

## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Kara K. McElvaine for the degree of Master of Science in Human Development and Family Studies presented on June 10, 2021.

Title: Toward an Inclusive Organizational Culture: Employees' Perceptions of Equity and Belonging within Oregon's Department of Human Services

Abstract approved: \_\_\_\_\_

Kelly D. Chandler

Social and human services employees are on the forefront of social justice issues in the United States through their direct work with a wide array of oppressed and vulnerable people. As a field, these workers are proximal to people most acutely impacted by injustices. In Oregon, the principal agency for interacting with and supporting vulnerable citizens, and one of the state's largest employers of social and human services workers, is the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS). A 2018 audit of ODHS conducted by the Office of Oregon's Secretary of State found that substantial structural problems within ODHS, such as overwhelming workloads and poor workplace culture, were leading to chronic employee turnover and lawsuits related to endangerment of children in the state's care. In response to that audit, ODHS is investing heavily in reimagining its workplace culture to become more inclusive. As a part of the early design of a workplace culture intervention, called RiSE, a team from ODHS's Office of Reporting, Research, Analytics, and Implementation conducted semi-structured listening sessions with over 1,200 employees across the state in spring of 2019.

The present study leveraged bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Xia, Li, & Tudge, 2020) and an organizational justice framework (Colquitt, 2001) to conduct a two-pronged qualitative analysis of data from those listening sessions, utilizing both a content and a thematic analysis, in order to answer the following research questions:

1. How do employees describe their perceptions of diversity, equity, inclusion and/or belonging at ODHS?
2. To what extent, and how, do ODHS employees connect their perceptions of diversity, equity, inclusion, and/or belonging to specific contexts within and outside the agency?

The content analysis indicated that about one fifth ( $n = 1,004$ ) of the comments ODHS employees from across the state made during those listening sessions were directly related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and/or belonging (DEIB) over the course of 39 listening sessions. The thematic analysis of each DEIB code individually resulted in 16 themes including, for example, “Ability to be authentic in the representation of identities” and “the centrality of human connection as a desired state.” When weaving those themes together, three broader thematic stories emerged related to (a) dehumanization, (b) “childification” of ODHS employees, and (c) a substantial disconnect between decision-makers and frontline workers. These themes and stories cut across contexts both inside (e.g. relationships with supervisors) and outside of ODHS (e.g. navigating structural racism). This study shines a light on the proximal processes driving individual-level development and feelings of belonging within workplaces with day-to-day work deeply rooted in societal injustices. The findings will inform the ongoing development of the RiSE initiative at ODHS and potentially other organizational culture change interventions.

©Copyright by Kara K. McElvaine

June 10, 2021

All Rights Reserved

Toward an Inclusive Organizational Culture: Employees'  
Perceptions of Equity and Belonging within Oregon's Department of Human Services

by

Kara K. McElvaine

A THESIS

submitted to

Oregon State University

in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the  
degree of

Master of Science

Presented June 10, 2021  
Commencement June 2022

Master of Science thesis of Kara K. McElvaine presented on June 10, 2021

APPROVED:

---

Major Professor, representing Human Development and Family Sciences

---

Director of the School of Social and Behavioral Health Sciences

---

Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

---

Kara K. McElvaine, Author

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To say that the 2020-2021 academic year has been unprecedented feels like an obvious understatement in this moment, and yet I've never felt more responsibility to situate my own work in time than now. The 2020-2021 academic year has been no joke. Across the country, many people lost the lives they once knew to the COVID-19 pandemic, whether through the loss of a loved one, the loss of work or housing, or the loss of their daily rhythms. We've collectively gotten used to seeing parts of our world we thought were immovable fall apart and be reimaged for a different, and frightening, world. And so, my first call here is to anyone reading this that has felt that cycle of the world crashing and being reimaged: let's do what we can to work towards a kinder world, where we see every person's humanity in all spaces.

To that end, I feel humbled by our partnership with the staff of the Oregon Department of Human Services, who have opened their doors with a genuine desire to *learn* and *improve* to better support the incredible 9,000+ people in their workforce. Being able to design and execute a thesis about such an urgent priority of one of our state's most critical agencies has been an honor, and helped me feel capable of moving this project to the finish line.

"My people," near and far, pulled out all the stops to support me in completing this thesis. First, I'd like to acknowledge my incomparably supportive mentor, Dr. Kelly Chandler, for her willingness to go on this ride with me. Conducting in-depth qualitative research is a commitment of time and mental energy, and Kelly was with me as a teammate and teacher at every step (with lots of thoughtful discussions and corny jokes along the way). This project would not have been possible without her partnership, and I am so grateful to her. My parents Bryan and Ranae, sisters Emily and Abby, and little niece Kensie delighted me with our regular facetiming, and consistently reminded me to just do my best and keep moving forward. My sweet partner Shelbie was able to gracefully bear with me at every peak (e.g. when I was done coding) and valley (e.g. everytime my software 'broke') associated with this project. Thank you for going with my funky schedule, all those trips to Chipotle, and all of the post it notes. Finally, I'd like to thank my committee members Dr. Rick Settersten, Dr. Shauna Tominey, and GCR Dr. Deborah Rubel for your enthusiasm and desire to support my development as a scholar.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
1 Introduction.....	1
2 Literature Review.....	4
3 Method.....	16
4 Findings.....	27
5 Discussion.....	44
6 Conclusion.....	55
References.....	56
Appendices.....	68

## LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. RiSE Intervention Elements.....	64
2. Semi-Structured Listening Session Questions.....	65
3. Overview of 16 Themes by Corresponding Outcome.....	66
4. Number of Coded Quotations by Outcomes and PPCT Model and Organizational Justice Codes.....	67



## LIST OF APPENDICES

<u>Appendix</u>	<u>Page</u>
A. Final Coding Framework .....	69
B. Intercoder Reliability.....	80

# **Toward an Inclusive Organizational Culture: Employees' Perceptions of Equity and Belonging within Oregon's Department of Human Services**

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The *need to belong* is a fundamental human motivation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Esteemed scholar on the acts of belonging and othering, John Powell (2013) claims that belonging is a prerequisite for a legitimate and equitable democracy; members of any group are not only seen as individuals, but also as members of a collective group with a linked fate and shared power. Meanwhile, those outside of the purview of any given group not only have difficulty entering the group, but are largely left unable to make any particular claims about the group's functions (Powell, 2013). As reviewed by Komisarof (2021), when people's need to belong goes unmet, they experience both affective and performance-related negative consequences, including anger and frustration along with self-perceptions of incompetence. These social dynamics play out in every conceivable space where people spend time (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

One space where adults in the United States spend a large quantity of time is the workplace. Full-time workers in the United States spend, on average, 8.5 hours per workday within a workplace context (American Time Use Survey, 2019). Work is such an important context of human development that it has been identified as a determinant of health, at both individual and population levels (Ahonen, Fujishiro, Cunningham, & Flynn, 2018). Because of the sheer volume of time people spend at work, employers interested in creating contexts which acknowledge their employees' humanity must acknowledge their feelings of belonging within the workplace. However, dynamics which impact feelings of belonging, such as in-group favoritism and out-group bias, extend beyond the purview of the workplace alone; multiple

social groups may be salient to an employee at any given time, such as groups by race, class, job position, or region. Because of this dynamic interplay of feelings of belonging with broader issues related to equity across social groups, more research is needed to understand both the effects of this interplay on employees as well as the practical implications for employers interested in improving organizational cultures.

A strategic sub-population with which to systematically interrogate these dynamics would be a workforce proximal to the injustices associated with in-group and out-group favoritism and biases playing out at a national level. Social and human services employees are a prime candidate for such a description, as they are on the leading edge of social justice issues in the United States through their direct work with a wide array of oppressed and vulnerable people. As a field, these workers are proximal to people most acutely impacted by injustices, and are thus working closely with the effects of both in-group favoritism and out-group biases in their day-to-day activities. In Oregon, the principal agency for interacting with and supporting vulnerable citizens, and one of the state's largest employers of social and human services workers, is the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS). A 2018 audit of ODHS conducted by the Office of Oregon's Secretary of State found that substantial structural problems within ODHS, such as overwhelming workloads and poor workplace culture, were leading to chronic employee turnover and lawsuits related to endangerment of children in the state's care (Richardson & Memmott, 2018). In response to that audit, ODHS is investing heavily in reimagining its workplace culture to become more inclusive. As a part of the early design of a workplace culture intervention, called RiSE, a team from ODHS's Office of Reporting, Research, Analytics, and Implementation (ORRAI) conducted semi-structured listening sessions with over 1,200 employees across the state in spring of 2019.

Although participants were not explicitly asked about topics of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB), a preliminary review of these qualitative data revealed that employees often organically brought up these topics. This, in conjunction with other internal leadership dynamics, prompted the RiSE intervention to be rehoused from the ORRAI to the Office of Equity and Multicultural Services (OEMS). To that end, the present study was the first external qualitative examination of data from these listening sessions which sought to analyze how ODHS employees described their perceptions of phenomena related to workplace inclusion. Using bioecological theory to frame this study, I interrogated bidirectional interactions between employees and contexts, occurring across proximal (e.g., work unit) and distal levels (e.g., ODHS). To better understand the cultural nuances of those contexts, I leveraged the organizational justice framework. Findings will shed light on the proximal processes driving individual-level development within workplaces with day-to-day work deeply rooted in societal injustices. While ODHS presents a unique and complex context in and of itself, more and more organizations are taking steps toward improving DEIB. Thus, these findings could contribute to the field's understanding of *nuanced processes* employees identify as contributing to those outcomes. Therefore, in addition to informing ongoing development of the RiSE initiative within ODHS, the present study offers insights to the field, and to other workplaces interested in improving their organizational culture and DEIB.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **The Need for Social Services in the United States**

In the summer of 2020, during what some have called “the summer of protest” against systemic racism in response to the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and countless other people of color by police officers, cries of “defund the police” reverberated loudly

throughout the nation. Frequently, those cries were followed by another longer-standing request: Increase public investments in social workers (Social Work Policy Institute, 2011). The line of reasoning for this request is that social workers, and human services employees more broadly, regularly work in the field with some of our country's most vulnerable people, including the homeless, those with physical and/or mental disabilities, clients predisposed to violence due to histories of trauma, young people within the criminal justice system, and other populations typically seen as dangerous. These workers observe and provide direct services to people affected by a tremendous variety of downstream social determinants of public health (Williams, Lawrence, & Davis, 2019). Indeed, their positioning in the field effectively places social and human services workers on the frontlines of social justice issues. This positioning on the frontlines appears to be increasing as visibility into and national conversation about incidents of police brutality against people of color grows, resulting in cities such as Minneapolis beginning to seriously interrogate their policing systems. Minneapolis has even committed to building a new community-designed public safety system, which will likely involve the participation of social service agencies (Romo, 2020). Some social workers, however, have noted that simply replacing police officers with social workers would not solve systemic issues leading to the murders of people of color, in large part due to the constraints of our social safety net. As social worker and lecturer Jonathan Foiles noted, social workers can only refer clients to mental health or housing services only if such resources already exist (Foiles, 2020).

Perhaps in part because of its frontline orientation, the field of social work—and social services writ large—attracts workers who want to help people and strengthen communities (Mishra & Bandela, 2015). The largest professional association of social workers in the United States, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), states that “Social workers help

relieve people's suffering, fight for social justice, and improve lives and communities" (National Association of Social Workers, n.d.). Prominently displayed on NASW's website are multiple links related to racial equity, highlighting a commitment to ending racism, and the statement that racism is a public health crisis. Issues related to equity and reimagination of social structures like policing are front and center on the national agendas for social workers. NASW itself notes that social work's history is complex and ingrained with racism and white supremacy, much like all other American institutions (National Association of Social Workers, n.d.). These issues affecting social services across the country have unique effects within specific states depending on the particular histories and current events within those smaller localities.

### **Social Services in Oregon**

The Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) is the state of Oregon's principal agency for supporting vulnerable citizens. ODHS's mission is "to help Oregonians in their own communities achieve wellbeing and independence through opportunities that protect, empower, respect choice, and preserve dignity" (Oregon Department of Human Services, n.d.). Most of ODHS's functions are to serve children, adults, families, seniors, and people with disabilities for any supports other than health-related functions; their staff of around 9,000 people provides direct services to over one million Oregonians each year. Staff are divided into five human service programs: Child Welfare, Aging and People with Disabilities, Self Sufficiency, Vocational Rehabilitation, and Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities. ODHS currently operates in 16 districts across Oregon's 36 counties. Historically, each district has operated fairly autonomously, which resulted in substantial variation and a lack of cohesion across districts and sites (Oregon Department of Human Services). To add to that variation, the state of Oregon is tremendously divided along geographic lines. Frequently described as "the two Oregons," in

rural areas, more than 65% of registered voters are Republicans, whereas in more urban areas, less than 40% of registered voters are Republicans (Clucas, Henkels, & Steel, 2009). These political divides are growing over time, in alignment with similar rural/urban chasms across the United States (Associated Press, 2019). While these political affiliations alone barely scratch the surface of underlying chasms between urban and rural parts of the state, they signal different views of the role of government in the daily lives of individuals, and potentially different understandings of root causes of pervasive social problems such as poverty (Love & Loh, 2020). Because of these divides, social services likely look different based on the rural/urban status of ODHS offices.

Although ODHS is committed to the populations it serves, a 2018 audit conducted by the office of Oregon's Secretary of State found that substantial structural problems within ODHS were leading to issues with employee retention and lawsuits related to child endangerment. Specifically, the audit found that "management has failed to address a work culture of blame and distrust, plan adequately for costly initiatives, address the root causes of systemic issues, use data to inform key decisions, and promote lasting program improvements. As a result, the child welfare system... is disorganized, inconsistent, and high risk for the children it serves" (Richardson & Memmott, 2018, p. 3). The audit also identified staffing challenges, such as overwhelming workloads, tremendous turnover and chronic understaffing, and a large proportion of inexperienced staff in need of better training, supervision, and guidance (Richardson & Memmott, 2018, p. 3). This is particularly troubling, because the impact of turnover is known to be both detrimental to the workforce and the populations served by these agencies (Wilke, Radey, King, Spinelli, Rakes, & Nolan, 2018). Importantly, some of these structural issues are likely to be rooted in Oregon's origins as an explicitly anti-Black state with its Black exclusion

laws; Oregon's social work workforce is around 70% white, and is thus in a unique position to be grappling with broader calls for social justice while being situated on the frontlines of social change work. The result of these issues is that ODHS as a whole has been a turbulent workplace context for at least the past five years, in the time leading up to the audit.

