



accenture

# Why belonging matters now more than ever

Fostering a sense of belonging among  
South African employees makes all the difference

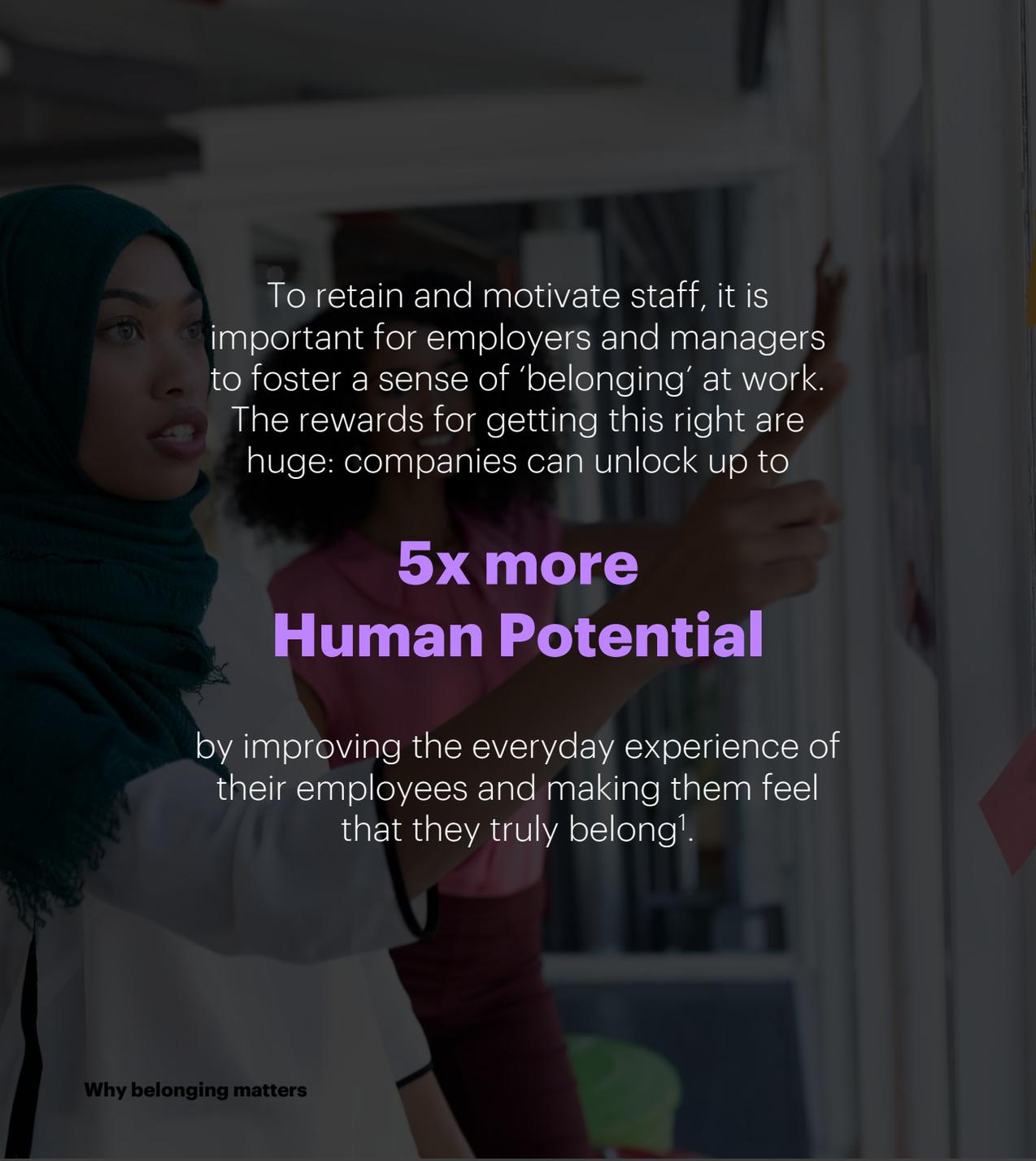
# Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging

## From Commitments to Action

South African companies have been in survival mode since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. This saw aspects of business such as employee experience and sense of belonging being ignored. A recent study by Accenture Research has found that **a third (31%) of South African workers feel they do not belong in their workplace.** This is a significant threat for South African companies as employees who do not have a strong sense of belonging may lose motivation, productivity or potentially even leave their organisation altogether.

