Roundtable Session 1 - Table 10 – Challenges and Obstacles to True Belonging in the Workplace

Facilitator: Lawrie Veale, *Protein Metrics*

Scribe: Cynthia Ziwawo, *Indiana University*

Abstract:

This roundtable will explore the multifaceted challenges and obstacles that employees face in achieving a sense of true belonging in the workplace. We will examine the factors that hinder inclusivity and discuss potential strategies to overcome these barriers. Key areas of focus will include organizational culture, leadership practices, diversity and inclusion initiatives, and personal experiences of employees. The goal is to identify actionable steps that can foster a more inclusive and welcoming work environment for everyone.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the most common barriers to achieving a sense of belonging in the workplace, and how do they impact employee morale and productivity?

"In this space, it is hard to feel belonging without a Ph.D, as some of the concepts may go over my head"

2. How can leadership play a pivotal role in fostering an inclusive environment where all employees feel they belong?

3. What role do diversity and inclusion initiatives play in promoting a sense of belonging, and what are some common pitfalls these initiatives face?

4. How can companies address unconscious biases that may create obstacles to true belonging for some employees?

5. What are some practical steps that employees at all levels can take to contribute to a culture of belonging in their workplace?

Notes:

Question #1

- "Merging big groups of people is always difficult"
- "Getting people to work together, and across brands, can feel like a hill/mountain"

- "Prolonged challenges to sense of belonging in the setting of transition to remote work"
- "COVID impacted social interactions"
- "Remote work continues to provide challenges to strengthening group dynamics"
- "Before the pandemic, the campus was full and bustling, but now with only mostly those that work in the lab, it feels deserted"
- When I began my role as a post-doc in a hybrid workspace, there was a slower transition into adjusting to a new lab"
- "Belonging requires showing up as your true self, which can be hindered due to insecurities"

Question #2

- "Strength finders - understanding that everyone on the team brings different values and strengths and giving my team the opportunity to have autonomy"
- "I like when people in the group are vastly different from each other because we need that!"
- "If everyone was the same, wouldn't the world be so boring?"

Question #3

- "My office is diverse, but senior leadership is all white men, which unfortunately not uncommon - now the shift has included division chiefs which has allowed for more diversity"
- "My office had an initiative to increase recruitment of PhD grads from diverse backgrounds, but one of those graduates ended up leaving the program because the area she was required to move to was not diverse enough to meet her needs"

Question #4

- "If you can't make space for diversity, it is harder to actually implement change and increase efficiency"
- "A company cannot address unconscious biases, it is up to the individual to actually commit to change and evaluate themselves"
- "If is not uncomfortable, then you are probably doing it wrong"
- "A lot of companies have unconscious biases on what diversity actually means"
- "There are a lot of disabilities that are not just physician, and in the effort to not address that, has negative impacts"

Question #5

- "Colleagues taking the time to make a deeper understanding of each other's differences"
- "Remember to stay curious and invest the time"