In response to the audit, ODHS collected additional data from staff across the state and crafted a plan called "pathways to success." One key priority area identified in these pathways is "investing in culture." ODHS noted that creating a culture where all state employees are valued, empowered, and feel a sense of belonging can, in turn, have a positive effect on the children and families ODHS serves (Eagles, Waugh, McKinney, McGinnis, & Barrett, 2018, p. 45). In order to improve ODHS's overall functioning as an agency, a nuanced understanding of the multilevel structural problems affecting employees' sense of belonging and conceptions of equity while working within the agency is essential.

### **Social Services as a Work Context for Human Development: Applying the Bioecological Theoretical Framework**

Amidst all of the turbulence within ODHS in the present moment related to the continuing aftermath of the 2018 audit and ongoing lawsuits, around 8,000 people still continue to go to work within ODHS's occupational systems each day. Therefore, an understanding of how structural forces, such as systemic racism, dynamically interact with more proximal influences in employees' lives, like day-to-day relationships with colleagues, is essential information for those seeking to improve the workplace culture of ODHS. It also offers a unique analytic opportunity for human development researchers to utilize existing theoretical frameworks. One theoretical lens which allows for a critical analysis of multilevel structural problems affecting ODHS's employees' perceptions of belonging and equity in their workplace



is the bioecological framework. As Tudge et al. (2009) argue, bioecological approaches are often misused by being treated within a more reductionist and mechanistic paradigm—that is, assessing the effect of a microsystem on a given developmental outcome. Here, the aim is instead to lean into the contextualist underpinnings in order to understand the joint, synergistic effects of structural factors within ODHS specifically, and the field of social work in the United States more broadly, influencing employees' perceptions of diversity, inclusion, equity, and belonging.

The bioecological theoretical framework famously includes a detailed and nested view of context, which in this study will center on the experiences of ODHS's employees. Bronfenbrenner originally conceptualized context as a collection of entirely interdependent nested environmental structures, where the individual at the center has the capacity to dynamically act with each of the layers and vice versa (Bronfenbrenner, 1998). The first, most proximal, and only direct of contexts is the *microsystem*, which represents proximal processes with other people, objects, or symbols (e.g., coworker relationships). The second nested structure is the *mesosystem*, which represents systems of two or more microsystems, such as interactions between work occurring in the field with work occurring in the office. The third structure is the *exosystem*, which is comprised of not the individual of interest, but rather the contexts of those whom the individual of interest interacts with. In the case of social workers within the workplace, examples include the neighborhood of a client or a coworker's residence. Fourth is the *macrosystem*, which simultaneously surrounds and permeates all other structures. Macrosystems describe the beliefs, values, and access to resources of any given sociocultural group. Macrosystems become more complex when accounting for subcultures and participation in multiple cultures at any given time, as is often the case for employees operating within a workplace culture (Johnson &

Roberto, 2018). Importantly, macrosystem-level contexts can help put language to the complexities present when seeking to understand competing values playing out within the day-to-day work of social work. Fifth, and finally, is the *chronosystem*, which accounts for both historical time and chronological time (e.g., age) as contexts for development.

Taken as a whole, the institution of work is a key context for health and human development; employees' workplace experiences can impede or improve their well-being and job performance (Anger, Elliot, Bodner, Olson, Rohlman, Truxillo, Kuehl, Hammer, & Montgomery, 2014). In the case of ODHS workers, their job performance directly affects the lives of over a million children and families each year (Oregon Department of Human Services). Within a bioecological theoretical framework, work contexts serve as microsystems replete with proximal processes for the individuals who work within them (Wachs, 2015). Because many individual people work within any given work context, the potential for complexity unfolding through proximal relationships is nearly infinite. Multiple contextual layers may become salient for workers in any moment, and some of those layers of context are unique to the role of social services. For example, the origins of the field of social work within the United States and the current events directly involving social services, such the aforementioned "Defund the Police" initiatives, could both become relevant as employees go about their work-related activities.

The most mature application of bioecological theory is arguably the process-person-context-time (PPCT) model, which is based on those four namesake principles and their simultaneous coactions (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Proximal processes, which are the core construct of the PPCT model, are the bidirectional interactions which occur between a person and one or more of the people, objects, and symbols within their immediate environment (Xia et al., 2020, p. 11). Such processes are theorized to be the primary engines of development, making

them supremely important for understanding the relationship between individual-level change and environmental factors over time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 996). Tensions between the aforementioned layers of context inevitably affect proximal processes of people working within these systems, and thus have the capacity to directly affect their developmental processes (Merçon-Vargas, Ferreira Lima, Rosa, & Tudge, 2020). Further, scholars have called for more intentionality in the treatment of culture in bioecological theory—indeed, in distinguishing between the existence of a macrosystem and a microsystem, the theory implicitly posits that everyday actions are somehow *distinguishable from* culture (Velez-Agosto et al., 2017). By contrast, Velez-Agosto et al. (2017) argued that activities present at the microsystem level both represent and perpetuate culture, making it possible to study all types of culture and subculture by studying the actions and beliefs of individuals. All of these contextual layers must be addressed by any ecologically-informed workplace culture changes, because, indeed, workplace culture is greater than the sum of the parts of these many different proximal processes.

### **Organizational Justice and Inclusive Organizational Cultures**

One lens which has been important for understanding how individual employees assess and contribute to organizational behavior and culture is called organizational justice (Greenberg, 1987). Organizational justice refers to employees' perceptions of what is fair and what is unfair in their workplaces (Colquitt, 2001). Although seeking to make workplaces more just alone is an important goal, research has found numerous reasons why taking employees' perceptions of organizational justice seriously for the well-being of both employees and the organization. Employees who believe they have been treated unfairly at work report more stress (Cropanzano & Wright, 2011; Judge & Colquitt, 2004) and have shown reduced job performance (Cohen-Charash & Mueller, 2007). Higher perceptions of organizational injustice have also been

predictive of turnover intentions (Mengstie, 2020). By contrast, when employees perceive more just workplace environments, they have higher organizational commitment, increased job satisfaction, and reduced turnover intention (Campbell, Perry, Maertz, Allen, & Griffeth, 2013; Kim & Kao, 2014). Increasing organizational justice, then, is a powerful lever for building a more stable workforce.

Organizational justice is a multifaceted construct, consisting of distributive justice, procedural justice, and two subsets of interactional justice. *Distributive justice* refers to employees' perceptions that both tangible and intangible outcomes, such as pay and positive feedback, are equitable (Colquitt, Scott, Rodell, Long, Zapata, Conlon, & Wesson, 2013). Historically, distributive justice is achieved when employees believe they are all treated equally (Adams, 1965); however, this study's focus is on equity rather than equality. Per the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, *equitable contexts* are those in which everyone has a fair and just opportunity to thrive, but because of structural forces such as racism, sexism, classism, ableism, etc., along with their consequences, equitable situations are unlikely to arise on their own (Braveman, Arkin, Orleans, Proctor, & Plough, 2017). The role of organizations interested in removing structural barriers impacting employee performance and well-being, then, becomes promoting thriving for all employees through intentional policies and practices. *Procedural justice* focuses on perceived fairness of decision-making processes which lead to distributive justice outcomes (e.g. perceptions of fairness within hiring policies). Finally, *interactional justice* refers to how individuals are treated interpersonally when employers make decisions affecting them (Colquitt et al., 2013).

Scholars have suggested that interactional justice is comprised of two distinct types: *interpersonal justice* and *informational justice* (Colquitt, 2001). Interpersonal justice refers to the

extent to which employees are treated with respect, politeness, and dignity by authority figures. Informational justice describes the extent to which authority figures are candid, truthful, and timely in their communications (Colquitt, 2001). Organizational justice occurs simultaneously at both the individual- and organizational-levels. For instance, individual perceptions of the components of organizational justice can contribute to a shared sense of justice or injustice throughout any given team, thus contributing to organizational culture (Roberson & Colquitt, 2005). Further, there is considerable evidence that members of non-dominant “out-groups,” such as racial-ethnic minorities and people with disabilities, experience more organizational injustice than “in-group” members of dominant groups (Stone-Romero & Stone, 2005).

Diversity, equity, and inclusion cut across all three domains of organizational justice, resulting in contexts supportive of individuals’ sense of belonging. *Inclusion* involves the processual factors leading to how workplace cultures are created and scaffolded to support thriving in all employees. *Diversity*, on the other hand, focuses mainly on the demographic makeup of an organization. Fostering both diversity and inclusion are of critical importance, and they go hand-in-hand; inclusion refers to the processes employees and their organizations undergo to integrate and utilize a diverse workforce while achieving organizational goals (Pless & Maak, 2004; Sabharwal, 2014). Recruiting and appreciating a diverse workforce alone is insufficient, because, per the operational definition of *equity* referenced above, if all else remains neutral, then oppressive climates continue to do harm to minority sub-populations. Thus, individuals are able to feel a sense of belonging when diversity, equity, and inclusion intersect to support feeling respected at a basic level that includes the right to both co-create and make demands upon the structures within which we’re situated (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). As such, fostering an inclusive workplace is comprised of creating a culture where all employees are

treated equitably, and where all employees are able to feel a *sense of belonging* as an emotional outcome (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Boekhorst, 2015).

For the purposes of the proposed study, culture can be defined as the accepted way of life of a group of people, inclusive of the behaviors, beliefs, values, and symbols passed along by communication (Okun, 2001; Velez-Agosto et. al, 2017). Cultures are powerful because they are both omnipresent and challenging to identify and name; intentional and equity-oriented organizational culture change initiatives thus have the power to acknowledge and dismantle oppressive societal structures. Organizational cultures can be conceptualized as “shared perceptions of a work environment, including procedures, policies, and practices that are expected, supported, and rewarded behaviors” (Boekhorst, 2015; Black & La Venture, 2015); while workplaces have their own dominant cultures, they also have their own subcultures across individual sites, programs, or teams. The interactions of different cultures creates complexity for those interested in supporting culture change. ODHS’s recent culture change efforts provide a window into this complexity.

### **Organizational Culture Change at ODHS: The RiSE Initiative**

ODHS has taken steps forward from their 2018 state assessment plan with the development of an organizational culture intervention called RiSE. RiSE is conceptualized as a “positive, intentional, and inclusive” culture, rooted in ODHS’s mission and cultivated primarily through the daily actions and habits of their employees (ORRAI, ODHS, 2020). The intention behind RiSE is to create workspaces where all employees can show up to work as their whole selves, resulting in an agency which improves the lives and outcomes of its employees, as well as the clients and communities they serve. Originally, there were five elements of the RiSE intervention: Safety and Well-Being, Caring and Supportive Relationships, High Expectations

and Accountability, Meaningful Participation, and Community Engagement (see Table 1 for definitions of each element). In June 2020, ODHS added a sixth element, Equitable Treatment and Belonging, in part based on what they heard during listening sessions conducted with staff (more below), and in part based on broader ODHS strategic aims of integrating diversity, equity, and inclusion in all ODHS initiatives.

In adding this sixth element, ODHS acknowledged that every individual-level interaction, every norm, and every policy enacted within the agency is influenced by complex sets of political and social factors. That said, in their internal reference materials for RiSE, ODHS staff stated that more work must be done to understand what stands in the way of equitable treatment and belonging in order to genuinely foster more healing and inclusive environments (ORRAI, ODHS, 2020, p. 18). In alignment with that aim, as mentioned previously, in October 2020, the RiSE intervention team was rehoused from ORRAI to the OEMS. OEMS' goals are to increase workforce diversity and inclusion, constructed as "supporting a work culture where the uniqueness of all people is welcomed and valued" (OEMS, 2020) and, in turn, improve service equity to all qualified Oregonians. In alignment with those goals, OEMS has been tasked with ensuring that RiSE evolves in a way that is explicitly aligned with DEIB. The commitment to organizational change embodied by the RiSE initiative, and evidence of a desire to challenge internal perpetuation of racism is in alignment with recommendations from NASW; RiSE demonstrates clear connections between ODHS's actions and national trends related to DEIB (NASW, n.d.).

### **The Present Study**

Given the internal culture of ODHS, and the broader societal context for social work in 2021, understanding how ODHS's employees across the state perceive workplace inclusion,

including diversity, equity, and belonging, and how they describe the salient processes and contexts for those perceptions, is important to understand for several reasons. First, utilizing a bioecological approach centering on ODHS employees themselves allows for an increased understanding of how people working within this government system describe proximal processes related to DEIB. Second, if ODHS is serious about changing culture and promoting inclusion in order to both create a more just workplace and to improve its employee retention, then gaining an understanding of how their employees perceive inclusion, diversity, equity and belonging within the context of their workplace is an essential foundation. An understanding of how structural forces dynamically interact with more proximal influences in employees' lives is essential information to those seeking to improve the workplace culture of ODHS specifically. Further, it offers a unique opportunity for analysis during a time of turbulence for the practice of social work writ large, and within Oregon due to the multifaceted problems identified in the 2018 audit.

ODHS employees themselves are active agents within their work contexts, and are thus analyzing their contexts in ways that make connections between more proximal factors and more distal factors clearer to those seeking to intervene. Indeed, employees' perceptions of their social and professional realities lead to real effects (Cooley, 1902). Utilizing a bioecological framework to articulate the connections that employees are making about proximal (i.e., micro level) and more distal (i.e. macro level) contexts can push how the field of human development utilizes theory to explain how people make sense of the human condition within their day-to-day working environments. Employees' perceptions of the ways in which they themselves are, or are not, actors within a system has direct implications for their daily routines and approach to work and in turn, workplace culture.



As a part of ODHS's culture change work with the aforementioned RiSE initiative, ODHS conducted listening sessions across the state in 2019. As an extension of Dr. Kelly Chandler's partnership with ODHS, I conducted the first external qualitative review of those listening session data to interrogate the following research questions (RQs):

- RQ1: How do employees describe their perceptions of diversity, equity, inclusion and/or belonging at ODHS?
- RQ2: To what extent, and how, do ODHS employees connect their perceptions of diversity, equity, inclusion, and/or belonging to specific contexts within and outside the agency?

