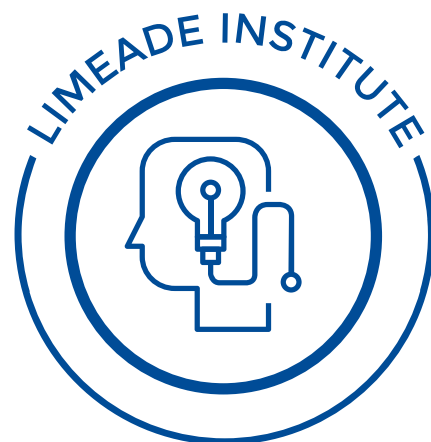


Whitepaper

# THE SCIENCE OF CARE

September 2019



limeade®



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# THE SCIENCE OF CARE

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## SUMMARY

Over the last several decades, the workplace has shifted from one driven by the needs of employers to one centered around the experience of employees. To compete in the modern workplace, organizations need to demonstrate to their workers that they not only support them in their work tasks, but that they also genuinely care about them as people. In this paper, we discuss what it means for an organization to care, how employees feeling cared for impacts company outcomes and how to demonstrate organizational care for employees. To do this, we describe the ways companies can show they care, as well as provide an accompanying toolkit to aid employers in building a caring workplace from the ground up.

## KEY FINDINGS

When employees feel cared for:

- **60% plan to stay at their company for three plus years** (as opposed to only 7% of those who don't feel cared for)
- **95% say they feel included in their organization** (compared to 14% of those who don't feel cared for)
- **90% say they're likely to recommend their organization as a great place to work** (compared to 9% of those who don't feel cared for)
- **94% say they feel personally engaged in their work** (compared to 43% of those who don't feel care)
- **94% say they have well-being in their life** (compared to 52% of those who don't feel care)
- **50% say their stress is manageable** (compared to 14% of those who don't feel care)
- **56% say they don't feel burned out** (compared to 16% of those who don't feel care)



## INTRODUCTION

As the nature of the modern workplace continues to shift from one driven by the needs of employers to one centered around the experience of employees, organizations must recognize the need to demonstrate to their workers that they care about them — both as organizational members and humans (Morgan, 2015). To do so, companies should take a “whole-person” approach to managing the employee experience, which involves integrating existing corporate well-being, diversity and inclusion, employee engagement and other programs to foster an overall sense of feeling cared for among employees. In this paper, we discuss what it means for an organization to care, how feeling cared for impacts company outcomes and how to demonstrate organizational care for employees.

## A NEW FOCUS: THE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

Over the last 40 years, the workplace has increasingly shifted from one focused primarily on driving productivity and efficiency towards one centered around fostering engagement, well-being and inclusion. Historically, when work was more routine and patriarchal models were more trusted, workers were paid a wage as part of a contract with their employers, on whom they were dependent for opportunities. In recent decades, economic forces have led to changes in career patterns, shifting power into the hands of employees (Morgan et al., 2015; Pink, 2009). This change has created a demand on employers to pay attention to more than employee productivity, but also the factors that contribute to a positive employee experience. Based on our own research, in which we interviewed and surveyed over 200 Chief Human Resource Officers of medium-size and enterprise-level companies, we define employee experience (EX) as how employees feel at work and about working for an organization. As an employee-centric concept and one that reflects the larger economic and societal shifts, employee experience is connected to all aspects of one’s work life, from relationships with supervisors and coworkers to a sense of being valued for one’s contributions and growing in one’s career. At Limeade we believe that in order to attract and retain the best talent, foster engagement and maximize productivity, organizations must focus on enhancing the employee experience. Organizational literature and our own research demonstrate that, to do this, they must show their employees that they genuinely care about them.



## DEFINING CARE IN ORGANIZATIONS

At the most basic level, caring for someone is defined as the provision of what is necessary for the health, welfare, maintenance and protection of someone or something. Conversely, an individual feeling cared for involves a sense of being looked after and having one's needs provided for. This caring-cared for dynamic can best be conceptualized as a bond or an attachment. According to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), humans have an innate need to seek and develop affectional bonds with others, particularly in times of need. Although much attachment research has focused on the parent-child relationship, research on adult attachment has identified similar attachment dynamics in organizational relationships (Yip, Ehrhardt, Black, & Walker, 2015). Specifically, researchers have identified that leaders, mentors, coworkers and the organization itself can serve as sources of social support and membership for employees (Hazan & Shaver, 1990). Additionally, these attachment dynamics in work relationships are related to valued organizational outcomes as well as negative outcomes when attachment needs are not fulfilled (Yip et al., 2015).

## ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT AS CARING

Because "caring" is a general construct not specific to organizations, it is useful to draw upon a closely related construct within the organizational literature: perceived organizational support. Much like the perception of being cared for by others, perceived organizational support is the overall feeling employees have that their organizations value their contributions and care about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1997; Kim, Eisenberger, & Baik, 2016). According to the theory, because the organization sets policies and norms that provide continuity, is responsible for the actions of its managers and specifies how employees should behave, employees tend to view the organization as having humanlike characteristics (Levinson, 1965). This personification provides a simplified mechanism through which employees can summarize and interpret the interactions they have with their organizations and its representatives. Additionally, employees tend to view the organization as having a more or less favorable orientation toward them (Eisenberger et al., 1986). This perspective fuels a need fulfillment process by which employees expect organizations to fulfill certain socio-emotional needs (e.g., affiliation, esteem, and emotional support) (Armeli, Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Lynch, 1998; Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, & Sowa, 1986; Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011). When these needs are met, this results in greater identification and commitment to the organization, an increased desire to help the organization succeed and greater psychological well-being (Kurtessis et al., 2017).



