures where people feel safe to bring their whole self to work, if they choose. Teams that feel safe and connected work better together, driving improvements in mental health and performance. This year MHFA England is warning employers of the risks of deprioritising EDI, cautioning that doing so could impact employee and business health.

Data released for My Whole Self Day 2025 reveals that only half of the number of people who think it's important to bring your whole self to work feel able to do so. 82%

think it's important people are able to bring their whole self to work, but only 41% of people feel they can do so, and only 31% felt their colleagues could do so in practice.

This is particularly true for those with protected characteristics. 54% of Black people say not being able to bring your whole self to work impacts productivity and 51% of those who identify as gay or lesbian say it impacts their mental health. Only 1 in 4 (25%) people with mental ill health felt they could bring their whole self to work. By deprioritising EDI, employees must use energy to hide parts of themselves at work, this brain drain could result in a significant loss of talent and decline in productivity.

There is also concern about the disconnect between manager and employer perceptions of psychological safety. The recent research findings show that while senior managers are most likely to recognise the importance of being able to bring your whole self to work, they tend to overestimate the extent to which they feel their colleagues can do so.

In partnership with Henley Business School to mark My Whole Self Day 2025, MHFA England has published a new report exploring psychological safety, employee engagement and wellbeing. You can read it in full here: **A white paper: The business case for belonging. How psychological safety drives engagement, wellbeing, and performance**

Sarah McIntosh, Chief Executive of MHFA England, said:

“Rather than reverting to a workplace of the past, just because that’s what those that shout the loudest are telling us to do, we should focus on making continued progress towards workplace policies that help ensure work works for everyone.

The working world has changed dramatically in recent years, and a rigid, one-size-fits-all structure of what a workplace should be risks disengaging and excluding sections of the workforce. This poses a risk to talent retention, performance and productivity. A more flexible, inclusive approach will not only support employee wellbeing but also create a more resilient and adaptable workplace for the future.”

Dr. Melissa Carr, Director of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion at the World of Work Institute, Henley Business School, adds:

“The research highlights how people’s experiences within the workplace are far from meritocratic: an individual’s diversity characteristics and lived experiences impact on their psychological safety, wellbeing and productivity.

“We are at a critical juncture in relation to equity, diversity and inclusion. For those companies that are stepping back on this work, there are many others that are doubling down and showing their commitment. This research highlights that there is work to be

done so that everyone can thrive within the workplace. If we can all work towards that, it will be better for people, businesses, and society.”

In a mission to support employers to effectively train managers, MHFA England has developed a new training course, *Supporting Team Mental Health and Performance*. It provides people managers with the tools, resources, and confidence to have effective performance and mental health conversations with their teams, supporting the creation of psychologically safe working cultures.

To find out more visit: <https://mhfaengland.org/organisations/workplace/supporting-team-mental-health-and-performance/>

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NOTES TO EDITORS

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About the research

The research was undertaken by One Poll for MHFA England during December 2024 with a nationally representative sample of 2,000 working UK adults.

About Mental Health First Aid England

Mental Health First Aid England is a social enterprise, established in 2009. It is the national authority on mental health first aid. MHFA England’s vision is to improve the mental health of the nation by creating societal change so we can all talk freely about mental health and offer and seek support when we need it. This will be achieved by its mission to train at least 1:10 of the adult population in mental health knowledge, awareness, and skills. To date 1:35 (January 2025) of the adult population has been trained by MHFA England.

MHFA England will achieve its mission through delivering mental health training into workplaces and will extend its reach to the NHS and Black people and People of Colour, through subsidised training.

The organisation’s training, consultancy, and campaigning is paving the way for positive mental health in the workplace and beyond. MHFA England offers consultancy as well as a number of face-to-face, online, and digital training options to increase mental health awareness, Knowledge, and skills, including the internationally licensed product, Mental Health First Aid.

Mental Health First Aid is the mental health equivalent of physical first aid training and provides people with the skills and confidence to recognise the signs and symptoms of common mental health issues, start a conversation, and effectively guide a person towards the right support, be that self-help or professional services.

More information about MHFA England and its courses can be found at mhfaengland.org or by emailing info@mhfaengland.org.

About My Whole Self

My Whole Self is the campaign for workplace culture change from social enterprise, Mental Health First Aid England.

It calls on organisations to empower employees to bring their whole self to work. That includes background, sexuality, religion, gender, health and mental health.

Now in its sixth year, 100s of organisations, including Skanska, Ford, The National Crime Agency, and many NHS Trusts have adopted the campaign.

To mark My Whole Self Day on the 11 March 2025, organisations are encouraged to [access free resources](#) including the new *My Whole Self: My plan for working well* resource.