### **Chapter 3: Method**

This study, which was classified as "exempt" by Oregon State University's Institutional Review Board, was designed to examine ODHS employees' perceptions of phenomena related to workplace inclusion. Between February and August of 2019, an internal team of staff from ODHS's ORRAI ("The RiSE Facilitation team") conducted 46 separate days of listening sessions, for a total of 79 listening sessions at 27 locations across the state of Oregon. In alignment with a perspective sampling approach (Emmel, 2013), I analyzed 39 of those listening sessions which were conducted *solely* with ODHS staff rather than supervisors/managers, comprising of 5,399 lines of data, or an average of 8 pages per listening session. This sampling approach simultaneously allowed a tighter focus on employees working directly with ODHS's vulnerable clients, more alignment with an organizational justice framework's focus on employees, and made the sampling frame more analytically manageable. These listening sessions had two aims: (a) to begin socializing the RiSE initiative with staff across ODHS programs throughout the state, and (b) to foster dialogue with employees, both about their thoughts

regarding the planned intentional culture intervention and their thoughts about ODHS's culture as a whole. In the following section, I detail both the manner in which these secondary qualitative data were collected and my corresponding analytic approach.

### **Site Selection**

The RiSE Facilitation team responsible for data collection consulted with the state's five ODHS program directors, as well as directors of the two more operational offices—Shared and Central Service—to select specific listening session locations. Although there were no rigid criteria for site selection, directors generally considered a set of common factors leading to what they viewed as balanced recommendations, including perceived interest in the sessions, a mix of urban and rural districts and offices, and a mix of offices they perceived to be thriving versus those to be more challenged in terms of culture. Thus, while there were some selection effects present in the method of identifying sites for hosting listening sessions, they appear to be fairly randomized.

### **Participants**

In total, about 1,200 of ODHS's 9,000 staff attended these listening sessions (~13% of employees). Although the attendance range was quite wide—with a low of six and a high of 60—the average attendance was about 30 people per session. The primary invitation method was via promotional emails sent by local leadership. The RiSE team encouraged local leadership to emphasize the message that participation was entirely optional, but the specifics of how the events were promoted, encouraged, or, in some cases, even strongly encouraged varied by location. Further, many managers and supervisors encouraged specific employees to attend because they were engaged in specific organizational or office activities. Such a method of invitation may result in selection effects with the sample, as individuals who opted to join may

have had unique reasons for attending the sessions (e.g. in response to a recent workplace problem resulting in a destabilized workplace culture). Although supervisors, managers, and staff were all invited, the majority of attendees had non-supervisory roles. Additionally, sessions varied in which employees were invited to attend. Some sessions were specific to one of DHS's five program areas: Aging and People with Disabilities, Child Welfare, Office of Developmental Disabilities, Self-Sufficiency Programs, and Vocational Rehabilitation. Other sessions combined Central and Shared Services, such as ODHS's Office of Communications, Office of Human Resources, and Office of Financial Services.

### **Format of Listening Sessions**

The listening sessions were close to a full-day event, and were held from approximately 8:30 am-3:30 pm PT, with an hour allocated for a lunch break. Sessions began with about two and a half hours of lecture about the RiSE initiative. After the lecture and corresponding activities, participants were divided into groups of between five to ten people each and were led by one facilitator and, when available, one notetaker. When a notetaker was not present, facilitators had the dual responsibility of guiding discussion and taking notes. Facilitators were provided a facilitation guide, which includes tips for creating a non-threatening and light atmosphere, asking probing questions, balancing participation, and redirecting discussion. The guide also outlines behaviors to avoid, such as any favoritism, use of jargon, or the permission of side discussion. Then, each listening session group was either assigned or selected an average of two elements to discuss. Facilitators utilized a semi-structured approach, with four common questions grounding all discussions while allowing conversations to flow with a fair degree of freedom (see Table 2). At the time of data collection, there were just five elements included in the RiSE intervention—as such, no questions were asked about the “Equitable Treatment and

Belonging” element. All comments made in response to these questions were logged in an Excel spreadsheet, inclusive of the content of the specific comment, the element and question number, date, location, and the attendees’ program affiliation and role within ODHS. Dr. Kelly Chandler and I reformatted the data from that Excel spreadsheet into individual documents organized by listening session ( $n = 39$ ) for upload into qualitative data analysis software, NVivo (Version 1.2; QSR International, 2021).

## **Procedure**

### ***First Impressions***

Prior to formatting and uploading those documents in NVivo, Dr. Chandler and I both read through the full Excel document to familiarize ourselves with the data. Dr. Chandler served as the second coder on this project, bringing expertise in workplace culture and nearly fifteen years of qualitative research experience since receiving her PhD in Human Development and Family Studies; our work together on this project officially commenced with this first impression process. In the process of that initial review, I wrote a series of first impressions memos, as well as a summative memo, to log any potential early ideas about the data. I made particular note of what kinds of microlevel, macrolevel, and outcome codes might be helpful given my research questions. Following the completion of this first impressions process, I made note of any codes potentially related to the outcomes of interest to aid the development of the codebook.

Subsequently, I discussed and compared first impressions memos with Dr. Chandler, where we aligned on our overarching thoughts about the quality and content of the data. This preparatory work allowed me to develop a draft codebook based on both an awareness of what these data could speak to, and the salient literature on these topics.

### ***Directed Content Analysis***

Following the creation of an initial codebook and importing all formatted listening session documents into NVivo, I conducted directed content analyses on the 39 listening sessions. Directed content analysis was an appropriate method for these data because it offered a structured and systematic approach for operationalizing a priori codes based on existing definitions of the *outcomes of interest* (e.g., inclusion and corresponding child-codes, like feeling respected and valued and psychological safety), *the bioecological theoretical framework* (e.g., macrosystem and corresponding child-codes, like racism and ableism), and the *organizational justice framework* (e.g., distributive justice and corresponding child-codes, like performance feedback and salaries) (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). It allowed for a study of the “practical and immediate” within a post-positivist contextualist worldview (Goldhaber, 2000, p. 51), with a focus on how individuals in this particular sociohistorical context (i.e., ODHS in 2019) describe phenomena related to DEIB. As the name implies, contextualism as a philosophic system takes seriously the role of context in response to what it means to know something is true. The utterances from these listening sessions and the stories and examples employees shared are particular to the time and place in which they occurred, and are also particular to the context of data collection. Because the underlying goal in using this method was to utilize what is already known in the empirical and theoretical literature about the topics of DEIB to be able to capture all examples of the highly contextual phenomena being described by this specific population, a directed content analysis was an appropriate choice.

**First Cycle of Coding.** To answer my research questions, I approached coding in a highly sequenced way following recommendations by Saldaña (2015). To that end, I engaged in two distinct cycles of coding. The launch of the first cycle took place in mid-February 2021, when Dr. Chandler and I collaboratively coded a portion of the first listening session to identify

example applications of the codes, and to test best practices while coding. This preliminary step was indispensable, because it helped to pressure test the coding framework and allowed us to brainstorm ways to iron it out prior to coding independently. One example of a step that needed to be ironed out is that we decided more specificity was needed within the “inclusion” category, prompting me to return to the literature. Inclusion was defined by the processes at play supporting employees in thriving, or processes at play making it challenging for employees to thrive. Recent work by Shore, Cleveland, and Sanchez (2018) synthesized literature on inclusion and created a model of workplace inclusion which identified five categories of workplace inclusion practices: feeling respected and valued; involvement in the work group; psychological safety; transparency/authenticity; influence on decision-making; and recognizing, honoring, and advancing diversity. In addition to these five categories, we identified “feeling supported” as another distinct sub-domain of inclusive processes within these data. While these child-codes needed further refining, their addition was very important for this study. Another key decision made at this early stage was to write an annotation in NVivo whenever either of us felt uncertain about our use of a code.

After this initial meeting, my independent coding began. In the first cycle, I determined whether there was evidence or any reference to diversity, equity, inclusion, and/or belonging (i.e., outcome codes) present in every line of text. If there was, then I assigned the appropriate deductive code(s), or, if it was not immediately clear if or how the line of text was related to those outcomes, I highlighted the text to both revisit later and to discuss during a reconciliation meeting. Because both of my research questions are about these outcomes, if there was no outcome code that could be associated with any given line of text, then I did not code the line at all. If there was an outcome code associated with the text, I continued to code for the aspects of

organizational justice and the bioecological theoretical framework codes. Dr. Chandler independently coded 13% of the listening sessions (i.e., five listening sessions) with the initial coding framework.

After Dr. Chandler completed her independent coding, and I had coded about a quarter of the listening sessions, we held two reconciliation meetings until we reached agreement, and subsequently revised codes and definitions in the codebook. Key decisions about the coding schema were also logged in an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). At this stage, an example of areas of disagreement were related to the child-codes of inclusion. Both Dr. Chandler and I were getting accustomed to how best to operationalize those child codes, which were clearly common throughout the text. For instance, it was challenging distinguishing between the experience of “feeling respected and valued” and “involvement in the work group.” As such, we discussed options for how to tighten both definitions to clarify the kinds of comments which needed to be made for a line to be coded as one versus the other. I incorporated edits to the coding framework in the coding of the remaining three-quarters of the listening sessions, and noted which sessions I needed to revisit with the updated codebook in the second cycle of coding. After I finished this first cycle of coding, I wrote a summative memo and Dr. Chandler reviewed all of my first cycle coding. Her review entailed reading through the coded text individually by code to check for areas of agreement/disagreement; responding to any annotations I had written in NVivo; writing new annotations with additional thoughts or critiques about my first application of codes, and preparing an analytic memo. We had a final series of reconciliation meetings where we reviewed any areas of lingering discrepancies. An example of a lingering discrepancy at this stage was clarifying the differences between “influence on decision-making” and other inclusion child

codes. Overall, we had a very high level of agreement, which I will discuss further below in the context of intercoder reliability.

**Second Cycle of Coding.** The aforementioned series of meetings following the completion of the first cycle of coding resulted in the final version of the codebook which I used as the basis for the second round of coding (see the final codebook in the appendix). In my second round of coding, I first revisited the listening sessions which preceded the initial reconciliation meetings (i.e. the first quarter of the listening sessions), and adjusted coding to match the most updated codebook. Second, I reviewed all annotations written by both myself during the first round of coding and Dr. Chandler during her corresponding review, and either incorporated recommendations or resolved any outstanding issues. Most of those annotations were either referring to areas where either Dr. Chandler or I had initially been unclear about how best to code the line, or an analytic idea I wanted to capture in-the-moment. If there were any areas of disagreement remaining after that review, I discussed them with Dr. Chandler. By then, however, we were quite aligned about what could be counted as any given code; there were no remaining areas of disagreement. After reviewing annotations to understand areas of confusion that emerged while coding, I reviewed everything coded as “inclusion” very carefully to ensure that I picked the correct child code based on the final codebook. I subsequently double-checked that anything coded with a “context” or “org justice” code also had an outcome code attached. Finally, I systematically read through every quote I had coded, code-by-code, and unlinked/relinked codes as necessary per the final version of the codebook. I reflected any changes I made from the reconciliation process with Dr. Chandler in a table where I calculated an intercoder reliability. Given the complexity of this coding framework, it was important to calculate intercoder reliability to improve communicability and transparency of the coding



process (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). Because the purpose of this research was not to reveal any universal objective facts in the spirit of positivism, but rather to apply theory to make sense of a vast array of perspectives, intercoder reliability served as a useful reflexive check to understand how well two researchers were able to arrive at a consensual interpretation of the data. In order to calculate intercoder reliability for this study, I took the percent differences between the number of coded lines of text within each code at the end of cycle 2 and cycle 1, resulting in the change of number of codes between the two time points. Numerically, this shows how much I altered the codes in the second cycle of coding based on the conversations and decisions made during reconciliation meetings (see Appendix B for intercoder reliability broken down by code).

### ***Thematic Analysis***

Following both cycles of the directed content analysis, I conducted a thematic analysis. The thematic analysis took all of the information that I “caught” with the codes in the coding framework, and allowed for deep review and recursive approach for building themes using those codes (Bernard, Wutich, & Ryan, 2016). As Saldaña (2016) advised, I built themes by moving from the particularities of the data, to codes, to categories, to themes, and ultimately, to theories (p. 12). Per Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen, and Snelgrove (2016), themes are the main product of this qualitative analysis, and are here defined as threads of underlying implicit meaning across lines of text linked to an outcome code. Practically, to conduct the thematic analysis of all outcome codes in NVivo in order to answer RQ 1, I first retrieved quotes and annotations associated with those outcome codes. I subsequently reviewed all quotations and annotations separately for each outcome code. In order to support some level of standardization in my development of themes, I again leaned on Vaismoradi and colleagues’ example in moving from the initialization of a theme, to construction, rectification, and finalization, culminating with the

development of coherent story lines (2016, p. 103). To answer RQ 2, which asked about the prevalence of employees making connections between the outcome codes and various contexts, and the content of those connections, I ran a series of 66 matrix coding queries to focus very specifically on the type of content that emerged in the quotes at the intersection of the outcome codes and the various PPCT and organizational justice codes (see Table 3 for a visual depiction of the content of the queries). Dr. Chandler reviewed my initial write-up of themes described in the findings below and the content of these queries, and produced an analytic memo outlining her interpretation of the data to help me minimize confirmation bias.

### ***Reflexivity and Establishing Rigor***

In alignment with Guba and Lincoln's (1985) four domains of trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, I took several measures throughout the study's life cycle to produce trustworthy, reliable findings. First, by way of *credibility*, regular peer debriefing helped to uncover my own biases and posturing towards the analysis. Second, in terms of *transferability*, I have sought to provide as much context about these data as possible to get closer to "thick description" to allow readers to determine the extent to which this content and the conclusions drawn here might be applicable in other situations. Third, when considering *dependability*, the presence of my audit trail captures the steps and sequence of key decisions which affected the coding schema contributing to this study's replicability. Finally, by way of *confirmability*, reflexivity was of central importance. Because every step of any qualitative analysis is an act of interpretation, memoing was a critical component of the analytic process. Memoing has been found to be a valuable tool with a variety of qualitative research methods, allowing for the researcher to record decisions made throughout analysis, identify and extract the meaning of data, continue momentum on the study, and opening communications

with research teams (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008). In this case, the role of the memo was key for each of these points, and as such I started and ended every analytic work session with the composition of a memo. Reflexive memos and regular meetings with Dr. Chandler both served as reflexive checks to reduce the likelihood that my biases and focus on the bioecological theoretical framework could inhibit my ability to make any surprising connections.