It is important to acknowledge that as employees spend more of their time at work, they may increasingly look toward their work organization as a source of fulfillment of socio-emotional needs and professional opportunities (Eisenberger, Karagonlar, Stinglhamber, Neves, Becker, Gonzales-Morales, & Steigermueller, 2019).

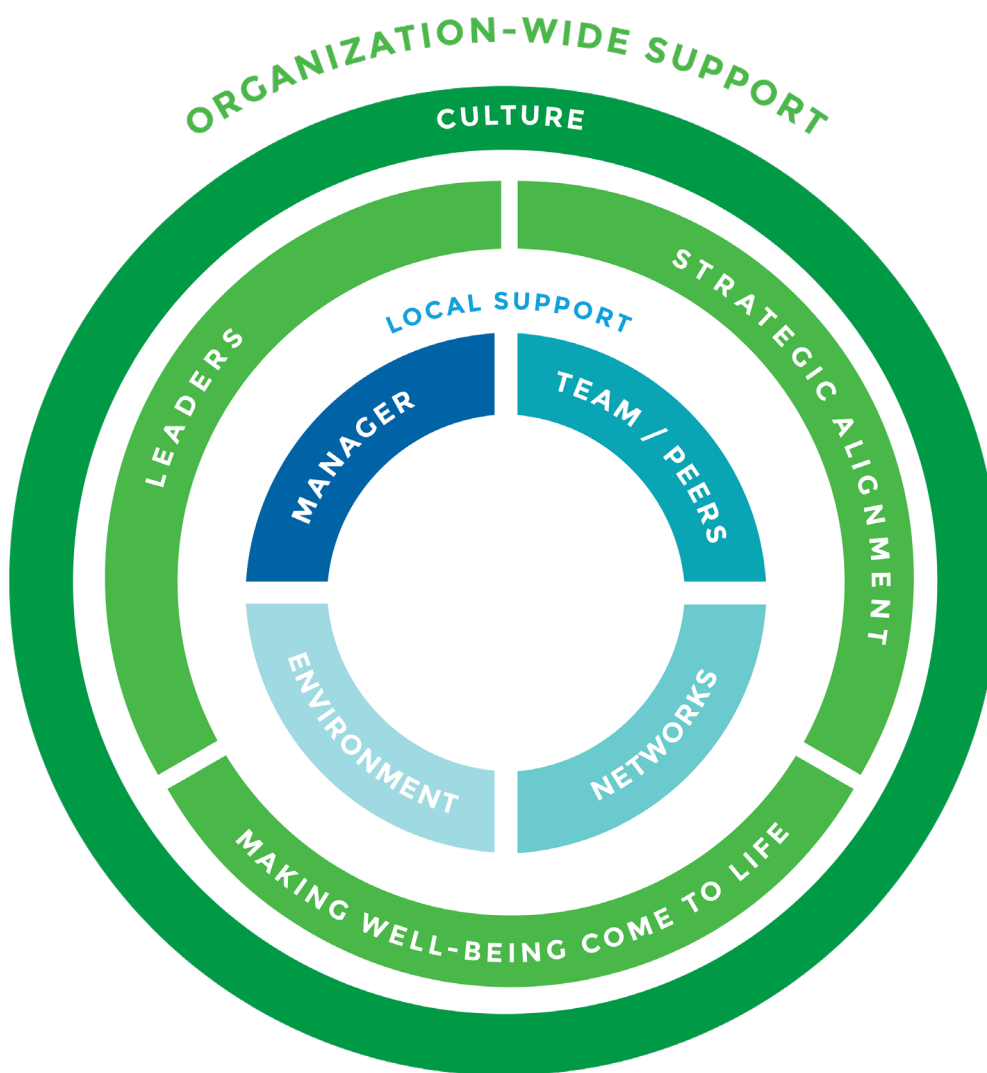


Figure 1. Limeade Organizational Support Model



## RELATIONAL SOURCES OF ORGANIZATIONAL CARE

As seen from our organizational support model (Figure 1), there are many sources that can contribute to overall perceptions of organizational care. Relationally, employees can perceive caring from individuals such as coworkers and supervisors/managers. Social support, which refers to the receipt of help from others, can take several forms including emotional, instrumental, informational or structural (House, 1981) and can be demonstrated in many ways across multiple levels of the organization (Dimoff & Kelloway, 2017). For example, supervisors may provide support by offering tangible resources (e.g., a bonus) or emotional support (e.g., listening to an employee who is distressed), and organizations may provide intangible resources such as a flexible work-family policy or scheduling flexibility. Although having the support of all organizational members may be important to employee outcomes, supervisors more closely embody the organization than other members and are viewed as acting on its behalf (Eisenberger, Karagonlar, Stinglhamber, Neves, Becker, Gonzalez-Morales, & Steiger-Mueller, 2010). Having the support of one's supervisor is important because they hold power over the employee and are viewed as representatives of the organizations they serve, leading employees to perceive their support as indicative of support from the organization as well (Frone, 2000; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Meta-analytic research indicates that perceived supervisor support is more strongly related to perceived organizational support than is perceived coworker support or perceived team support (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Additionally, several studies have found that supervisor support promotes positive work outcomes such as higher levels of job satisfaction (Griffin, Patterson, & West, 2001), extra-role behaviors (Chen and Chiu 2008; Shanock and Eisenberger 2006), reduced turnover (Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002; Maertz, Griffeth, Campbell, & Allen, 2007) and lower levels of employee cynicism (Cole et al. 2006). Because we conceptualize overall perceived organizational, supervisor and coworker support as forms of caring at work, we use these terms and "caring" interchangeably throughout the rest of the paper.