Employees, across all industries, are re-examining their personal priorities. As a result, we're seeing a 'great resignation', as employees re-evaluate their careers and leave their jobs in record numbers. Resignations made up to 40% of all staff turnover in South Africa in 2021. Companies are losing skilled employees who are exploring their options within the country and abroad, in pursuit of not just higher salaries but more favourable working conditions. To survive, employers need to foster a culture of belonging and make sure that their employees remain motivated and inspired to work for them.





To retain and motivate staff, it is important for employers and managers to foster a sense of 'belonging' at work. The rewards for getting this right are huge: companies can unlock up to

## 5x more Human Potential

by improving the everyday experience of their employees and making them feel that they truly belong<sup>1</sup>.

To explore how South African employers can foster a greater sense of belonging, we conducted research based on a cross-industry global study — Better to Belong.

**180+**

South African Frontline Workers and Consumers

**7,000**

individuals participated in the larger global study

**3,500+**

customers

**14**

countries across seven industries

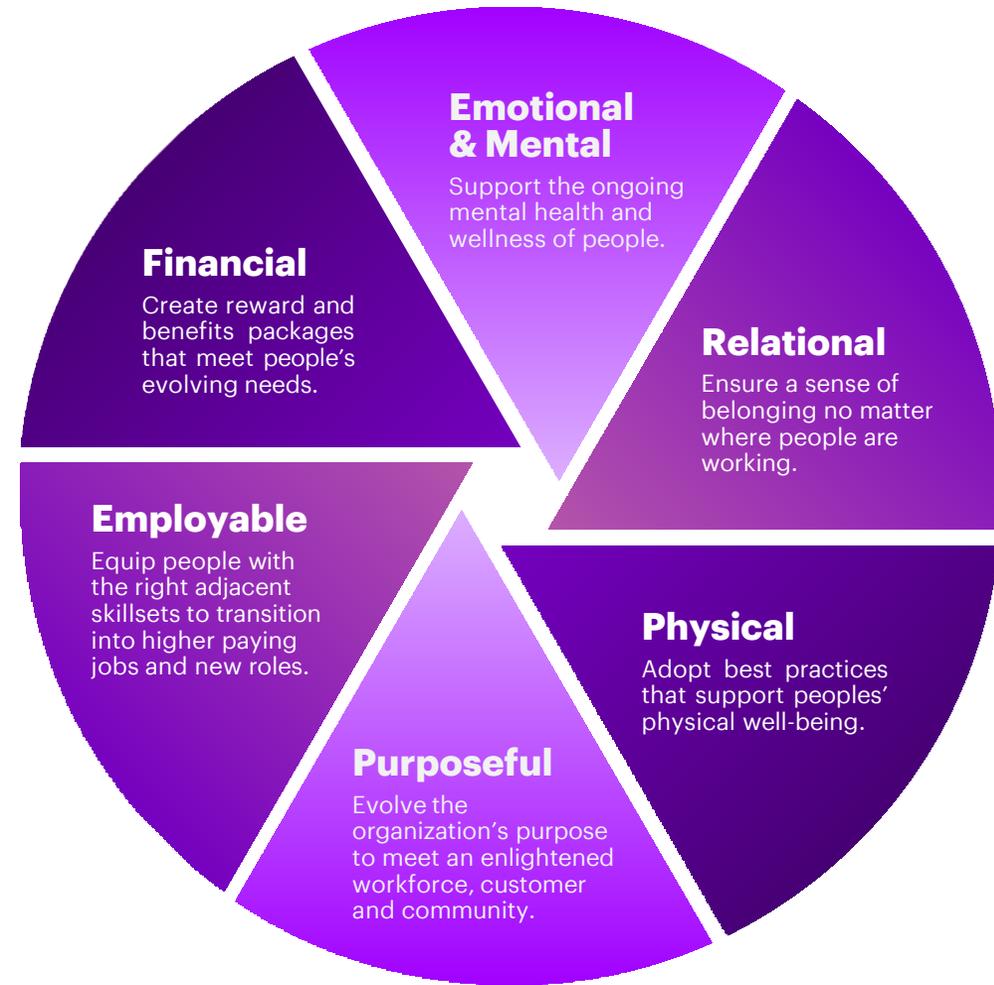
# Why belonging hinges on employees feeling **Net Better Off (NBO)**

Leaders leave people NBO by being curious about their unique situations and the external forces (such as economic inequality, racism, and environmental disasters) that shape their work lives.