Memos also helped me grapple with the challenges of researching issues related to the presence of oppression of vulnerable groups by dominant groups. My own identity, as a cisgendered, able-bodied, bisexual white woman living in Oregon, is anything but separate from the landscape of the content I was analyzing. In many ways, not limited solely to my racial-ethnic or gender identity expressions, I share some attributes and tendencies of the individuals who work at ODHS: Much like most social workers, I desire to help people, make the world better, and I have my own opinions about what it means to be inclusive, equitable, and diverse in the context of life in 2021. As such, there were a few occasions when I identified with [my imagination of] the individuals who participated in these listening sessions, because in some ways I saw them as peers even though I have never knowingly met them. There were also moments in conducting these analyses where I felt strange being the arbiter of what counts as DEIB. In response to awareness of my biases, raised in part because of my memoing, I was able to debrief my experience as it was unfolding with Dr. Chandler, and regularly reviewed any quotes which left me with that feeling of unease. My goal was to center on ODHS employees' reflections on these outcomes of interest rather than *my own* beliefs about what should, or should not, be considered an outcome. The finalized codebook (see Appendix) is a reflection of my attempt to be crisp in these outcome definitions and provide illustrative examples of the kinds of

content which appeared within each code in order to support It is my hope that in alignment with post-positivist approaches, this study provides sufficient objectivity to be of service.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

The aim of this study was to describe how employees of ODHS represented their perceptions of diversity, equity, inclusion, and/or belonging within their workplaces, and understand to what extent those employees seem to connect those perceptions with specific contexts both inside and outside of the agency. In this chapter, I will present the findings and key themes that emerged for both research questions.

### **Findings for RQ1**

RQ1 asked, “*How do employees describe their perceptions of diversity, equity, inclusion, and/or belonging at ODHS?*” Overall, the qualitative analyses indicated that even though DEIB were not explicitly asked about during these listening sessions, these topics appeared to be highly salient to employees across the state. While the number of occurrences of any given code tells just a bit of the story, the following overview will provide both numeric and substantive descriptions of these employees’ perceptions of DEIB. Across all four of those DEIB outcome codes, inclusion was the most prevalent: There were 868 applications of the parent code inclusion and its six children codes (e.g. involvement in the work group, across all listening sessions. Following inclusion was equity, which I identified 118 times across 32 listening sessions. Diversity was described 23 times across 23 listening sessions. Finally, belonging appeared just 18 times across 13 listening sessions. In what follows, I will open the hood of each outcome area to unpack the 16 themes that emerged related to how employees described their view of these outcomes amidst their broader reflections on the culture of ODHS (See Table 3 for themes).

## ***Inclusion***

The specifics of how inclusion was described varied across all six child-codes: feeling respected and valued, involvement in the work group, psychological safety, transparency, influence on decision-making, feeling supported, recognizing, honoring, and advancing of diversity.

**Feeling respected and valued.** The most salient form of inclusion, coded 184 times in 34 listening sessions, was “feeling respected and valued.” The most significant theme within this code was *feeling seen and heard* (Theme 1). Many ODHS employees recounted times when they had what felt like organic, natural conversations with other employees or leadership, which resulted in increases in them feeling like they were respected by their colleagues and their workplace. One employee shared a powerful example of a time ODHS leadership really listened to them:

The 'What do you need?' e-mail came out from Child Welfare. I sent a novel, really poured my heart into it, and a week later I got a call from Marilyn Jones [Oregon’s child welfare director]. We had a conversation about my feedback, and she asked if she could read my e-mail at the dinner at the Governor's House that night, and if she could share it at session. I would have been happy with a personal e-mail, a 'hey, we got your feedback', but getting a personal call felt like real meaningful participation. That, without even any changes was enough for me to say that someone heard me. It gave me hope to carry on. A four minute phone call made all the difference.

This employee shared that she felt heard, and sufficiently hopeful to “carry on,” after a senior leader of ODHS took the time to give her a personal phone call to verbally follow-up about a heartfelt email that the employee had sent after employee feedback had been sought in the first place. The “serve and return” this employee referenced, wherein the organization asked for employee feedback, employee either shared the requested information, and an organizational leader or another team member responded genuinely to that action, reads like a feedback loop that was successfully closed. Other employees shared examples of times when they wished they

had received positive, and preferably immediate and specific, feedback. One employee shared “Would be really nice to hear, ‘You’re doing a good job’ without all the buts.” Another common theme within this sub-domain of inclusion was *lack of access to material or psychological resources resulting in feeling devalued* (Theme 2). Many employees shared that they did not have access to basic office supplies, like paper and pens, which resulted in them feeling devalued. One employee noted that:

People have to bring their own stationary because office won't provide them because they get stolen. When asked for tools the response is that it's not in our budget. Didn't provide paper, pens, markers and said they weren't going to provide them. Makes us feel like we are not valued or not worth it.

A corollary to this lack of resources impacting feeling respected and valued could possibly be a regional effect, captured by this quote from an employee in a rural region:

Salem activities are paid by Salem and we feel like chopped liver. Our own supervisor got us pizza out of her own pocket. Why won't Salem provide for us? We get all these emails about what they're doing for their Salem workers.

This feeling of being like “chopped liver” appears to be brought on by the regular comparison of the resources available to Salem workers versus the workers in this more rural area, in part due to the allocation of resources and in part due to standard communications (i.e., “all these emails”). Finally, employees described feeling devalued when they asked for help but did not received the help they need. For instance, one employee from an urban region shared that “I've felt devalued over the last few years, I've been asking for help, there's no mechanism to hire another paralegal.” A deeper understanding of why there is no mechanism to hire another paralegal would support this employee in feeling more respected and valued, and could potentially extend to other employees as well.

**Involvement in the work group.** The second most prevalent sub-domain of inclusion, “involvement in the work group,” occurred 168 times across 32 listening sessions. The central theme in this sub-domain was that many employees describe *feeling alone rather than interdependent with their teams* (Theme 3). Several employees noted simply that “I am alone, and everyone thinks I can do this on my own, and I can’t,” or “Everyone is their own island.” Another employee connected this phenomenon to workplace culture: “We have created a culture of not working together, so the expectations we have working with other departments has been skewed.” This aloneness seemed to be in contrast to a desired state of increased interdependence, where individuals are working toward a common interest as one unified entity. As one employee put it, “All units are separated—BEWS, FC, Support—feels like “us and them” we asked for a team meeting, they [Leadership] just said, ‘no’. We need to be one & contribute to all as one team.” To add further challenge to operating as a team, there were multiple descriptions of a climate that did not allow enough time for people to get to know their colleagues due to high workloads and time pressure. Yet, at the same time, employees wanted to know that their team had their back. With regards to the lack of time for relationship building, one employee shared:

Some supervisors have attempted to facilitate connection amongst group, but low turnout because everyone is stressed for time. Cannot attend because I will fall behind and be punished.

In this instance, then, even though a supervisor made efforts to create a relationship-building space, other incentive structures and workplace demands created a context where workers felt like they could not carve the time to attend. Further, if they chose to attend and subsequently fell behind because they prioritized building relationships with their colleagues, at least one employee believed they would be punished.

**Psychological safety.** The third sub-domain of inclusion is psychological safety, which was referenced 153 times across all 39 listening sessions. The first theme present within this area was *significant variability in where people feel safe across individuals and contexts* (Theme 4). Some employees referenced feelings of psychological safety with their unit, but not with other teams or offices. As one employee said, “My unit is my family and I feel comfortable there, but beyond that, forget about it.” Relatedly, another employee commented that:

The team I have now makes me feel safe; we don't have enough time, and we work really hard, and we don't get to talk about cases we need to talk about. I don't always trust other offices because of being burned in the past. Each office is run very differently, we all have policies we need to respect. For example some offices declining applications and others saying no, this isn't policy. You can't deny an intake.

Differences across offices in terms of both policies and procedures seem to have negatively affected this employee's ability to trust their internal teams, and teams at other locations they may need to interact with. Another prevalent theme within this category is the idea that caring for clients sometimes impacts their own psychological safety. One employee shared, “We are really good about caring for our clients but we also beat ourselves down. We are client-centered and take care of our clients.” Another made connections between lack of available staff to cover for time off, which impacts clients: “When can I fit the support into my schedule? No one to cover if time off is needed and that will affect the families we serve and affect caseload.” Another employee noted that they experienced this tension between tremendous time pressure and high workload on one end, and their own self-care on the other, as receiving mixed messages: “Self-care, but take care of all this.”

Finally, some employees made connections between psychological safety and the experience of racism within the workplace. One employee spoke to this transparently:



Observation – black and indigenous people. The room can be white – it doesn't feel safe. Being in a lot of meetings at HSB. It is rare that I am not the only person of color in the room. Until organization realizes that is a psychological safety issue, it will be a safety issue.

In the context of a predominantly white organization, the act of being one of the only non-white people in these spaces does not feel safe to this employee of color.

**Transparency.** The fourth child code of inclusion, transparency, appeared 117 times across 30 listening sessions. Transparency referred to both transparency of communication and transparency in the representation of one's identities within the workplace. The predominant theme within this code was *a desire to know the "why" behind decisions* (Theme 5) made throughout the agency. Several employees used terminology suggesting that secrets are intentionally kept from staff. For example, one employee noted, "Manager treats most information as secretive and does not share." Several other comments noted that there may be some pieces of information that cannot be shared, but the underlying reason why the information cannot be shared should potentially be known to employees. For instance, one employee said, "I'd rather have hard & true info than no info. For example, 'There's a political reason behind this, we can't share this.'" Similarly, someone else noted explained, "There's a difference between no transparency because 'we don't want you to know' and 'we don't know yet'. Don't protect me from that, tell me you don't know, or tell me 'I can only tell you this much.'"

The second most prevalent theme within the transparency code was the idea of *honest communications* (Theme 6), both in terms of content and sincerity. Content can include information about how staff are filling their time, and thus creating more transparency about the processes used to allocate and monitor workloads. Clarity around an individual's limits and boundaries was valued by some employees, including one person who shared that "In my new

unit, we support each other by being transparent, saying ‘I can do this much, but this is my bandwidth.’” In terms of sincerity, some employees noted that there is a lack of genuineness present within ODHS. For example, one stated that “Sometimes [a] message seems insincere.” Finally, several employees spoke to the *ability to be authentic in the representation of identities* (Theme 7) within this code. One employee spoke about the ODHS positively: “I came from the private sector where I learned not share dreams and aspirations with managers. It felt strange when talking to supervisors here, it was a nice change.” In contrast to that comment, another employee shared that they “feel like I have to be vanilla, to work on a team, my personality has been stripped. I have to do things a specific way, because we all have to do things the same.” The former comment shows a more positive vignette, wherein working at ODHS feels like a breath of fresh air following work in the private sector. The latter comment is a more negative story, one where workers feel they must assimilate in order to do things the same as other workers to produce reliable results across the state.

**Influence on decision-making.** The fifth sub-domain of the inclusion parent code, influence on decision-making, appeared 112 times across 31 listening sessions. The primary theme here was *a disconnect between those doing the work and decision-makers* (Theme 8). Employees routinely referenced grappling with the new decisions from Salem which impact their day-to-day work. One employee said the following about the rollout of a statewide hotline in April 2019:

“...there are things from Central & ORCAH that are rolling out, without clear communication. The work is drastically changing for front end workers, with no clear expectations or communication. There’s anxiety, whispers, but people don’t know & are scared.”

Some employees believed that those at the Central Office did not necessarily know what would be best for children and families, because they are removed from the day-to-day work. It also appears that some employees believe that Central Office does not really want to incorporate the suggestions of frontline staff, and instead are just checking a box. To address that rift, employees articulated a *desire to have a more active role in decision-making* processes (Theme 9). One employee said “Trust me. Give me some control. Believe the words that I’m saying. Don’t make a decision before I ask – make a decision based on the info I report to you.” Another, in an apparent critique of the format of the listening sessions, stated, “Staff is tired of ‘listening sessions’. We would like a more active role in the decision-making and implementation process.”

**Feeling supported.** This sub-domain of the inclusion code was referenced 69 times across 27 listening sessions. A few staff noted, positively, that they believe that ODHS is a supportive workplace. One employee said it is “more supportive than the average environment [Because we do emotional work, we’re in a *\*social\** work].” Examples of positive support ranged from emotional support to a shared focus on clients. *Emotional support* (Theme 10) was often described as physical presence and comforting after charged and challenging moments with clients. One employee shared:

Supervisor pulled me into a room after she walked down the aisle and saw me sobbing in my cubicle after a trial. She let me cry and reminded me 'this is just a job'. That support meant a lot, especially from someone with 30 years of experience under her belt.

In contrast to that positive belief framed around the nature of social work as a whole, there were several patterns here related to the ability to take breaks and time off. In two instances, employees shared challenging personal situations with poor demonstrations of managerial support. First, one employee shared that “Manager schedule meetings when I am on vacation and

expects me to attend. I had to leave my vacation to meet with my manager. My manager was calling and emailing me while on vacation and expected responses.” Thus, for this employee, even when they took personal time off, they were unable to fully turn off from work due to their manager’s actions. Another worker shared a desire for “More support around family emergencies – husband had a stroke came in to tell the manager and the first thing that was asked was, ‘Well are you going to come to work tomorrow?’” These comments signal a potential pattern worth exploring related to concrete actions supervisors can take to help employees feel supported related to reinforcing and advocating their use of personal time off.