### LIMEADE ORGANIZATIONAL CARING DEFINITION

**Organizations show they care by authentically investing in, committing to and supporting their employees.**



## IMPACT OF CARING

When employees perceive their organizations care about them, they are more likely to experience increased commitment, engagement, psychological well-being and performance (Gupta et al., 2016; Kurtessis et al., 2015; Kurtessis et al., 2017; Rhoades & Eisenberger 2002). These outcomes can be explained by social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), which holds that social behavior is the result of an exchange process in which social relationships are rooted in a give-and-take process in which people weigh risks and rewards and act in response to those assessments. According to the theory, employees develop a more favorable orientation toward organizations for which they work in response to the organization's fulfillment of their socio-emotional needs (e.g., approval, esteem, affiliation and emotional support) and material goals and objectives (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011; Rousseau, 1989, 1995; Shore et al., 2006). As a result, employees seek balance in the relationship and thus reciprocate by providing value back to the organization. In other words, employment is viewed as an exchange of loyalty and effort by the employee for benefits and resources from the organization (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

Importantly, the degree to which employees will reciprocate depends upon their attributions regarding the extent to which treatment they receive from employers reflects a concern for their welfare. If the employee perceives that the organization cares, they consider the benefactors more trustworthy and likely to provide valued resources — either socioemotional or tangible — in the future (Eisenberger et al., 2019; Gouldner, 1960; Greenberg, 1980; Kurtessis et al., 2017). An important implication of this perspective is that if employees feel they are giving more (e.g., effort, time or dedication to the company) than they are being given in exchange (e.g., social support), they will be less likely to feel satisfied in their jobs (Kurtessis, Eisenberger, Ford, Buffardi, Stewart, & Adis, 2017), which could lead to negative outcomes including decreased engagement, commitment or increased turnover intentions.

Based on changing norms related to promotion of employees' well-being, dignity and respect, employers are putting forth additional efforts to demonstrate that they care by introducing more human resource benefits. However, recent meta-analytic research suggests that doing so often backfires (Eisenberger et al., 2019). In fact, employees may believe such displays are a "trap" designed to dupe them into long-term unfavorable exchange relationships (Eisenberger et al., 2019). Indeed, the same study found that compared to those of previous decades, today's workers do not have stronger exchange relationships with their employers. This indicates that although organizations recognize that the employee experience is of utmost importance, they struggle to effectively demonstrate to their employees that they care.





We will now review important findings — from the organizational literature as well as our own research — related to four important outcomes of perceived caring, including increased commitment, engagement, well-being and performance.

## **CARING DRIVES COMMITMENT**

Research has demonstrated that when employees perceive support from their organizations, they feel more emotional commitment — or affective commitment — toward the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1997). Through the lens of social exchange, the support perceived by employees from employers helps fulfill socio-emotional needs that the employee then feels the need to “repay” through additional dedication to organizational objectives (Kim et al., 2016). In other words, when they feel cared for, employees reciprocate the caring by developing affective commitment (Tsui, Pearce, Porter, & Tripoli, 1997). For these reasons, employees’ commitment relies heavily on their perceptions that their employers care about them. In fact, perceived organizational support has been found to be the biggest driver of affective commitment (Gupta et al., 2016) and has been found to mediate the association between perceived organizational support and performance (Casimir, Ng, Wang, & Ooi, 2014). Further, affective organizational commitment has been viewed as an important determinant of employees’ intentions to stay with the organization and pursue organizational goals (Klein, Becker, & Meyer, 2009; Meyer & Allen, 1997).

## **CARING INCREASES ENGAGEMENT**

Enhanced commitment from employees as a result of perceived caring leads to additional positive outcomes for individuals and their organizations, including increased engagement (Gupta et al., 2016). Engagement is a deep connection and sense of purpose that drives employees to invest more personal resources in their work (Gupta, Agarwal, & Khatri, 2016), driving productivity while decreasing employee turnover and accidents (Aon Hewitt, 2009; Harter et al., 2002; Shuck, 2011), and enhancing business outcomes such as customer service climate, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (Harter et al., 2002; Salanova, Agut, & Peiró, 2005). Perceived caring is also associated with thriving at work, which is a positive psychological state characterized by a sense of vitality and learning (Abid, Zahra, & Ahmed, 2015; Kleine, Rudolph, & Zacher, 2019; Riaz, Xu, & Hussain, 2018). Meta-analytic research has found that thriving at work is related to important employee outcomes including burnout, commitment and performance (Kleine et al., 2019).



