

Tips for Measuring Belonging & Support

Measuring belonging provides visibility into the human conditions that drive the performance, retention, and well-being that lead to organizational success.

1. Define belonging and support in your specific context

Before measuring anything, clarify what “belonging” and “support” mean in your setting.

Belonging typically reflects whether people feel accepted, valued, and included, while support reflects whether the organization provides resources, relationships, and structures that enable success.

The most actionable insights will be captured using scales that measure belonging across environments, reinforcing that belonging is context-specific, not one global feeling.

- Use this principle everywhere: Define *where belonging happens* before measuring it

2. Measure belonging across multiple environments, not just one

Belonging is rarely uniform:

- Someone may feel supported by peers but not leadership
- Or connected socially but excluded professionally

Measure across key environments:

- Classroom, faculty, clinical, peers are important for educational environments
- Team, manager, organization, cross-functional interactions are important for workplace environments

Research shows belonging varies across contexts and should be assessed in each environment separately.

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3. Use validated tools when possible

Use established instruments rather than building from scratch when you can.

Widely used options:

- Sense of Belonging in Nursing School (SBNS) (field-specific)
- Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM) (general belonging)
 - Measures whether individuals feel respected, included, and recognized
- Sense of Belonging Instrument (SOBI) (general population)

Many belonging scales use Likert-style items and assess:

- Feeling part of the group
- Being recognized or valued
- Feeling able to be oneself
- Perceived inclusion in activities

Tip:

- Replace “school” with “team,” “organization,” or “department” when adapting tools.

4. Pair belonging measures with support measures

Belonging is not just an outcome. It reflects organizational inputs.

Always measure support systems alongside belonging, such as:

- Access to guidance (advisor, manager, mentor)
- Clarity of expectations
- Responsiveness of leadership
- Access to resources and help

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5. Measure relationship quality

It's not enough to ask:

“Did you meet with your advisor/manager?”

Instead ask:

- Was the interaction helpful?
- Was it respectful?
- Did it reduce uncertainty?
- Did it improve performance or confidence?

Research shows that quality of faculty–student/manager-employee relationships and perceptions of respect, communication, and inclusiveness directly affects outcomes like motivation and performance.

6. Include psychological safety in your measurement

Belonging is closely tied to whether people feel safe to:

- Ask questions
- Admit mistakes
- Share ideas
- Seek help

Belonging instruments like Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM) Scale include items about being able to be oneself and having supportive adults or peers available.

Add items like:

- “I feel comfortable asking for help when needed”
- “I can express concerns without negative consequences”

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7. Capture both inclusion and exclusion signals

Strong measurement includes both:

Positive indicators:

- Feeling respected
- Feeling included in decision-making
- Feeling valued

Negative indicators:

- Feeling ignored
- Feeling excluded
- Feeling like an outsider

Tools like SOBI explicitly measure both belonging and alienation as separate constructs. (For more information see: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9484985/>)

8. Combine surveys with qualitative data

Quantitative surveys tell you how much, but not why.

Add:

- Open-ended survey questions
- Focus groups or interviews
- Exit or stay interviews

Combine surveys with open-ended responses to identify **drivers and barriers** of belonging.

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9. Disaggregate results to identify equity gaps

Belonging is not experienced equally.

Break down results (when appropriate) by:

- Role or level (e.g., new hires vs experienced staff)
- Program or department
- Demographics (where ethical and permitted)

Research shows belonging varies by context (e.g., campus location, environment), highlighting the need to analyze subgroups.

10. Connect belonging and support to performance outcomes

Measurement becomes actionable when linked to outcomes.

Examples:

Education

- Belonging leads to retention, grades, program completion

Workplace

- Belonging leads to engagement, retention, performance, burnout

Research shows belonging correlates with motivation, grades, and engagement.

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11. Include organizational climate and culture

Belonging is shaped by the broader environment:

- Fairness
- Inclusion practices
- Diversity climate
- Psychological and cultural safety

Inclusion as an environment where differences are respected and individuals are supported to participate fully.

In workplaces: Include measures of leadership behavior and organizational culture are important to consider

12. Measure early and often (especially at transition points)

Belonging is most fragile during transitions:

- Students as they start their first year, clinical placements
- Employees during onboarding, role changes, promotions

Research highlights early stages as critical for belonging and retention.

13. Focus on help-seeking behaviors as a proxy

A strong indicator of belonging and support is whether people:

- Use available resources
- Reach out to mentors or peers
- Engage with support services

Low usage often reflects lack of perceived belonging or trust, not lack of need.

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14. Treat belonging as a system-level outcome

Avoid framing belonging as an individual issue.

Instead ask:

- What structures enable inclusion?
- What practices create exclusion?
- Where are the gaps in support delivery?

Belonging research in higher education shows that environmental conditions (not just individual traits) drive belonging.

15. Use results for continuous improvement

Belonging measurement should feed into action:

- Training (faculty, managers, leaders)
- Advising/mentorship improvements
- Resource allocation
- Culture change initiatives

Measurement without action can leave your audience feeling less valued than if you had not measured at all.