**Recognizing, honoring, and advancing diversity.** The final sub-domain of inclusion—recognizing, honoring, and advancing diversity—was referenced 51 times across 20 listening sessions. The content coded within this sub-domain is illustrated by a tension between a concern for how *actions against marginalized groups might negatively impact both the workplace and the clients with whom ODHS works* (Theme 11) along with *different portrayals of how to advance diversity through hiring processes* (Theme 12). With regard to the former, the most frequently discussed marginalized groups were people of color and women. One employee noted that “Micro aggressions in [the] office to each other causes concern with how we may treat our vulnerable clients,” and another shared that male leadership needs training to avoid being intimidated by female voices. They clarified that “They have a [sic] attitude towards women speaking up.” Both of these examples indicate that some internal practices or norms are potentially contributing to hostile working environments for employees of color and women. Given this context for marginalized groups when they are able to be present within the agency, a deeper grappling with hiring processes is needed. Some employees noted that hiring for cultural

fit within a biased organization will not advance diversity: “If you're hiring for culture fit, you're going to miss diversity, you need to hire for culture awareness that we're all different.”

### ***Equity***

Equity appeared 118 times across 32 listening sessions. The most salient theme related to equity was that in part because of chronic staffing shortages, *workloads and expectations vary person-by-person in ways that some do not perceive as fair* (Theme 13). One staff member observed that staffing is not calibrated to regional needs: “Staffing statewide is not equitable. In one day in [location], one client went in and they had two calls. Resources are not being distributed equitably.” Other employees called for more equitable distributions of work across teams of workers. Some employees conflated equity for equality. For example, one worker noted that “Expectations not the same for everyone. Standardized expectations for everyone would be nice.” The other two common scenarios present within these codes were new staff having inadequate access to resources like computers or office space, and inequitable distribution of trainings and training support materials.

### ***Diversity***

Diversity was coded 23 times across 10 listening sessions. Significantly, while there was a small amount of overlap with the “Recognizing, honoring, and advancing of diversity” code, because diversity is more explicitly about the demographic make-up of the relevant work group, a few additional items arose in this code. *Diversity of perspectives* (Theme 14) and *diversity of person factors* (Theme 15) arose. Within the theme of diversity of perspectives, issues related to recruitment and retention were present. One employee shared that “The panel needs to reflect the diversity they aspire to, at least to some degree. If the panel stays homogenous, the workforce will likely too,” signaling that if diversity is needed, then hiring panels should be less

homogenous. This homogeneity is in alignment with our knowledge that ODHS as a whole is a mostly white organization. Potentially contributing to this according to one employee, “In the past, we’ve seen high [sic] African American and people with disabilities be fired.” Other staff stated strongly that “hiring and retention and promotion from underrepresented communities” was an important pathway to more authentically engaging with communities ODHS serves. In terms of other person factors related to diversity, the person factors referenced most frequently were ODHS tenure, race, job title, gender, and ability status. Multiple employees referenced educational differences between staff as a barrier to strong relationships. One employee shared “I had one caseworker that could really bring me down, and it only takes one. ‘Yes, I’m here without a college degree, I know you’ve had 7 years of college experience, you’ve told me several time.’”

### ***Belonging***

The final outcome code, belonging, appeared 18 times across 13 listening sessions. The primary theme related to belonging is the *centrality of human connection* (Theme 16). Despite the importance of human connection, several noted that it was not sufficiently present in their work. For instance, one employee shared, “Everything here has to be in writing, not person to person. Which is good for tracking, but we’re missing the human connection.” This focus on the written word over prioritizing social relationships is prevalent, and transforms relationships into task-based interactions. As another employee shared, “Task based, no longer have time to talk, can’t build relationships. All about numbers.” As a result of this mode of operation, not knowing all of the people who work on your floor, or in your building, was a common phenomenon.

## **Findings for RQ2**

RQ2 asked “*To what extent, and how, do ODHS employees connect their perceptions of diversity, inclusion, equity, and/or belonging to specific contexts within and outside the agency?*” To answer this question, I ran a series of 66 matrix coding queries (i.e., crosstabs) in NVivo to identify the intersection of quotations coded as an outcome code and a PPCT or org. justice code (see Table 4 for a visualization of all the crosstabs run). Overall, ODHS employees did connect their perceptions of outcomes to specific contexts within and outside the agency. Most significantly, 30% of the time employees were talking about their perceptions of DEIB outcomes, they were also talking about some aspect of organizational justice. Almost as prevalent as connections to organizational justice was connections to context codes—29% of the time respondents were talking concretely about those outcomes, they were also talking about context. Nearly 7% of the time respondents were talking about those outcomes, they were also talking about person-level factors. What follows is a summary of the content that emerged within each set of crosstabs organized by outcome code to better understand how employees connected their perceptions of these outcomes with these various categories of codes.

### ***Inclusion***

Employees made connections between inclusion and the macrolevel, along with person, and organizational justice. In terms of the macrosystem, employees referenced problems with lack of inclusion in ways that could be predicted by race, age, culture, gender identity, and ability. Person-level characteristics identified in conjunction with inclusion ranged from employee age, tenure at ODHS, ability, culture, gender, and race. Tenure at ODHS, was associated with different kinds of issues related to inclusion: newer employees had a lack of support, and older employees experienced a lack of respect. In terms of organizational justice, a

panoply of workplace phenomena were referenced, ranging from hiring practices, professional development and career advancement opportunities, recognition for quality work, and retention to name a few.

**Feeling respected and valued.** Macro-, micro, and person-level codes were used at the same time as the “feeling respected and valued” code. At the intersection of “feeling respected” and “macrosystem” were just a few quotations related to the tension between feeling devalued as an employee and a belief that social work lends itself to a more supportive workplace context than average. At the microlevel, employees detailed specific actions that they find result in them feeling either valued or devalued, respected or disrespected. On the positive end, they referred to actions like informal talk building a sense of community, seeing colleagues smiling in the office, and buying someone a coffee when they have a bad day. On the negative end of the spectrum, they referenced clique behavior, gossiping, or unequal allocation of resources across sites. At the intersection of “feeling respected” and “person” codes, ODHS tenure came up the most frequently. Newer employees were said to not have access to resources they needed, whereas employees who had been with ODHS longer felt disrespected by having to spend a week of valuable time at a mandatory training designed for new workers.

**Involvement in the work group.** Within this child-code, macrosystem, microsystem, person, and organizational justice codes were also present. At a macrolevel, listening to all employees and both leadership being responsive to their needs, especially related to supporting efforts to build team-level trust due to healing from in-office racism and the effects of constant turnover. On the microlevel, employees again described the creation of opportunities to build a sense of community. However, this sense of community was challenging for many employees because of limited opportunities related to office space configuration, workload, and office



culture. By way of person-level codes, the few that were present emphasized the importance of supporting new employees in feeling like they are a part of the team. Finally, at the intersection of “involvement in the work group” and “organizational justice,” variation in perceptions of fairness was referenced by rurality, branch, and supervisors.

**Psychological Safety.** Macrolevel, microlevel, person, and organizational justice codes were present within the “psychological safety” child-code. At a macrolevel, employees made it clear that they are in need of psychological and emotional safety, as well as physical safety, with both their colleagues and their clients at ODHS. At a microlevel, variation by rurality, program, and job title were all referenced, as they were in “involvement in the work group” above. Gossip, and the creation of a “culture of fear,” resulting in employees believing that if they make mistakes, they will be punished, were two ways in which people described negative associations at the intersection of microsystem and psychological safety. Several employees also demonstrated connections between feelings of trust and feelings of psychological safety—for these individuals, the two concepts are go hand-in-hand. Because of the constant churn of staff and management at ODHS, there are very regular changes in expectations of staff and regular reconfigurations of what teams look like. Both of these results of turnover ultimately lead to reduced feelings of psychological safety. At the intersection of person and psychological safety codes, I found references to length of ODHS tenure, job title, program, and whether or not the employee identifies as BIPOC represented. Finally, with respect to organizational justice, employees noted lack of accountability for both some management and employees, and a tension between feeling unsafe to take vacations and feeling a need to take mental health breaks because of the occasionally traumatic nature of the work.

**Transparency.** Transparency was represented at the macro-, micro-, and person-levels. At a macrolevel, some employees did not feel clear about their job titles, and desired more open conversations with ODHS leadership about the nature of their work. At a micro-level, transparency varied by office, program, agency, and unit. Employees shared a desire to discuss their feelings about the direction of their work, but at the same time feel like they need to put aside those feelings in order to just move forward on their jobs. Person-level codes which co-appeared with transparency were tenure at ODHS, ability, and age.

**Influence on decision-making.** Macro-, micro-, and person-level codes co-appeared with “influence on decision-making.” At a macrolevel, a need to empower a variety of voices in decision-making processes at all levels, not just from the top-down emerged. At a micro-level, substantial variation by program, branch, and unit of ODHS was relayed again. A disconnect amongst offices was identified, as well, wherein there are fewer voices and less overall representation from disadvantaged locations. The individuals who shared thoughts about representation at the “important tables” in Salem were from urban locations. Finally, in terms of person-level codes, ODHS tenure and job title were again salient. Employees referenced a belief that newer managers were more likely to be open to allowing others to have a voice. Also, an employee identified that leads are not supported by leadership, and as such, there is reduced incentive for pursuing or accepting promotions.

**Feeling supported.** The penultimate child-code of inclusion, “feeling supported,” intersected with macrolevel and person-level codes. In terms of macrolevel, employees reported feeling a lack of support or consistent advocacy from management. In terms of person-level intersections, generally, there was a perception that people with disabilities and women received less support than, presumably, able-bodied men.

**Recognizing, honoring, and advancing diversity.** The final child-code of inclusion, “recognizing, honoring, and advancing diversity,” co-appeared with macrolevel, microlevel, and person-level codes. At the macrolevel and person-level, employees described learning to honor a variety of person-level characteristics, such as gender identity, race, physical ability, rurality, and culture. At a microlevel, the need for better representation of diverse identities, backgrounds, and lived experiences in both ODHS’s specific hiring and decision-making emerged.

### ***Equity***

At a macrolevel, there was concern for the ways in which institutional racism, sexism, ageism, and ableism perpetuate inequities within the agency by keeping status quo, and preventing more diverse hiring and promotions to leadership positions. One employee noted that racism was “the elephant in the room,” which cannot be remedied without honest collective reflection and acknowledgement that it exists at the agency. Some employees also felt concerned about how the effects of workplace inequities on marginalized workers is, in turn, negatively affecting how clients are treated. At a microlevel, the allocation of resources and staff are perceived as being inequitable throughout the state, where some areas are not getting enough of what is needed and they perceive more than enough in other places. Another employee shared that they believed some offices that are believed to be “superstars” get regular support and recognition, but the offices with the most need are struggling and feel less supported. Finally, with regards to person-level characteristics, two patterns emerged. First characteristics like sex, race, parental status, and ability were related to perceptions of fewer promotions and lower pay. Second, new employees are not provided with adequate onboarding and/or training, which leaves them unprepared to do their work, which ultimately contributes to turnover.

### ***Diversity***

“Diversity” intersected with macro-, micro-, and person-level codes, along with organizational justice codes. At a macrolevel, employees shared that there are no repercussions within the agency for microaggressions. The example one employee provided was microaggressions used against non-binary/queer staff, and staff without college degrees. At a microlevel, employees shared that diversity training conducted to date was surface-level, and largely ineffective. One employee noted that it was essentially training to be polite in contrast with, for example, communicating across difference. A couple employees believed that focusing on points of commonality rather than focusing on differences was a better approach for fostering diversity than continuing to breathe life into categories of difference. In terms of person-level codes, employees made references to needing to minimize their authentic selves in order to assimilate into the agency to be accepted. Finally, at the intersection of diversity and organizational justice, some employees thought that making improvements in training and advertising more about justice would facilitate hiring and retaining more diverse staff. There were also more references to intentionally promoting people from underrepresented groups.

### ***Belonging***

Finally, belonging only had a few intersections, but employees did make connections between macro- and microlevel forces contributing to a *lack* of belonging, or othering. First, at a macrolevel, institutional racism, discrimination, and marginalization all need to be addressed in order to increase belonging of people of color, specifically. At a micro-level, many employees shared an experience of both physical and psychological isolation, which made them feel othered. Last, at the person-level, an employee noted that it has been an exhausting process, as someone who has experienced racism, to feel like they do belong.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

This study utilized a bioecological approach centering on ODHS employees in order to accomplish two aims, and to answer two research questions. The aims of this study were to (a) increase understanding of how people working within this government system describe proximal processes related to DEIB; and (b) support ODHS in their culture change efforts by identifying how their employees conceptualize DEIB. The research questions this study has answered were: (a) How do employees describe their perceptions of diversity, equity, inclusion, and/or belonging at ODHS? and (b) To what extent, and how, do ODHS employees connect their perceptions of diversity, inclusion, equity, and/or belonging to specific contexts within and outside the agency? Together, the answers to these questions shed light on what employees who work very proximally to the downstream effects of societal injustices identify as processes and contexts supportive, or unsupportive, of a sense of belonging within the workplace.

On the whole, when employees were talking about diversity, equity, inclusion, and/or belonging, they spoke more frequently about microsystem contexts (e.g. supervisor relationships) than macrosystem-level contexts (e.g. structural racism). Where they made connections to macrolevel forces, they were primarily striving to make connections between the outcomes they were experiencing or observing, and ways of describing attitudes or institutional structures that subordinate a group of people because of their target group (e.g., racism, ableism, and sexism). Other times employees made connections between the outcomes of interest and the macrolevel were when they were speaking very specifically in response to the current state of ODHS—one where all employees are not listened to, and where the workplace is not consistently responsive to employees' needs. Thus, in both the more immediate workplace context and in the fabric of societal-level “-isms” which perpetuate injustices amongst oppressed

groups of people, employees identified connections to factors which contribute to how they feel othered by, or like they belong within, their workplace. All in all, the employees who participated in these listening sessions had rich and multidimensional ways of thinking about DEIB within ODHS. Transforming the themes identified through the analysis into theories about those multidimensional ways of thinking may result in some recommendations for ODHS to consider amidst their culture reinvention work, and other workplaces working to more intentionally center on employee belonging by enhancing diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.