## **CARING ENHANCES WELL-BEING**

When employees perceive their organizations care about them, they also experience a heightened sense of subjective well-being, which includes moods, emotions and evaluation of job and life satisfaction (Diener, Scollon, & Lucas, 2004). Research indicates that employees who perceive high levels of perceived organizational support are more satisfied with their jobs, experience less job stress, burnout, emotional exhaustion and have more balance between work and non-work life domains (Kurtessis et al., 2017). This is likely because perceived caring fulfills employees' socioemotional needs and increases their expectancy that their future needs will be fulfilled, thereby reducing stress and buffering against components of burnout (e.g., emotional exhaustion) and work-family conflict (Kurtessis et al., 2017). This may occur because, based on resource-based models of burnout (e.g., conservation of resources theory, Hobfoll, 1989, and job demands-resources model of burnout, Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001), burnout is largely driven by a lack of resources to cope with work demands. In sum, employees with high perceived organizational support find their job more enjoyable, are in a better mood at work and suffer fewer strain symptoms, including fatigue and burnout (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). It should also be noted that it is widely acknowledged that conditions where people live, work, learn and play — known as social determinants of health — affect a wide range of health risks and outcomes. Indeed, the federal government has initiated a Healthy People 2020 initiative to highlight the importance of creating social and physical environments that promote good health for all.

## **CARING IMPROVES PERFORMANCE**

When employees perceive their employers care about them, they are more likely to feel more obliged to help the organization meet its objectives and to believe that such additional effort will be rewarded. This felt obligation should drive employees to expend additional effort into job activities, resulting in enhanced performance both in and beyond their role requirements (Kurtessis et al., 2017). This can be at least partially explained by the increase in commitment, which has been shown to drive organizational citizenship behavior as the result of perceived organizational support (Gupta et al., 2016). This is further supported by meta-analytic evidence that employees with high affective commitment demonstrate higher levels of performance in their roles and are more likely to go “above and beyond” (extra-role performance) (Kim et al., 2016; Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002; Riketta, 2002). In contrast, when employees feel a lack of support from their organization, they are more likely to withdraw from their work and enact behaviors that harm the organization and its representatives, known as counter-productive work behaviors (Kurtessis et al., 2017).



## ADDITIONAL OUTCOMES OF CARING

When employees perceive their organizations care, they are also less likely to leave the organization, be absent from work and commit errors or accidents (Kurtessis et al., 2017; Gallup, 2017). Additionally, they exhibit more job involvement and experience higher levels of trust in their organization and its representatives (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Because organizational caring involves the provision of informational and tangible resources, it is likely that if employees do not feel they have equal access to those resources, they will not feel included (Shore et al., 2011). Table 1 summarizes the outcomes of organizational caring found from the existing academic and empirical literature.

**TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF OUTCOMES OF ORGANIZATIONAL CARING**

<b>Commitment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased emotional (affective) commitment</li> <li>• Enhanced performance when commitment is in response to organizational support performance</li> <li>• Increased intentions to stay with the organization and pursue organizational goals</li> </ul>
<b>Engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A result of enhanced commitment</li> <li>• Drives productivity</li> <li>• Decreases employee turnover</li> <li>• Decreases accidents</li> <li>• Enhances customer service climate, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty</li> <li>• Enhances thriving at work</li> <li>• Reduces burnout</li> </ul>
<b>Well-being</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heightened sense of subjective well-being (i.e., moods, emotions, and evaluation of job and life satisfaction)</li> <li>• Increased job satisfaction</li> <li>• Reduced job stress, burnout, emotional exhaustion and work-family conflict</li> </ul>
<b>Performance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased in- and extra-role performance, including organizational citizenship behavior</li> <li>• Reduced counter-productive work behaviors</li> </ul>
<b>Other</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced absenteeism</li> <li>• Reduced errors</li> <li>• Increased job involvement</li> <li>• Increased levels of trust in organization and its representative</li> </ul>



## STUDY 1

Described in more detail below, we conducted a study to further examine the outcomes of feeling cared for by one's organization. Specifically, we sought to examine the statistical relationship between experiences of organizational care and employee engagement, inclusion, well-being, intent to stay, stress, burnout and likelihood to recommend their company as a great place to work.

### SAMPLE

We administered a Care Survey online using Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) to examine employee perceptions of organizational care. After screening for participant criteria and data quality, the final sample consisted of 354 individuals. All participants were employed at least full or part time (90.1% indicated they worked more than 30 hours a week, while 9.9% indicated they worked less than 30 hours per week). 56.2% of the sample identified as men, 42.9% as women, and 0.8% identified as non-binary or a third gender.

The sample was predominantly White (65.5%), followed by American Indian or Alaska Native (18.9%) and Black or African American (11.58%) individuals. About 2.0% identified with two or more races, while less than 1% identified as Latinx (0.14%) or Asian (0.03%). The majority of participants were between 25 and 35 (50.3%) years old, followed by ages 36 to 45 (25.4%), 18 to 24 (13.0%) and 46 and up (11.0%).

For job level, 63.3% of the sample were individual level contributors, 31.1% were people managers and 4.2% were directors or above. Most of the sample worked for smaller organizations with 37.3% working at an organization of 51 to 499 individuals and 26.0% working at an organization of one to 50 individuals. 20.1% worked for an organization with 500 to 4,999 individuals and 15.8% worked for an organization with 5,000 plus individuals.

### METHOD AND RESULTS

A series of one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted to examine care group differences on a variety of outcomes. These analyses allow us to determine if there are differences between groups (i.e., those who feel their organization cares, those who feel neutral and those who feel their organization does not care) on each variable of interest. Table 2 shows the full list of items.