We know from earlier [Accenture Research](#) that 64% of employee potential is influenced by employers meeting six fundamental human needs: Emotional & Mental, Relational, Physical, Financial, Purposeful, and Employable.

We used these findings to create a framework that we call Net Better Off. And it has huge ramifications for how employers should think about their talent management.

Our latest global Better to Belong study underscores the importance of NBO, showing that **when employers deliver equitable experiences at scale, they increase workers' sense of feeling NBO. And when employees feel that way, they're twice as likely to have a sense of belonging at work.**



# Belonging: making everyone feel **recognized and valued**

So, what does a truly inclusive sense of belonging feel like? It incorporates a strong element of diversity, equity, and inclusion. However, it is about more than just recruiting talent from different backgrounds.

**Belonging also means ensuring that everyone in the workforce has a fair chance to have their voice heard, do interesting work, learn new skills, as well as progress up the career ladder.**

People's work-related experiences have a crucial influence on their sense of connection to their organisation and co-workers. This includes everything from the onboarding process to the degree of autonomy and responsibility they enjoy, and the extent to which they have a voice at the table.

## Why does this matter so much?

We measured this sense of belonging among South African frontline workers across four key dimensions and the findings suggest that:

▮ **Feeling comfortable** speaking up (felt by 81% of South African frontline workers)

▮ **Being respected** by your peers (71%) and managers (66%)

▮ **Having influence** over decisions (64% average), and

▮ **Receiving sponsorship** from a senior leader who can help you advance and grow (65%)

Although at first glance these numbers might look positive, they show that roughly a third of South African frontline workers feel like they don't belong at their workplace because of factors related to the human experience they have at work.

# Delivering **tangible impact**

When workers feel a sense of belonging, their employers benefit too. For example, a study by BetterUp (a B2B and B2C online coaching platform) found that a strong sense of belonging was linked to a 56% increase in job performance, 50% lower staff turnover, and a 75% reduction in sick days.

[The researchers calculated that for a 10,000-person organisation, this would result in annual savings of more than \\$52 million.](#)

So, how can South African employers realise similar benefits by increasing their people's sense of belonging and helping them to feel Net Better Off? This can be accomplished by focusing on two key areas<sup>1</sup>:

**“Moments that matter,”**  
which can generate a **3.2x**  
**increase** in NBO scores

---

**“Everyday moments,”**  
which can deliver a **5x**  
**increase** in NBO scores

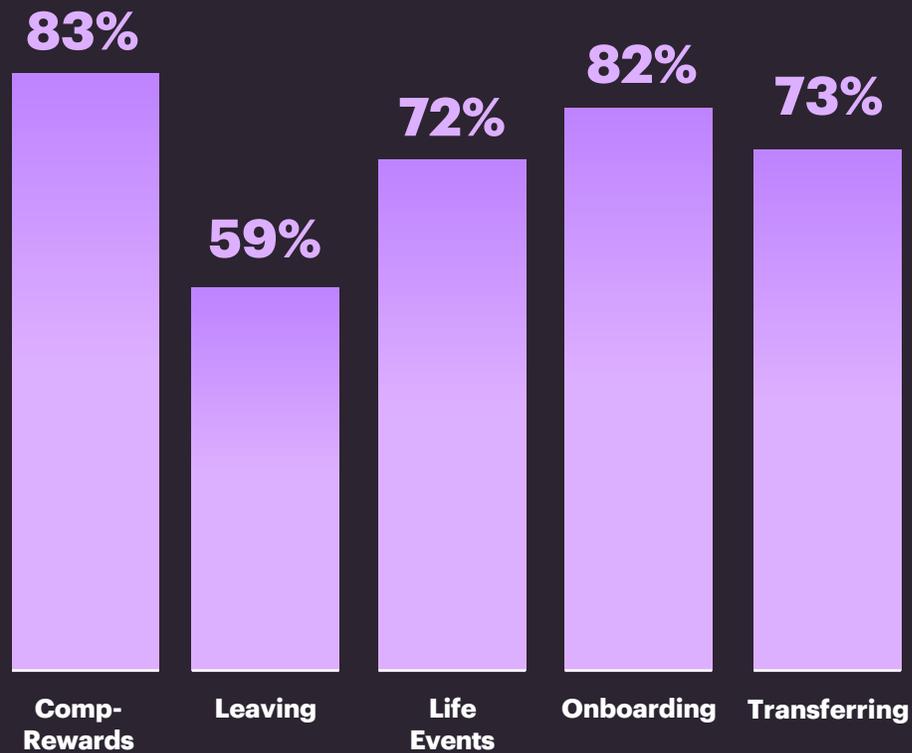
---



Moments that matter include the big, decisive occasions during an individual's career. They span everything from the person's onboarding experience to how the organisation treats life events such as births and bereavements, to compensation and even what happens when a worker exits the organisation. We found that when it comes to these moments that matter, approximately 44% of South African frontline workers don't feel supported by their employers.

# Moments that matter

How supported South African frontline workers feel across different moments that matter



By getting the moments that matter right, leaders can increase NBO. Crucially, it's not just significant personal moments that matter which leaders should focus on. Employees' everyday experiences also have a huge impact on their sense of belonging and their NBO scores.

# What business can do

## Ten everyday experiences that employers must get right

We identified 10 everyday experience levers (4 are essential) that can foster a greater sense of belonging among workers. They include issues related to people skills- which are essential as they are the biggest drivers of human potential- followed by organisational factors, and individual factors. The table below shows how well workers feel supported in each of these areas on a scale of 1 – 5, with one being lowest and 5 being highest.

	Lever	Definition	SA Average Support (1-5)
<b>Essential People Skills</b>	<b>A. Empowerment</b>	Making people feel that they have the autonomy to support advancement	4.0
	<b>B. Communication</b>	Sharing relevant information when people need it and delivering with empathy and transparency	4.2
	<b>C. Diversity</b>	Holding leaders accountable for welcoming, progressing and valuing the contributions of all people at all levels	4.1
	<b>D. Customer-Centric</b>	Valuing and rewarding behaviors that drive a positive customer experience	4.2
<b>Organisational Factors</b>	<b>E. Skilling</b>	Providing opportunities for skill building to meet organizational objectives	4.2
	<b>F. Dependence</b>	Rules and processes that limit people’s contribution to achieving desired outcomes	2.8
	<b>G. Governance</b>	Practices and processes that impede people’s agility	2.6
	<b>E. Technology</b>	Providing the appropriate infrastructure and real-time digital support which keeps people connected	4.1
<b>Individual Factors</b>	<b>H. Self-Efficacy</b>	Believing in one’s own ability to meet work demands	4.3
	<b>I. Growth Mindset</b>	Enabling people with greater ownership and influence over organizational outcomes	4.4

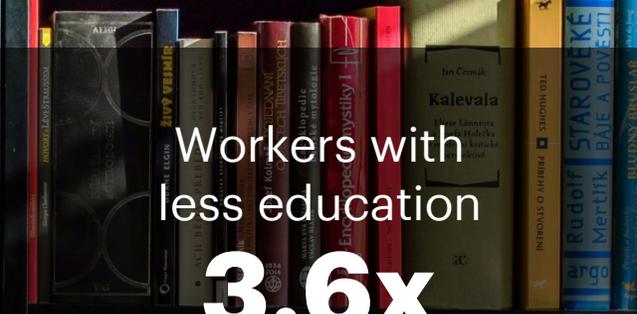
The essential people skills — **empowerment, communication, diversity** and being **customer-centric** — are the most important to improving NBO scores and a sense of belonging.

Additionally, when employers deliver excellent everyday experiences, the employees on whom they're likely to have the greatest impact include women, previously disadvantaged and marginalised communities, LGBTQ+ employees, and workers without traditional education qualifications. And when these employees feel NBO, and reach their full potential, they deliver greater productivity. In short, these groups stand to gain the most — and deliver the greatest increases in human potential and productivity to their organisations.