### **Review of themes and creation of synthesized, cross-outcome theories**

Thus far, I have identified themes which percolated within the individual outcomes, and have highlighted the ways in which employees described the overlap of those outcomes with microlevel and macrolevel contexts (see table 4). Because diversity, equity, and inclusion all contribute to an individual's sense of belonging, weaving these themes together as described by Saldaña (2015) allowed three broader theories, or stories, to emerge: (a) the dehumanization of ODHS employees, (b) "childification" of ODHS employees, and (c) a substantial disconnect between decision-makers and frontline workers. Collectively, these stories contribute to, and deepen, the field's understanding of both othering and belonging.

#### ***Dehumanization of ODHS employees***

In weaving together the themes "feeling seen and heard," "lack of access to material or psychological resources resulting in feeling devalued," "feeling alone rather than interdependent with teams," "emotional support," and "centrality of human connection," a larger story related to the *dehumanization of ODHS's employees* emerges. Multiple employees drew comparisons between assembly lines, conjuring images of production: "Feels like an assembly line mentality, very production focused not person focused, transactional interactions." In order to support the

substantial workloads ODHS employees are asked to manage, some employees in this sample suggested that they were asked explicitly by the state to focus on numbers over people. This is clear in one employee's remarks: "The state hired me for [my] compassion- now [I'm] being told 'chop-chop' so I'm notable to be true to myself. Production line is the expectation." It's clear that there is an art to the work of being an ODHS employee. The employees referred to it as "quality over quantity," and, to do it well, they need space in their schedules for some creative liberties. In one extreme example of not having space in schedules, one employee shared that "I asked for an additional 5 minutes between appointments to finish things and breathe, and was told no- you're past 6 months, your training time is over." Here, "training time" is equated with the human need to take breaks, and to cognitively shift between tasks; indeed, it is suggested that once you are no longer a trainee, the expectation is that employees can function without such transition breaks. All together, then, employees are being held accountable to assembly line style metrics with variable levels of supervision, guidance, or recognition of human needs. This appears to result in frustration and decreases in organizational inclusion due to feeling devalued. Work at ODHS appears to focus so tightly on client-facing activities that focus on employees is pushed aside—respect of employee perspectives is far from central. When this story about dehumanization is connected with the stories related to employee assimilation, retention, and hiring challenges, it seems possible that exploring what *rehumanizing* the experience of being an ODHS employee might be a fruitful pathways for investigation.

### ***"Childification" of ODHS employees***

When weaving together the themes "desire to know 'why' behind decisions", "Feeling seen and heard", "Disconnect between those doing the work and decision-makers", "diversity of perspectives", "diversity of person factors", and "lack of access to material or psychological

resources resulting in feeling devalued”, a story related to ODHS employees being untrusted emerges. Building on where we left off in the first story, some employees may experience the “factory” model of social services as daunting and dehumanizing. However, another emotional response to some of ODHS leadership treatment can be described with the phrase “childification” of ODHS employees. Multiple employees drew explicit comparisons to being treated like children who could not be trusted to perform. For example, one employee noted: “Need to have that trust to have that dialogue and be open; they hired us, they know we’re professionals, treat us like professionals and we’ll act like one. I think that idea got lost someone [sic]- they think we’re all a bunch of backstabbing kids.” Another employee articulated feeling like they were being babysat by HR: “HR. I feel like I’m babysat. I have to ask permission for everything. Even transportation. We never had to do that.” Other employees made comparisons between ODHS and junior high, with cliques and gossip at all levels, and others still experienced belittling micromanagement: “When we saw them [the supervisors] strolling around we felt like it was a micromanagement thing. They told us if our interviews ran over into the break we were supposed to adjust our breaks, but a manager walked into the break room and pointed to the clock in front of everyone. Not the same expectations for me, I felt singled out and like a small child.” These kinds of demeaning experiences emphasize power differentials between employees and other staff, e.g. supervisors, and results in negative feelings about oneself and about the agency. Efforts should be made to emphasize the significant role ODHS workers have as professionals and leaders within their field, focusing on supporting autonomy and building trust. Importantly, though employees themselves drew comparisons between perceived lack of trust from their supervisors and being treated like children, these ideas perpetuate negative stereotypes



that children are inherently less worthy of trust by virtue of their age; indeed, the treatment employees described would not even be acceptable towards children.

### *Disconnection between decision-makers and frontline workers*

Finally, in weaving together the codes “Feeling alone rather than interdependent with teams,” “lack of access to material or psych resources leading to feeling devalued” “disconnect between those doing the work and decision-makers” and “desire to know the ‘why’ behind decisions,” is a story about a disconnect between central office workers and ODHS field employees. A more moderate voice commenting on this issue noted that “The field changes so fast. When people go up to Central Office they lose touch.” In losing touch, Central Office contributes to feedback problems and instability. As one employee noted, “We prove staff right all the time. We operate like a pendulum, we try something, and we do not provide stability, we always go back and forth and create no stability.” Meanwhile, employees on the ground spoke repeatedly about strong desires to be more actively involved in decision-making, understand what decisions will affect them, and if so, how decisions will affect them. Wherever possible, employees also signaled interest in actively contributing to that decision-making. This growth area for ODHS would strengthen nearly every aspect of RiSE.

Across all of these stories, aspects of white supremacy culture described by Tema Okun (2001) were present. Perfectionism appears rampant in part due to the culture of fear. As one employee noted, “I wake up lots of times thinking I am afraid of doing anything wrong. For a while, they fired people frequently, or reprimanded. Just want to get your job done. Too afraid of not making mistakes.” Worship of the written word, quantity over quality, and paternalism have also been evident at every turn, at the expense of the experience of frontline workers.

### **Future Directions for the Field and for ODHS**

The themes and stories outlined in the above sections lend themselves to important takeaways about workplace belonging to guide future research, and several concrete ideas for ODHS leadership to consider when implementing and evaluating RiSE.

The stories which surfaced within this study present evidence of the processes by which this sample of employees felt othered by, or a sense of belonging within, their workplaces. They collectively demonstrated that inclusive workplace practices can contribute to a sense of employee belonging, and non-inclusive workplace practices can contribute to a sense of employee othering. In being dehumanized, untrusted, and disconnected from the hub of decision-making impacting the day-to-day experience of their jobs, employees in this study painted a fairly dark picture of how othering can play out in a workplace. The prevalence of discussion about inclusion, and the ways in which both positive and negative inclusive practices were described, demonstrated the utility of both the PPCT model and the organizational justice framework for workplaces interested in supporting employees' sense of belonging. The PPCT model has proven capable of identifying the most salient levels of context from the perspective of employees themselves, which can guide both future research as well as intervention efforts within ODHS and, perhaps, even within other workplaces. Because DEI are complex constructs which connect macro-cultural factors with every-day, micro-level contexts, interrogating those layers of context requires a model capable of holding and connecting micro with macro to prioritize where and how to intervene. The organizational justice framework, on the other hand, was able to connect typical workplace practices with employees' ideas about what is fair and what is unfair. Future studies can similarly utilize these theoretical frameworks to inform employees' perceptions on factors contributing to, or preventing, their sense of belonging at work.

Researchers interested in supporting organizations like ODHS in their organizational culture change efforts are in a prime position to design and execute follow-up studies building on these findings. Future studies could return to these listening session data and conduct more analyses focused explicitly on rural/urban or regional differences, or differences by program, to understand how those variables may contribute to employees' perceptions of DEIB outcomes. Conducting follow-up interviews with individuals who participated in these listening sessions could be an interesting way to both understand how workers' feelings of belonging change over time, and how they connect those feelings of belonging to historical events and the roll-out of RiSE. Finally, supporting ODHS in integrating DEIB into RiSE inspired by findings from this study could look like a community-based participatory action research project, which could in turn support the field in improving operationalization of both bioecological theory and definitions of belonging and inclusion.

In addition to these broader takeaways, because of the highly specific and contextual nature of these data, what follows are recommendations ODHS leadership can consider in alignment with the purpose of RiSE, i.e. to build a more intentional, positive, and inclusive workplace culture:

- *Complete feedback loops with employees:* Site-based supervisors and ODHS central office staff can develop internal norms for closing any loops of communication opened with field staff. For example, in situations where staff are surveyed to inform the development of a product, providing them with regular updates on the status of said product may promote feelings of belonging.
- *Tailor communications/email blasts to intended recipients:* Many employees noted that they are deluged with emails from central office that do not seem relevant for either their

location or role. Tailoring communications by role and location, and being strategic about moments when all ODHS staff across the state must receive an update may contribute to employees feeling respected, because their workplace honors their time.

- *Identify how celebrations vary:* Notice when, why, who, and how often central office is promoting and celebrating specific individuals or workplaces, such as recognition in newsletters and allocated funds for events.
- *Evaluate team compositions and workloads:* Teams that experience chronic turnover are in need of additional supports to build authentic, collaborative working relationships. Because coworker relationships are a predictor of turnover, the confluence of heavy workloads and a lack of ability to forge the relational ties which can help people get through hard times is lost. Supervisors and senior leadership should consider ways to lighten workload across the board, but especially for those high turnover locations, while mitigating the risk that other high performers will view this as disincentivizing heavier workloads.
- *Investigate what, if anything, is contributing to reasons why relationships are de-incentivized.* Employees repeatedly reported that they either did not have opportunities to build relationships with their colleagues, or they felt unable to prioritize relationship-building due to their workloads. Understanding more about the specific daily experiences resulting in employees choosing to deprioritize relationship-building would help
- *Support employee PTO:* Managers strive to support employee right to personal time off- and set expectations for how to request and use PTO before it is needed.

## **Missingness**

In any analysis, patterns present in missing data are arguably just as important as patterns present in existing data. The thematic analysis—the second step in my analytic process—allowed me to ask, “What is missing?” while reviewing these data (Bernard et al., 2016). The most central issues at play with respect to potential missingness of data in this study are related to selection bias of the sample, method of data collection, and approach to notetaking. Selection bias is a risk within this study because, while ODHS’s central office in Salem asked every ODHS office to invite a wide variety of employees and staff, there was no consistency in, or clarity why, specific individuals who participated opted to join. One point which was made very clear in the data is that these employees feel significant time pressure—so much so that many reported having inadequate time to attend brief community-building meetings in their offices. This optional training was almost the length of a full workday, and often required a bit of travel. Additional information about the events that led up to these listening sessions, along with identified information about the participants, would have been valuable information to both help determine why they chose to be present, and whether they had anything on their mind when they learned that it was about a workplace culture initiative. Second, the method of data collection was a listening session, with small groups of 5-10 individuals answering questions and discussing what they imagined the various aspects of the RiSE intervention could look like in practice. Because DEIB were not explicitly asked about in these listening sessions, and because of broader cultural patterns related to colorblindness in the context of the United States, it is possible that people of color or other marginalized sub-populations of employees did not feel like they had the scaffolding needed to be able to safely speak out. As I did see in the data,

psychological safety and receiving emotional support is a substantial concern of employees, and as such must be taken seriously by those interested in organizational culture change.

### **Limitations**

As is the case with all studies, the proposed study presents a variety of both limitations and strengths. Secondary qualitative data analyses are known to be challenging, and this study is no exception (Tripathy, 2013). The method of data collection limits several aspects of analysis. First and foremost, while comments captured each represents an attempt to quote individual employees verbatim, the specific characteristics of the individual employees represented are unavailable. This means that salient person-level characteristics, such as race, ethnicity, gender, age, and length of employment at ODHS are all not present in the dataset. Second, there are no markers of the actual flow of dialogue present within the listening session breakout groups; each comment is represented in individual row in an Excel spreadsheet, without clear links between lines other than an approximation of sequence. Further, any interjections or probing questions the facilitator may have asked are absent from the dataset.

Taken together, these absences are significant because they limit the depth of the data available, and restrict the analysis to the content of the words themselves, along with the few additional pieces of information we have in connection with each comment (including the location of the session, question number in reference, and the position and program of the speaking individual). Relatedly, because this context was absent from the data, individual lines of data which were frequently likely uttered in direct response to a previous speaker had to be analyzed individually to reduce the likelihood of reading content into the data. This is a real loss in a study where the context of data collection could have had such substantial influence on how much employees, especially marginalized employees, were willing to share. Third, from a

logistical perspective, it is unclear how breakout groups were created within these sessions. That is to say that it is unclear if there was a systematic approach for dividing a room full of attendees into breakout groups. This would have been a helpful piece of information to include in analysis, as it has implications for whether or not participants in the breakout groups had pre-existing working and/or personal relationships, which in turn may affect their willingness to speak during a breakout group.

### **Strengths**

With all of those limitations said, there remain many strengths which justify the value of the proposed study. Because these data have already been collected, but have not been systematically reviewed by anyone external to ODHS, the proposed study offers a fresh and more systematic analysis of the data to inform ODHS's organizational culture intervention efforts without the biases associated with an internal review. ODHS is in the process of determining how to incorporate DEIB efforts into the RiSE intervention, so this study has the potential to directly inform the manner in which staff build out and further refine their culture-changing work. Second, this dataset presents a rare opportunity to analyze qualitative data from a substantial proportion (~ 10%) of the full study population, i.e. ODHS employees across the entire state of Oregon. Also, the proposed study is positioned to directly extend existing theoretical knowledge of how humans develop in work contexts by offering insights into how ODHS's employees make sense of their occupational environments, inclusive of what is and is not, within their power to control. As a whole, this study simultaneously strengthens literature on human development, and has the capacity to be support ODHS in building a more inclusive organizational culture and potentially inform other workplace culture change initiatives.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

Many adults get up every day and head to work at least five days a week. Every workplace has a culture which simultaneously affects the employee, and is affected by any individual employee's presence. Workplace cultures can be intentionally built, and can aim to be inclusive spaces for all employees. While many workplaces want to create more equitable and inclusive workspaces where a diverse staff can feel a sense of belonging, it can be challenging to operationalize because of the extent to which *it is complex*. This study aimed to learn from employees of just one workplace, ODHS, to understand how their employees conceptualize within the context of their own organizational culture. Because these employees work on the frontlines of social justice issues, I hypothesized that they would be predisposed to both notice and report the ways in which macrolevel phenomena, such as racism, permeates their experiences of their workplace culture. To that end, I conducted a content and thematic analysis of listening session data conducted across the state of Oregon in 2019. I identified 16 themes, and developed 3 theories, related to these outcomes, each of which could help guide decision-makers at ODHS toward more precise behaviors and policies to move forward on the RiSE with an explicit DEIB and organizational justice lens. Though ODHS's context is certainly unique, the themes and stories which emerged likely transcend across other workplaces as well and can be used as a starting place for other workplaces working towards building a more equitable and inclusive workplace context. Because research suggests that improving DEIB outcomes benefits both the workplace performance (e.g. Mengstie, 2020) and employees' well-being (e.g. Anger et al., 2014; Judge & Colquitt, 2004), I am hopeful that these employees' voices are heard and lead to concrete action.