The ANOVA statistical test requires several assumptions including normality, independence and homogeneity of variances. Though our sample met the assumption of independence, the data did not demonstrate normality and Levene's tests for homogeneity of variances were violated. Based on these violations, along with the fact that the data were ordinal and that cell sizes were unequal, we used Kruskal-Wallis tests to examine differences in each variable as a function of group membership. The Kruskal-Wallis test is the non-parametric version of the one-way ANOVA that is used when assumptions are violated. Please see a summary of the Kruskal-Wallis results in Table 2.

**Care group.** Participants who responded "strongly agree" or "agree" to the item, "I feel like my organization cares about me," were placed in the "does care" group, those who responded "neither disagree or agree" were placed in the "neutral" group and those who responded "strongly disagree" or "disagree" were placed in the "does not care" group. Because ANOVA is an omnibus test, multiple pairwise comparisons were conducted to determine where differences between groups truly lie (e.g., between those who perceive care and those who are neutral vs. those who perceive care and those who do not).

**Intent to stay.** First, we examined group differences on participants' intent to stay with their organization. The Kruskal-Wallis test was significant ( $H(2)=66.75, p<.01$ ) indicating that there are differences among care groups in their intent to stay. Follow-up pairwise comparisons indicated that those who feel their organization cares have a significantly stronger intent to stay than those who feel neutral ( $\chi^2=-62.74, p<.01$ ) or that their organization does not care ( $\chi^2=-113.75, p<.01$ ).

**Likelihood to recommend.** Next, groups were compared on how likely they would be to recommend their organization as a great place to work. Kruskal-Wallis results indicated significant differences existed among groups ( $H(2)=158.98, p<.01$ ) and specifically that participants who felt their organizations care were significantly more likely to recommend their organization as a great place to work than those who were neutral ( $\chi^2=-80.82, p<.01$ ) or who felt their organization does not care ( $\chi^2=-175.15, p<.01$ ).

**Stress and engagement.** Participants were also compared on stress, engagement, well-being, burnout and inclusion. In regard to stress, significant differences did exist among groups ( $H(2)=66.75, p<.01$ ). Pairwise comparisons indicated that those who feel their organization does care were significantly less stressed than those who feel their organization does not care ( $\chi^2=87.46, p<.01$ ), but not than those who felt neutral ( $\chi^2=-27.78, p=.17$ ). Significant differences also existed between groups on engagement ( $H(2)=-84.07, p<.01$ ), where those who felt their organization cares are significantly more engaged than those who felt their organization does not care ( $\chi^2=-113.88, p<.01$ ).



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**Well-being and burnout.** Significant differences existed between groups in well-being ( $H(2)=74.19$ ,  $p<.01$ ), as well as burnout ( $H(2)=48.90$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Specifically, those who felt their organization cares had significantly higher well-being ( $\chi^2=-109.65$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and lower burnout ( $\chi^2=100.31$ ,  $p<.01$ ) than those who felt their organization did not care. Further, those who felt their organization does care also experienced higher well-being than those who felt neutral ( $\chi^2=-52.93$ ,  $p<.01$ ).

**Inclusion.** Finally, there were significant differences among groups in feeling included in their organization ( $H(2)=146.06$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Those who felt their organization cares felt significantly more included than those who felt their organization does not care ( $\chi^2=-163.01$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and those who felt neutral ( $\chi^2=-93.14$ ,  $p<.01$ ).

Outcome	Item	H(df)	p-value
Intent to Stay	"I intend to stay at my organization for at least..."	66.75(2)	.000
Likelihood to Recommend	"On a scale of 0 (not at all likely) to 10 (extremely likely), how likely are you to recommend your organization as a great place to work?"	158.98(2)	.000
Stress	"Which of the following best describes the current level of stress in your life?"	66.75(2)	.000
Engagement	"I feel personally engaged in my work."	-84.07(2)	.000
Well-Being	"Overall, I have well-being in my life."	74.19(2)	.000
Burnout	"I feel burned out."	48.90(2)	.000
Inclusion	"I feel included at my organization."	146.06(2)	.000



## Care is related to lower stress and burnout

■ % stress is manageable  
■ % disagree or strongly disagree to "I feel burned out"