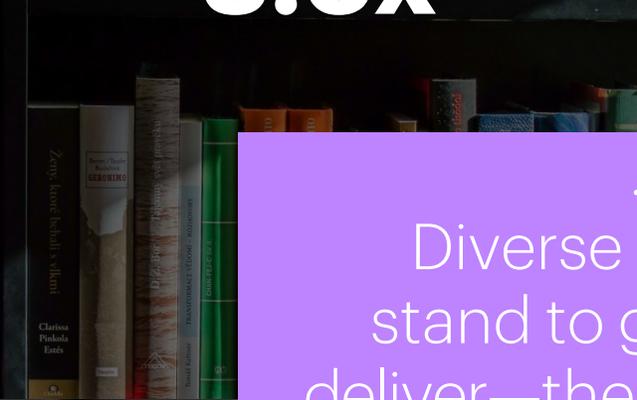




Workers with  
less education  
**3.6x**



Women  
**4.7x**



Diverse workers  
stand to gain—and  
deliver—the most when  
employers excel at  
everyday experiences



Previously  
disadvantaged  
communities  
**4.0x**

LGBTQ+  
**3.7x**



Why belonging matters

These numbers refer to the uptick in NBO when the moments that matter and experience levers are maximised. Data is drawn from the global sample.

# Belonging in practice

To bring belonging to life, employers need to focus on all ten levers. Some organisations have understood the importance and harnessing of these levers to foster a sense of belonging as evidenced by the various initiatives they have put in place. Focusing on empowerment, diversity, skills development, communication and customer-centricity is a starting point.





## Empowerment

When employees feel empowered, they're more likely to feel a sense of connection to the organisation. So how should employers empower their people?

By giving them greater autonomy in determining how they work, allowing them to have more control over their work products and outcomes, and giving them opportunities to succeed. These recommendations are reinforced by [Accenture's 2022 Future of Work](#) research, which shows that empowering employees keeps them happy, motivated, productive and increases their overall wellbeing.

## Case study

For more than three decades, Accenture has committed to prioritising the LGBTQ+ community through the [Pride Community program](#). Embracing authenticity forms part of inclusion and diversity. Being yourself and expressing your style, no matter how bold – is part of our workplace culture.

“An employee once said to me ‘If there is anything that makes you feel uncomfortable let us know’. I’m comfortable in my own skin, tattoos, and all. I am part of a company that has a community that embraces authenticity and allows you to be yourself.”

– **John van Schalkwyk, service and interactive designer.**

“Real impact comes from uplifting everyone regardless of position in the company, from C-level all the way down to the tea lady. You do not have to be a CEO to make an impact, all you have to do is make everyone feel seen and heard. Making employees feel seen and heard tells them that they are worthy, considered, valued, and most importantly, that they belong.”

– **Colleen Larsen, C.E. Business Engage.**

## Diversity

The best companies for diversity and inclusion create a welcoming environment that leads to greater employee productivity and loyalty. When a team is made up of a diverse group of people, and all have equitable experiences, a culture of belonging is manifested. The team also benefits from multiple viewpoints and perspectives that bring innovative and creative solutions.

## Case study

Trucia's hearing impairment often alienated her from her colleagues as she repeatedly had to request them to speak louder or look at her when they spoke. Sometimes she would resign and just keep quiet, fatigued from repeatedly requesting her colleagues to accommodate her. Things, however, changed when she joined an organisation that not only accommodated her but cared enough to make sure she had an equitable voice. After the company heard about her struggles, they took her needs into consideration and procured hearing aids for her. Since receiving them, her work experience and productivity has been positively impacted.

"I do not feel left out anymore. I can now participate fully in meetings, and I am able to follow the contributions of others and add my voice."

– **Trucia Lubisi, salesforce associate.**





## Skilling

To foster a stronger sense of belonging, employers should enable people by upskilling and reskilling as demands change. Companies who value their workforce would not only care about making a profit but also the personal development of their employees. Online courses and external credentials are some of the steps that can help. But employers should also offer people on-the-job training in different parts of the organisation where they're keen to gather more experience.

## Case study

Skilling goes beyond just technical competencies. It equips employees with soft and hard skills that will not only benefit them in the organisation, but beyond.

“Through the [Enterprise Supplier Development](#) programme, I was able to gain business skills, mastery skills, and I learned how to be innovative. I was perfectly matched to my mentor, who helped me navigate the challenging and sometimes lonely journey of being an entrepreneur.”

- **Edith Maphisa, Fuse IT MD.**

## Customer Centricity

Employers should prioritize recruiting individuals with a customer-centric mindset and reward them accordingly. Building a workforce with the right mindset will sustain this mentality within the company culture. Employers must be intentional about connecting talent to customer outcomes by helping employees see the human needs of those they are working to serve.

### Case study

[Voices of Change \(VOC\)](#) is an initiative which was started by employees from a number of blue-chip South African companies who came together to drive gender equality in society and business. The initiative has been running since 2017 and employees have been finding it valuable in engaging, collaborating, and contributing to equality.