## References

- Adams, J. S. (1965). Inequity in social exchange. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 267-299). Academic Press.
- Ahonen, E. Q., Fujishiro, K., Cunningham, T., & Flynn, M. (2018). Work as an inclusive part of population health inequities research and prevention. *American journal of public health, 108*(3), 306-311.
- American Time Use Survey- 2019 Results. (2019). Bureau of Labor Statistics: U.S. Department of Labor. <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/atus.pdf>
- Anger, W. K., Elliot, D. L., Bodner, T., Olson, R., Rohlman, D. S., Truxillo, D. M., Kuehl, K. S., Hammer, L. B., & Montgomery, D. (2014). Effectiveness of total worker health interventions. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 20*(2), 226-247.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0038340>
- Associated Press (2019). Oregon's urban-rural divide has deepened.  
<https://www.oregonlive.com/pacific-northwest-news/2019/01/oregons-urban-rural-divide-has-deepened.html>
- Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin, 117*(3), 497-529.
- Bernard, H. R., Wutich, A., & Ryan, G. W. (2016). *Analyzing qualitative data: Systematic approaches*. Sage.
- Birks, M., Chapman, Y., & Francis, K. (2008). Memoing in qualitative research: Probing data and processes. *Journal of Research in Nursing, 13*(1), 68-75.

- Black, J. M., & La Venture, K. (2015). *The human factor to profitability: Building a people-centered culture for long-term Success*. River Grove Books.
- Boekhorst, J. A. (2015). The role of authentic leadership in fostering workplace inclusion: A social information processing perspective. *Human Resource Management, 54*(2), 241–264. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.21669>
- Braveman, P., Arkin, E., Orleans, T., Proctor, D., & Plough, A. (2017). What is health equity? And what difference does a definition make? Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. <https://www.rwjf.org/en/library/research/2017/05/what-is-health-equity-.html>
- Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, P. A. (1998). The ecology of developmental process. In R. M. Lerner & W. Damon (Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology: Theoretical models of human development* (pp. 993-1028). John Wiley & Sons.
- Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, P. A. (2006). The bioecological model of human development. In R. M. Lerner & W. Damon (Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology: Theoretical models of human development* (pp. 793–828). John Wiley & Sons.
- Campbell N. S., Perry S. J., Maertz C. P., Allen D. G., Griffeth R. W. (2013). All you need is... resources: The effects of justice and support on burnout and turnover. *Human Relations, 66*, 759–782. doi:10.1177/0018726712462614
- Clucas, R. A., Henkels, M., & Steel, B. S. (2009). The politics of one Oregon: The causes, consequences and prospects of overcoming the rural-urban divide. [Presentation].
- Colquitt, J. A. (2001). On the dimensionality of organizational justice: a construct validation of a measure. *Journal of applied psychology, 86*(3), 386-400.

- Colquitt, J. A., Scott, B. A., Rodell, J. B., Long, D. M., Zapata, C. P., Conlon, D. E., & Wesson, M. J. (2013). Justice at the millennium, a decade later: A meta-analytic test of social exchange and affect-based perspectives. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 98*(2), 199-236.
- Constitutional Rights Foundation. (n.d.). *How welfare began in the United States*.  
<https://www.crf-usa.org/bill-of-rights-in-action/bria-14-3-a-how-welfare-began-in-the-united-states.html>
- Cooley, C. H. (1902). Looking-glass self. In O'Brien, J. (Ed.) *The production of reality: Essays and readings on social interaction* (pp.126-128).
- Cropanzano, R., Li, A., & Benson III, L. (2011). Peer justice and teamwork process. *Group & Organization Management, 36*(5), 567-596.
- Eagles, M., Waugh, A., McKinney, O., McGinnis, R., Barrett, A. (2018). *State assessment: Framing the pathways for success*.  
<https://www.oregon.gov/DHS/DHSNEWS/Documents/DHS-Statewide-Assessment-DRAFT-Report-2018-08-13.pdf>
- Emmel, N. (2013). *Sampling and choosing cases in qualitative research: A realist approach*. Sage.
- Foiles, J. (2020, July 1). We can't just replace cops with social workers. *Slate*.  
<https://slate.com/technology/2020/07/social-workers-cant-replace-cops.html>
- Goldhaber, D. E. (2000). *Theories of human development: Integrative perspectives*. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield.
- Greenberg, J. (1987). A taxonomy of organizational justice theories. *Academy of Management Review, 12*(1), 9-22.

- Hsieh, H. F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research, 15*(9), 1277-1288.
- Johnson, A. F., & Roberto, K. J. (2018). Right versus left: How does political ideology affect the workplace? *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 39*(8), 1040–1043.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2291>
- Judge, T. A., & Colquitt, J. A. (2004). Organizational justice and stress: The mediating role of work-family conflict. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 89*(3), 395–404. <https://doi-org.10.1037/0021-9010.89.3.395>
- Kim, H., & Kao, D. (2014). A meta-analysis of turnover intention predictors among US child welfare workers. *Children and Youth Services Review, 47*, 214–223.  
[doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2014.09.015](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2014.09.015)
- Komisarof, A. (2021). A new framework of workplace belonging: Instrument validation and testing relationships to crucial acculturation outcomes. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication, 1-22*.
- Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage.
- Love, H., & Loh, T. (2020). The ‘rural-urban divide’ furthers myths about race and poverty-concealing effective policy solutions. Brookings Institute.  
<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2020/12/08/the-rural-urban-divide-furthers-myths-about-race-and-poverty-concealing-effective-policy-solutions/>
- Mengstie, M. M. (2020). Perceived organizational justice and turnover intention among hospital healthcare workers. *BMC Psychology, 8*(1), 1-11.
- Merçon-Vargas, E. A., Lima, R., Fernandes Ferreira, R., Edinete, M., & Tudge, J. (2020). Processing proximal processes: What Bronfenbrenner meant, what he didn't mean, and

- what he should have meant. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 12(3), 321–334.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12373>
- Mishra, P. J., & Bandela, A. P. (2015). Social work: A comprehensive helping profession. *International Journal of Arts, Humanities, and Management Studies*, 1(2), 13-18.
- National Association of Social Workers. (n.d.). *Why choose the social work profession?*  
<https://www.socialworkers.org/Careers/NASW-Career-Center/Explore-Social-Work/Why-Choose-the-Social-Work-Profession>
- O'Connor, C., & Joffe, H. (2020). Intercoder reliability in qualitative research: Debates and practical guidelines. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919899220>
- Office of Equity and Multicultural Services (2020).  
[https://www.oregon.gov/dhs/ABOUTDHS/OEMS/Pages/About\\_us.aspx](https://www.oregon.gov/dhs/ABOUTDHS/OEMS/Pages/About_us.aspx)
- Office of Reporting, Research, Analytics, and Implementation, Oregon Department of Human Services. (2020, June). Book of RiSE [Unpublished report].
- Okun, T., (2001). *White supremacy culture*.  
[http://www.cswsworkshop.org/pdfs/CARC/Overview/3\\_White\\_Sup\\_Culture.PDF](http://www.cswsworkshop.org/pdfs/CARC/Overview/3_White_Sup_Culture.PDF)
- Oregon Department of Human Services. (n.d.). *About the Oregon Department of Human Services*. <https://www.oregon.gov/dhs/ABOUTDHS/Pages/index.aspx>
- Pless, N., & Maak, T. (2004). Building an inclusive diversity culture: Principles, processes and practice. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 54(2), 129-147.
- powell, j. (2012). Poverty and race through a belongingless lens. *Northwest Area Foundation*.  
[https://www.law.berkeley.edu/files/PolicyMatters\\_powell\\_V4.pdf](https://www.law.berkeley.edu/files/PolicyMatters_powell_V4.pdf)

QSR International. (2021). NVivo Release 1.2 [Computer software].

<https://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo-qualitative-data-analysis-software/home/>

Richardson, D., Memmott, K. (2018). *Foster care in Oregon: Chronic management failures and high caseloads jeopardize the safety of some of the state's most vulnerable children.*

<https://sos.oregon.gov/audits/documents/2018-05.pdf>

Roberson, Q. M., & Colquitt, J. A. (2005). Shared and configural justice: A social network model of justice in teams. *Academy of Management Review*, 30(3), 595-607.

Romo, V. (2020). *Minneapolis council moves to defund police, establish 'holistic' public safety force.* NPR. <https://www.npr.org/sections/live-updates-protests-for-racial-justice/2020/06/26/884149659/minneapolis-council-moves-to-defund-police-establish-holistic-public-safety-forc>

Sabharwal, M. (2014). Is diversity management sufficient? Organizational inclusion to further performance. *Public Personnel Management*, 43(2), 197-217.

Saldaña, J. (2015). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers.* Sage.

Shore, L. M., Cleveland, J. N., & Sanchez, D. (2018). Inclusive workplaces: A review and model. *Human Resource Management Review*, 28(2), 176-189.

Social Work Policy Institute. (2011). *Investing in the social work workforce.* National Association of Social Workers.

Stone-Romero, E. F., & Stone, D. L. (2005). How do organizational justice concepts relate to discrimination and prejudice? In Greenberg, J., & Colquitt, J. (Eds.) *Handbook of organizational justice* (pp. 439-467). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Tripathy J.P. (2013). Secondary data analysis: Ethical issues and challenges. *Iranian Journal of Public Health*, 42(12), 1478-1479.

- Tudge, J. R. H, Mokrova, I., Hatfield, B. E., & Karnik, R. B. (2009). Uses and misuses of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 1(4), 198–210. doi:[10.1111/j.1756-2589.2009.00026.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1756-2589.2009.00026.x)
- Tudge, J. R. H., Payir, A., Mercon-Vargas, E., Cao, H., Liang, Y., Li, J., & O'Brien, L. (2016). Still misused after all these years? A reevaluation of the uses of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human Development. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 8(4), 427–445. doi:[10.1111/jftr.12165](https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12165)
- Wachs, T. D. (2015). Assessing bioecological influences. In R. M. Lerner & W. Damon (Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology and developmental science*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed.(811-846). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Wilke, D. J., Radey, M., King, E., Spinelli, C., Rakes, S., & Nolan, C. R. (2018). A multi-level conceptual model to examine child welfare worker turnover and retention decisions. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, 12(2), 204–231. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15548732.2017.1373722>
- Williams, D. R., Lawrence, J. A., & Davis, B. A. (2019). Racism and health: Evidence and needed research. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 40, 105-125.
- Vaismoradi, M., Jones, J., Turunen, H., & Snelgrove, S. (2016). Theme development in qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis. *Journal of Nursing Education and Practice*, 6(5), 100-110.
- Vélez-Agosto, N. M., Soto-Crespo, J. G., Vizcarrondo-Oppeneheimer, M., Vega-Molina, S., & García Coll, C. (2017). Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory revision: Moving culture from the macro into the micro. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 12(5), 900-910.

Xia, M., Li, X., & Tudge, J. R. (2020). Operationalizing Urie Bronfenbrenner's process-person-context-time model. *Human Development*, 64(1), 1-1



**Table 1***RiSE Intervention Elements*

<b>RiSE Element</b>	<b>Example</b>	<b>Year the element was added to RiSE</b>
Safety and well-being	“I feel confident in my ability to provide a sense of safety for myself and others”	2019
Caring and supportive relationships	“I see myself as a resource to you and I see you as a resource to me”	2019
High expectations and accountability	“I am accountable to myself, my team, my organization, and my community”	2019
Meaningful participation	“I have the knowledge, skills, ability, resources, and opportunities to take an active role”	2019
Community engagement	“I belong to a community where collaboration is valued and success is communal”	2019
Equitable treatment and belonging	“A positive and inclusive organizational culture depends on diversity, belonging, and equitable treatment”	2020

**Table 2***Semi-Structured Listening Session Questions*

<b>Primary Question</b>	<b>Corresponding Probing Questions</b>
1. What does [element] at work mean to you? Your team/unit? DHS? Clients?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What's the value added? Or impact/influence?</li> </ul>
2. How do you know when you are experiencing [element]? Or not experiencing [element]?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This can mean different things to different people</li> <li>• Encourage and create space for people to share their experiences (collect examples)</li> </ul>
3. What can you do to help support/promote [element] in your specific environment? What can we do as an agency?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can you contribute? Things you can do in your day-to-day work? What do you feel is your role/responsibility?</li> <li>• How can we as an agency do better? What are some actions/behaviors you would like to see?</li> </ul>
4. How would we know if we are being successful in achieving [element]? What can we identify as indicators of success?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are some tangibles? For unit/team, program area, broader DHS?</li> </ul>

**Table 3***Overview of 16 Themes by Corresponding Outcome*

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Theme</b>
Inclusion	1. Feeling seen and heard
	2. Lack of access to material or psychological resources leading to feeling devalued
	3. Feeling alone rather than interdependent with teams
	4. Significant variability in where people feel safe across people and contexts
	5. Desire to know the “why” behind decisions
	6. Honest communication
	7. Ability to be authentic in the representation of identities
	8. Disconnect between those doing the work and decision-makers
	9. Desire to have a more active role in decision-making processes
	10. Emotional support
	11. Actions against marginalized groups might negatively impact both the workplace and clients with whom ODHS works
	12. Different portrayals of how to advance diversity through hiring processes
Equity	13. Workloads and expectations vary person-by-person in ways that some do not perceive as fair
Diversity	14. Diversity of perspectives
	15. Diversity of person factors
Belonging	16. Centrality of human connection as a desired state