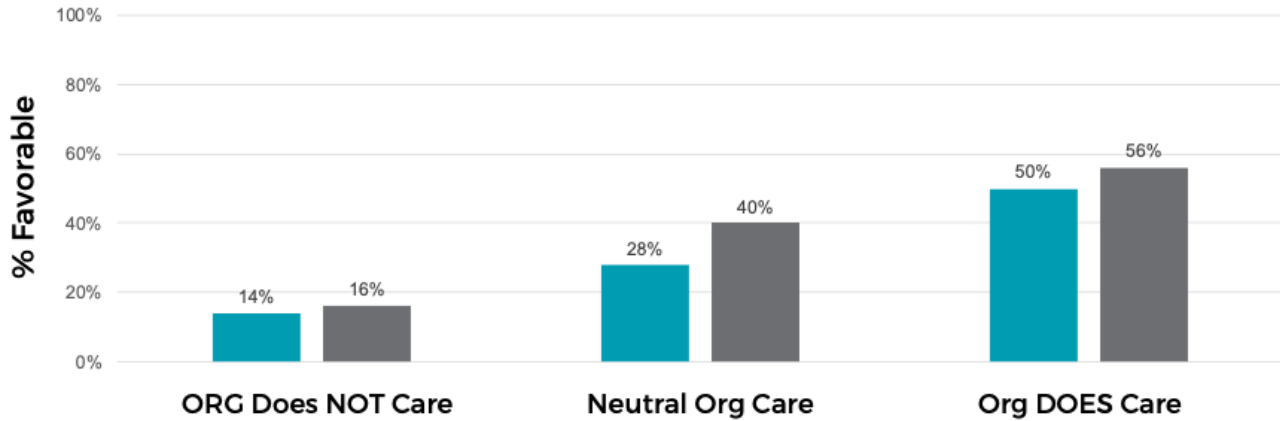


Figure 2. Organizational Care relates to Employee Stress and Burnout

## Care is related to well-being, engagement and inclusion.

■ Well-being  
■ Engagement  
■ Inclusion

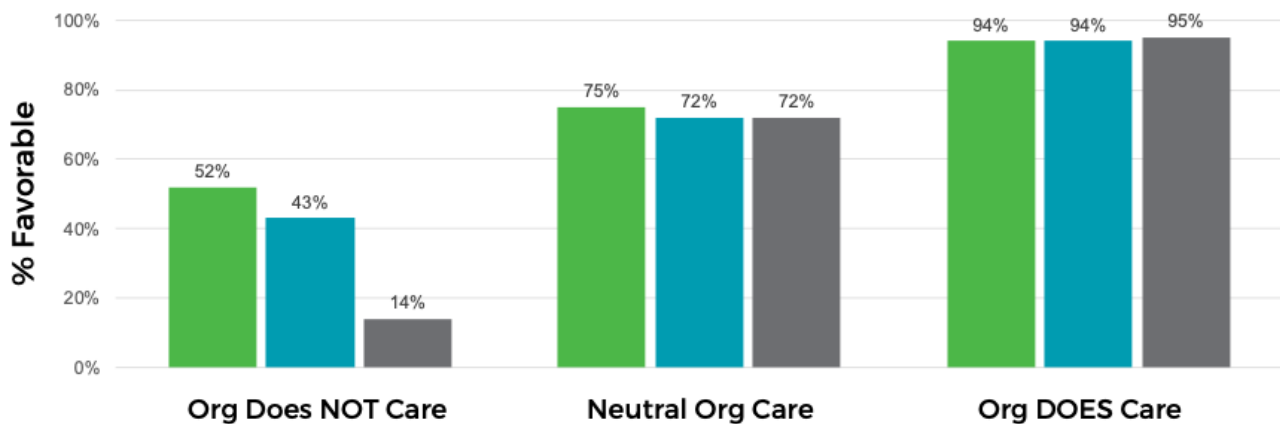


Figure 3: Organizational Care relates to Employee Well-being, Engagement, and Inclusion



## Care is related to intent to stay and likelihood to recommend.

■ Intend to stay 3+ yrs  
■ Likelihood to recommend as a great place to work

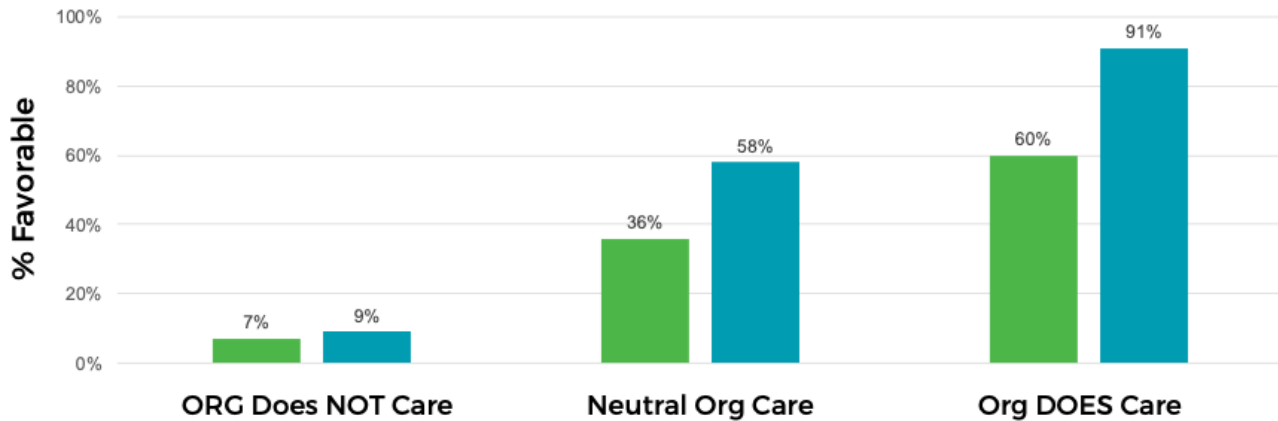


Figure 4: Organizational Care relates to Employee Intent-to-stay and Likelihood-to-Recommend

### ELEMENTS OF PERCEIVED CARING

Organizational literature indicates there are several factors that influence employees' perceptions that their organizations care about them (Kurtessis et al., 2017; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). Based on these findings and our own research, we have developed a care framework for organizations, described below as elements of care. Although this is not an exhaustive list or taxonomy, it provides an introductory framework for further operationalizing organizational support with a focus on what companies can do to show their employees they care. While our Organizational Support Model provides a summary of how to show your employees that you care, the care elements introduce the what the actual focus of that care can be. For example, if a company wanted to focus on Grow, they could do that through the Organizational Support Model with things like manager and leader support. In this section, we walk through each level of the care elements, sharing actionable steps organizations can take at each level.