“We have a part to play in building a legacy that will change the female narrative for future generations. VoC is intentional about helping women use their voice and developing them to sit in decision making tables. We are looking to disrupt the world! if you want to grow, you need women on the top. Women who are innovative and productive.”

– **Ntombi Mhangwani, Ph.D, co-founder Voices of Change.**



# Looking to **the future**

Increasing a sense of belonging among employees is a 'must do' for South African organisations. The good news? There is no shortage of addressable opportunities to help achieve that goal.

Most organisations have introduced legislation around diversity in their policies. There are targets and strategies focused on increasing representation and career progression for women, previously disadvantaged communities, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ employees. However, equity continues to remain elusive. Pay gaps persist. Equal representation is lacking across the upper echelons of organisations. And some groups of workers continue to suffer from incidents of harassment and bias.

Recent events are putting greater pressure on organisations to address unfair treatment. For instance, the racial justice movement has drawn increased attention to inequalities. And it's been widely reported that the pandemic has had a disproportionately negative impact on women, people with disabilities and previously disadvantaged communities. In light of this, organisations are making stronger commitments to creating workplace equality.

What's more, globally companies are stepping up their commitments to diversity, equity, & inclusion (DEI) and generating a stronger sense of belonging at work. South African employers will need to improve in these areas to compete effectively for top talent.





Finally, there's a **huge opportunity to improve employees' key career moments and day-to-day experiences.** This can help instill a greater sense of belonging and create a future of work that's more equitable.

**The benefits are far-reaching. Employees can reach their true potential and deliver greater productivity to their organisations.** In other words, when workers feel a sense of belonging, everybody benefits.

## About Accenture

Accenture is a global professional services company with leading digital, cloud and security capabilities. Combining unmatched experience and specialised skills across more than 40 industries, we offer Strategy and Consulting, Technology and Operations Services and Accenture Song — powered by the world's largest network of Advanced Technology and Intelligent Operations centres. Our 721,000 people deliver on the promise of technology and human ingenuity daily, serving clients in more than 120 countries. We embrace the power of change to create value and shared success for our clients, people, shareholders, partners and communities. Visit us at [www.accenture.com](http://www.accenture.com).

## For more information



### Khethiwe Nkuna

Executive – Responsible Business  
[khethiwe.t.nkuna@accenture.com](mailto:khethiwe.t.nkuna@accenture.com)

### Research Leads

Anesu Ruswa, Ph.D; Mayuri Naik

## Acknowledgements

Laurie A. Henneborn

Corbin Lazier

Tchicaya Ellis Robertson, Ph.D

Reggie Romain

## About Accenture Research

Accenture Research shapes trends and creates data-driven insights about the most pressing issues global organizations face. Combining the power of innovative research techniques with a deep understanding of our clients' industries, our team of 300 researchers and analysts spans 20 countries and publishes hundreds of reports, articles and points of view every year. Our thought-provoking research—supported by proprietary data and partnerships with leading organizations such as MIT and Harvard—guides our innovations and allows us to transform theories and fresh ideas into real-world solutions for our clients. Visit us at [www.accenture.com/research](http://www.accenture.com/research)

## References

1. Better To Belong Study (2021), [Employee Belonging | Net Better Off People Strategy | Accenture](#)
2. BusinessTech: Big shake up for jobs in South Africa as great resignation hits (2022), <https://businesstech.co.za/news/business-opinion/598366/big-shake-up-for-jobs-in-south-africa-as-great-resignation-hits/>
3. BetterUp (2019) Belonging Report, <https://www.betterup.com/press/betterups-new-industry-leading-research-shows-companies-that-fail-at-belonging-lose-tens-of-millions-in-revenue>
4. Harvard Business Review (2019) The Value of Belonging at Work, <https://hbr.org/2019/12/the-value-of-belonging-at-work>
5. Accenture Future of Work Study (2022), <https://www.accenture.com/us-en/insights/consulting/future-work>
6. BusinessTech, (2020) [Great Resignation in South Africa](#)

Copyright © 2022 Accenture. All rights reserved.  
Accenture and its logo are registered trademarks of Accenture.

This content is provided for general information purposes and is not intended to be used in place of consultation with our professional advisors. This document refers to marks owned by third parties. All such third-party marks are the property of their respective owners. No sponsorship, endorsement or approval of this content by the owners of such marks is intended, expressed or implied.