**Table 4***Number of Coded Quotations by Outcomes and PPCT Model and Organizational Justice Codes*

<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Person</b>	<b>Context</b>	<b>Macro- system</b>	<b>Micro- system</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Org Justice</b>
<b>Inclusion (overall)</b>	35	147	33	116	1	127
Feeling respected and valued	12	28	3	25	0	48
Feeling supported	4	17	8	9	0	14
Influence on decision-making	2	20	6	13	1	13
Involvement in the workplace	8	39	6	33	0	19
Psychological safety	4	27	4	24	0	23
Recognizing, honoring, and advancing of diversity	5	26	9	19	0	11
Transparency	6	18	2	16	0	13
<b>Equity</b>	21	29	12	18	0	69
<b>Diversity</b>	2	23	2	23	0	8
<b>Belonging</b>	1	7	3	4	0	1

APPENDICIES

## Appendix A: Final coding framework

CODES				DEFINITIONS	EXAMPLES
DOMAIN	CATEGORY	CODE	SUBCODE		
OUTCOMES					
	Inclusion			Processes which scaffold employees ability to thrive; employee connects a workplace process to their own ability to thrive	
		Psychological Safety		Safety associated with sharing different opinions and views from others, at an individual or group level (Shore, 2018) "Psychological and physical safety associated with sharing different opinions and views from others" (Shore et al., 2008, p. 182)	"There's retaliation, so people don't feel safe talking to manager"
		Involvement in the work group		Feeling like an insider with access to critical information and resources (Shore, 2018). Includes a team orientation/connection; willingness to jump into the work.	"It's like that in the trenches thing, you'd die for the guy next to you but don't care about the cause anymore"
		Feeling supported		Employee describes something making them feel supported at work	"Supportive feedback from supervisors"

		Feeling respected and valued		Being treated as an esteemed and appreciated member of the unit and organization, as an individual or group level (Shore, 2018)	"I've felt devalued over the last few years, I've been asking for help, there's no mechanism to hire another paralegal"
		Influence on decision-making		Employees believe that their ideas and perspectives are influential and/or are listened to	"Everyone wants to be heard, not just the noises that are coming out of my mouth. For little and large decisions"
		Transparency		Organizational support of transparency and authentic sharing of valued identities and/or information	"Less secretive, not learning about things months later"
		Recognizing, honoring, and advancing of diversity		Fair treatment, sharing of employee differences for mutual learning and growth, and top management shows value for diversity through words and actions	"Promotions of people of color"
	<b>Inclusion types (Colquitt, 2001)</b>				
		Leader inclusion		Individual-level perceptions of an immediate supervisor or manager's inclusion	"My supervisor gave me options. "What do you think?" Made me feel like I have a voice. Ask vs. tell."
		Organizational inclusion		Individual-level perceptions of an employee's inclusion in the organization	"DHS provides leave, counseling, EAP, as an agency very supportive"

		Work group inclusion		Individual-level perceptions of an employee's inclusion in the work group, unit, and/or office	"We need to feel like a family here"
	<b>Sense of Belonging</b>			Respondent respected at a basic level that includes the right to both co-create and make demands upon society or structures within which we're situated	"I want to go to work because my team is there"
	<b>Diversity</b>			Reference to demographic make-up of relevant organizational unit, office, and/or district	"The interview process- super discouraging. There's no diversity, no one that looks like me. I feel like I'm always having to act a certain way because there's no one that reflects my culture"
	<b>Equity</b>			Each employee receives what they need to develop to their full professional potetial	"Trainings are not equitable. There are catered lunches for bigger central trainings vs. when I provide trainings to field I have to buy my own snacks"
<b>ORG JUSTICE</b>				Employees' perceptions of microculture: organizational decisions and behaviors that influence their own perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors at work	



	<b>Distributive Justice</b>			Workplace outcomes are equitable	
		Performance feedback		Respondent references that both formal and informal performance feedback is, or is not, distributed effectively across employees	"Celebrate the good work of staff, we only hear the bad stuff from CO, how do we bring forward and highlight the little victories- i.e. all staff district meeting that focuses on team building and recognize good work of teams (kudos to those teams-- what are the successes of these teams 'one of three offices that had no late reports")
		PTO		Respondent references time off as being available fairly or unfairly for employees	"Preparing to take time is difficult, almost not worth it"
		Salaries		Respondent reports that salaries are perceived as fair or unfair	"Case managers need to get paid more"
		Workloads		Respondent references that workloads are, or are not, distributed effectively across employees	"Not always sure how people use their time or have time for socializing with our workload"
		Resources		Workplace or Community Resources	"Rural communities don't have equitable resources"
	<b>Interactional Justice</b>			Reference to how respondent is treated interpersonally when employers make decisions affecting them	

		Informational justice		Accessible, timely, relevant communication is made available to employee.	"Have the branch as a whole to be very helpful, and I've needed it a lot. Wish there was some place to register all the help that is needed, so that it's not always a one-off thing, finding the right person, someone that has a form, etc. There's C and S, but not a systemic way"
			Truthfulness	Authority figure is described as being candid and/or not engaging in deception	"Comments/actions are sincere and not just habit/ritual"
			Justification	Explanation for the basis of a decision	"Job/duty changes with no explanation are interpreted as 'not doing a good job'- need to be more intentional and clear about 'the why'"
		Interpersonal Justice			
			Respect	Being polite rather than rude to colleagues; true listening	"I am a good employee and my supervisor has never shown me any respect and distrusts me for no reason"
			Empathy	Seeking radical understanding of colleagues' perspectives	need to operationalize radical here- but I'm trying to get at historical c
	<b>Procedural Justice</b>			Workplace processes are perceived as fair	

		Hiring		Respondent describes hiring processes as just or unjust	"Hiring practices don't reflect the communities we serve. This has been going on for years and we continue to make the same mistake"
		Onboarding		Respondent describes onboarding practices as just or unjust	"Have a welcome process. Tour of the building, and help them get the tools they need to do their job"
		Promotions		Respondent describes promotions as being just or unjust	"I have a coworker who has applied over and over for positions, but has not been able to go on. It's affecting her emotionally. But it is not my place to hinder her by telling her what to do when she is not speaking about it"
		Training		Respondent describes training practices as just or unjust	"Cultural humility and agility- we need to really do more of that, not the competency training. Instructors need to be far more diverse. More mandatory training. Trainings on how to work with partners. Trainings teach politeness- need more depth"
		Policies		Respondent describes workplace policies as just or unjust	"Morals, policies, and procedures don't align"
<b>CONTEXT</b>				Environments, situations, and characteristics	

	<b>A Microsystem</b>			Characteristics of the immediate environment, including individuals who participate in the life of a developing person.	
		Diversity		Reference to demographic make-up of relevant organizational unit, office, and/or district	"We need diversity in hiring panels"
		Office location		Respondent explicitly references the location and/or geographical characteristics of their workplaces.	"Inconsistency between units, in some there are huddles, meetings, and lunches, in another in the same branch, that doesn't happen"
		Office size		Respondent explicitly references the size of their unit, office, and/or district. Also used to capture office configuration.	"We have such a small office, it [caring and supportive relationships] kind of comes naturally"
		Workplace culture		Respondent describes workplace culture, inclusive of: cross-program dynamics, subjective feeling of the work unit, etc.	"Each office has a different culture about how they approach feedback and debriefing. Ours is negative."
		Workplace relationships		Respondent describes relationships in the context of their workplaces, though does not specify with whom	"The environment helps! Relationships with each other"

			Coworker relationships	Respondent explicitly describes their relationships with colleagues, coworkers, and/or teammates in their unit	"Acknowledging co-workers, not breaking into cliques"
			Supervisor relationships	Respondent explicitly describes their relationships with their supervisor(s) and/or managers	"I like our leaders, but I feel alone a lot"
	<b>B Mesosystem</b>			"Linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings, at least one of which does not contain the developing person, but in which events occur that indirectly influence processes within the immediate setting in which the developing person lives."	n/a
	<b>C Exosystem</b>			Societal structure which functions independently of the individual, but has immediate effects on the context in which individuals develop	n/a

	<b>D Macrosystem</b>			"The level of environmental influence that is most distal to the developing individual and that affects all other systems. It includes the values, traditions, and sociocultural characteristics of the larger society."	
		Ableism		Respondent references issues related to ableism within work context	"The agency doesn't do a good job of supporting staff with disabilities"
		Ageism		Respondent references issues related to ageism within work context	"I have heard that ageism is a real issue, too. I know people who had a hard time finding a job because of age. Well qualified for the position. Eventually they were hired but it was a hard process"
		Heteronormativity		Respondent references issues related to heteronormativity within work context (including LGBTQ+ rights, gender identity and expression)	"I don't want to hear my cubicle neighbor talking crap about someone's gender identity. That's not professional"

		Other		Respondent references other issues related to society at large (especially "-isms") playing out within the work context; references to the function of ODHS within society	"We are people working for a broken system"
		Racism		Respondent references issues related to racism within work context	"I find this process exhausting. Approach it from a lens of someone who has experienced racism and marginalization"
		Policy		Respondent references policy context beyond ODHS	"We literally catch people red handed, report fraud, and then are told 'we can't do anything about it'"
	<b>E Time</b>			Changes and continuities which unfold over time and influence an individual's development (including normative and non normative life transitions, historical time, etc)	"It's a struggle that it happens so slowly, a lot of people just can't hold on that long"
		2019		Respondent references 2019	n/a
		Historical event		Respondent references a historical event	n/a
<b>PERSON</b>				Personal characteristics the listening session participants identify in their comments	

		Gender		Respondent references their gender identity	"Train male leadership to not be intimidated by female voices They have an attitude towards women speaking up"
		Job Title		Respondent identifies their role or title within workplace	"Approached recently about moving up as a lead, but I said no way. The leads we have now are great, but they aren't supported at all in leadership or with new ideas"
		ODHS Tenure		Respondent identifies length of employment at ODHS	"I broke when they made me go to a week of mandatory training for new workers- as an experienced worker. There was no way I would ever catch up with my work after that"
		Other		Respondent references any other personal characteristic	"Low walls are not ADHD friendly, that set-up is so distracting"
		Race		Respondent references their racial-ethnic identity	"Observation- black and indigenous people. The room can be white- it doesn't feel safe. Being in a lot of meetings at [location]. It is rare that I am not the only person of color in the room. Until organization realizes that is a psychological safety issue, it will be a safety issue."
		Sexuality		Respondent references their sexual orientation	n/a



## Appendix B: Intercoder reliability

Code	<i>n</i> - pre reconciliation	<i>n</i> -post reconciliation	Percent change	Intercoder agreement before reconciliation
<b>OUTCOMES</b>				
Equity	32 FGs, 118	32 FGs, 118	0%	100%
Inclusion	41 FGs, 820	41 FGs, 862	5%	95%
Feeling respected	34 FGs, 178	34 FGs, 184	3%	97%
Feeling supported	24 FGs, 52	27 FGs, 69	33%	66%
Influence on decision making	30 FGs, 105	31 FGs, 112	7%	93%
Involvement in the work group	32 FGs, 159	32 FGs, 168	6%	94%
Psychological safety	38 FGs, 147	39 FGs, 153	4%	96%
Recognizing, honoring, and advancing of diversity	20 FGs, 50	20 FGs, 51	2%	98%
Transparency	30 FGs, 115	30 FGs, 117	2%	98%
Leader Inclusion	14 FGs, 34	14 FGs, 34	0%	100%
Organizational Inclusion	6 FGs, 15	6 FGs, 15	0%	100%
Work group Inclusion	9 FGs, 26	9 FGs, 26	0%	100%
Sense of Belonging	13 FGs, 18	13 FGs, 18	0%	100%
Diversity	10 FGs, 23	10 FGs, 23	0%	100%
<b>ORG JUSTICE</b>				
Distributive justice	29 FGs, 166	29 FGs, 165	-1%	99%
Performance feedback	20 FGs, 62	20 FGs, 61	-2%	98%
PTO	9 FGs, 13	8 FGs, 12	-8%	92%
Resources	15 FGs, 47	15 FGs, 48	2%	98%
Salaries	5 FGs, 6	5 FGs, 6	0%	100%
Workloads	11 FGs, 37	11 FGs, 37	0%	100%
Interactional Justice	10 FGs, 15	10 FGs, 15	0%	100%
Informational Justice	9 FGs, 13	9 FGs, 13	0%	100%
Justification	6 FGs, 8	8 FGs, 10	25%	75%
Truthfulness	7 FGs, 17	7 FGs, 12	-29%	71%
Interpersonal Justice			n/a	n/a
Empathy	9 FGs, 13	10 FGs, 15	15%	85%
Respect	19 FGs, 37	19 FGs, 37	0%	100%
Procedural Justice	32 FGs, 121	32 FGs, 123	2%	98%
Hiring	11 FGs, 22	11 FGs, 21	5%	95%
On-boarding	3 FGs, 9	3 FGs, 9	0%	100%
Policies	7 FGs, 15	8 FGs, 18	20%	80%
Promotion	15 FGs, 22	14 FGs, 21	5%	95%
Training	16 FGs, 42	17 FGs, 43	2%	98%
<b>CONTEXT</b>				
Microsystem	29 FGs, 216	30 FGs, 224	4%	96%
Clients' homes	1 FG, 3	1 FG, 3	0%	100%
Diversity	10 FGs, 23	10 FGs, 23	0%	100%

Office location	18 FGs, 74	18 FGs, 72	-3%	97%
Office size	10 FGs, 23	10 FGs, 23	0%	100%
Workplace culture	19 FGs, 53	21 FGs, 61	15%	85%
Workplace relationships	10 FGs, 39	11 FGs, 41	5%	95%
Coworker relationships	9 FGs, 14	10 FGs, 15	7%	93%
Supervisor relationships	9 FGs, 49	11 FGs, 51	4%	96%
Mesosystem	0	0	0%	100%
Exosystem	0	0	0%	100%
Macrosystem	21 FGs, 64	21 FGs, 67	5%	95%
Time-Chronosystem	2 FGs, 2	1 FG, 1	50%	50%
<b>PERSON</b>				
Gender	4 FGs, 4	4 FGs, 4	0%	100%
Job Title	16 FGs, 20	16 FGs, 19	-5%	95%
ODHS Tenure	15 FGs, 20	15 FGs, 21	5%	95%
Other	11 FGs, 15	12 FGs, 15	0%	100%
Race	7 FGs, 9	6 FGs, 8	-11%	89%
Sexuality	0	0	n/a	n/a