## ELEMENTS OF PERCEIVED CARING



Figure 5: Limeade Care Elements

## THE CARE ELEMENTS

### LEVEL 1: MEETING BASIC NEEDS

We envision employees' experiences of organizational care as a system of individual, social and interpersonal needs that must be satisfied to feel supported by one's organization. The first level involves safety and security, dignity and respect, fairness and trust and meaningful work.

To meet needs for safety and security, employees must receive a decent salary to support themselves, have certain benefits to take care of their health and families (i.e., health, life and disability insurance), and work in an environment that is physically and psychologically safe (De Vito, Brown, Bannister, Cianci, & Mujtaba, 2016). To meet needs for respect, fairness, and trust, employees must perceive their workplace is just in that it has fair policies and procedures (i.e., not just fair outcomes, but also fairness in the processes involved in deciding, communicating, and distributing those outcomes). This is because people wish to be accepted and respected by others and want to avoid being exploited or harmed by powerful decision-makers (Cropanzano, Bowen, & Gilliland, 2007). In turn, fair processes foster trust; without trust, breakdowns can occur including a decrease in communication and interactions with coworkers and supervisors, which is necessary for performance on all levels of the organization (Wells & Kipnis, 2001). To experience meaningful work, employees must feel their work tasks are significant, have variety in their tasks, and identify with the work they are doing



(job characteristics theory; Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Humphrey, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007). Organizational researchers consider meaningfulness a “critical psychological state” that serves as fuel for performance and job satisfaction (Humphrey et al., 2007). Research has also shown that when employees have meaningfulness in their work, they experience reduced absenteeism and turnover intentions (Humphrey et al., 2007).

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONS

### SAFETY AND SECURITY

- Ensure fair pay for all employees and provide beyond-the-bare-minimum benefits.
- Develop family supportive work practices to demonstrate support for a balanced work-family life.
- Institute anti-discrimination and anti-sexual harassment policies that go above and beyond the law to ensure all employees feel safe.
- Design and promote practices that enhance occupational safety.

### DIGNITY & RESPECT

- Create a code of conduct that clarifies norms and expectations for how coworkers treat each other, and how supervisors treat employees.
- Train managers on how to support employees who report interpersonal problems with coworkers.
- Ensure supervisors and coworkers work to build mutual trust and respect.

### FAIRNESS & TRUST

- Improve employees’ perceptions of fairness by ensuring policies, procedures, communication systems and reward systems are clear, fair and equitable.
- Leaders must demonstrate integrity by being consistent in the enforcement of all policies.
- Eliminate policies and processes that promote perceptions of favoritism and lack of meritocracy.

### MEANINGFUL WORK

- Allow employees with autonomy in their work to increase perceptions of meaningfulness.
- Supervisors should provide employees with frequent feedback to foster engagement.
- Clarify role responsibilities, remove any conflicts as well as any conflicting tasks, which are stressors that undermine other efforts to enhance meaningfulness and perceptions of organizational caring.



## LEVEL 2: SUPPORTING EMPLOYEES' UNIQUE NEEDS

The second level of demonstrating care includes addressing the needs of the “whole person,” listening to employees’ needs to foster deeper connections with them, recognizing employee contributions and helping employees grow in their careers. This next level of organizational caring emphasizes ongoing personal development. Taking a “whole-person” approach means considering employees’ needs and goals beyond their current job function (i.e., their future career aspirations) as well as their non-work lives and associated needs (i.e., need for flexibility as caregiver). Doing so contributes to a sense among employees that their organization cares about them as people and not just about their ability to meet organizational objectives. Similarly, when managers work to listen to employees’ opinions and involve them in decision making, it enhances motivation, likely due (at least partially) to meeting a human need for belongingness or relatedness with others (Gagne & Deci, 2005; Maslow, 1944). Additionally, helping employees grow in their careers and build additional skills through mentorship and personal development plans can help fulfill the need for competence and self-efficacy (self-determination theory; Gagne & Deci, 2005).

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONS

### WHOLE PERSON

- Provide an employee assistance program and spousal/partner benefits to demonstrate compassion for employees’ health and well-being both in- and outside the work environment. This should not only help increase perceptions of caring by employees who are directly affected by these benefits, but should also enhance perceptions of caring for employees who view having additional benefits such as these as evidence that the organizations values its employees as a group (Eisenberger et al., 2019; Kurtessis et al., 2017).
- Allow employees some freedom with their schedules through work from home opportunities and/or flexible start and finish times in support of employees with caregiving responsibilities.
- Foster inclusion so that employees feel they can bring their full selves to work.

### LISTEN & CONNECT

- Leaders must demonstrate concern for their subordinates’ well-being through both formal and informal listening mechanisms, such as employee engagement surveys, recurring meetings or informal conversations.
- Utilize transparent communication to foster trust and perceptions of fairness, watch for signs employees are distressed and offer to remove obstacles where possible.



## RECOGNIZE & ACT

- Recognize employee contributions regularly and utilize praise.
- Express gratitude for employee efforts and a job well done.
- Train managers how to recognize signs that employees are struggling with burnout, interpersonal challenges, or other mental or physical health problems. Managers should be the first to offer support to the employee, intervene if necessary and ensure the employee is aware of all available resources.

## GROW

- Support employees as they work toward fulfilling careers. Put effort into discovering and nurturing employees' unique learning and developmental needs.
- Challenge employees to pursue difficult goals and celebrate wins with them. This should foster employees' sense of confidence and motivation toward growing their skills within the organization and utilizing them to further organizational goals.

## LEVEL 3: SUPPORTING EMPLOYEES' ONGOING DEVELOPMENT & IMPACT

Purpose refers to people's identification of highly valued, over-arching goals, the attainment of which is anticipated to move people closer to achieving their true potential and bring them deep fulfillment (Steger, 2012). This is supported by empirical research which indicates that people with a strong sense of purpose and meaning in life experience greater happiness and well-being (Steger, 2012; Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006; Steger, Kashdan, Sullivan, & Lorentz, 2008), and people who approach their work as a source of meaning are expected to be more deeply engaged with their jobs, work more effectively in teams, commit more strongly to their organizations, and experience higher job satisfaction (Steger & Dik, 2010). Thus, purpose is viewed by organizational scholars and practitioners as central to one's satisfaction in their work lives and career (Kosine, Steger, & Duncan, 2008). Because of its importance to one's overall happiness, it is likely that when organizations help employees find purpose in their work, they will feel cared for. To do this, managers can ensure employees understand the mission, vision and values of the organization, which helps them see how their efforts contribute to the company's overall success. This should demonstrate organizational support, which should in turn inspire employees to encourage further identification with the organization and alignment of personal goals with organizational goals.



To build a caring climate throughout the organization, it is important that leaders ensure organizational norms are aligned with company values. Research indicates that when employees perceive a mismatch between norms and values, they experience less identification with the organization (Ng, Yam, & Aguinis, 2018), a necessary part of perceived organizational care. Additionally, by extending care beyond the organization (i.e., through corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts), organizations can provide additional ways for employees to find meaning and purpose by working for the organization. Additionally, employees are increasingly wanting their employers to take a stand on societal issues (Bolden-Barrett, 2017) and engage in more CSR (Peretz, 2017).

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONS

### FINDING PURPOSE

- Leaders should support employees in finding meaning in not just their work, but their lives and careers.
- Clearly communicate the company's purpose, values and objectives and help employees see how they fit in.
- Set a vision to inspire employees toward organizational and their own personal goals.

### MAKE IT A BETTER WORLD

- Organizations should demonstrate inclusion by adopting best practices for diversity management in all sectors of the organization.
- Extend care outside the organization. Support causes that employees care about. Encourage community service and provide employees with time and financial resources to participate in causes.
- Pursue social responsibility efforts that align with company values. Research has found that when employees perceived an organization's CSR efforts were not aligned with their company values (low authenticity of their CSR efforts), they were less likely to like the organization's CSR efforts (Schaefer, Terlutter, & Diehl, 2019).



## STUDY 2

We sought out to further examine the relationship between elements of organizational care as drivers of feeling cared for by one's organization. To do this, we utilized the same sample and dataset from Study 1.

To examine how needs at each level contribute to employee perceptions of organizational care, we conducted a series of one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) and Kruskal-Wallis tests (non-parametric version of one-way analyses of variance). One of the assumptions of ANOVA is homogeneity of variances (i.e., the variance within each group is equal). Many of the ANOVAs we conducted broke this assumption (indicated by a significant Levene statistic), which prompted us to additionally conduct Kruskal-Wallis tests for variables that did not demonstrate homogeneous variances. All follow-up Kruskal-Wallis tests were significant, indicating significant differences among groups indeed exist. For this reason, we will only report results from the ANOVAs and multiple comparisons.

These analyses allow us to determine if there are differences between groups (i.e., those who feel their organization cares, those who feel neutral and those who feel their organization does not care) on each "step" or variable of interest. Participants who responded "strongly agree" or "agree" to the item, "I feel like my organization cares about me," were placed in the "does care" group, those who responded "neither disagree or agree" were placed in the "neutral" group and those who responded "strongly disagree" or "disagree" were placed in the "does not care" group. Because ANOVA is an omnibus test, multiple pairwise comparisons were conducted to determine where differences between groups truly lie (e.g., between those who perceive care and those who are neutral vs. those who perceive care and those who do not).

### LEVEL ONE

At the first level of the care elements, organizations can provide physical safety and security, dignity and respect, fairness and trust and meaningful work. We compared groups on the items: "I feel safe at work," "I am respected at my organization," "I trust my organization" and "I feel personally engaged in my work." Results for physical safety and security were significant ( $F(2, 349)=25.450, p<.05$ ), as were results for dignity and respect ( $F(2, 349)=51.615, p<.05$ ), fairness and trust ( $F(2, 349)=230.445, p<.05$ ) and meaningful work ( $F(2, 349)=73.840, p<.05$ ). For each of these variables, each group differed significantly from all other groups according to the Bonferroni post-hoc comparisons. This indicates that those who feel their organization cares for them also report feeling safer at work, better respected at work, trust their organization more and feel more engaged in their work, compared to those who are



neutral or feel that their organization does not care. Figures one through four depict the distributions of agreement based on group membership. While we can see that some who feel their organization does not care report, for example, feeling safe or respected, those who do not feel safe or respected were predominantly respondents who feel their organization does not care. These results indicate that when employees feel safe, respected, trusting and engaged, they are more likely to feel that their organization cares for them.

## LEVEL TWO

The second level of demonstrating care includes addressing the needs of the “whole person,” listening to employees’ needs to foster deeper connections with them, recognizing employee contributions and helping employees grow in their careers. We compared groups on the items: “I feel valued by my organization,” “I feel connected to what’s happening in my organization,” “In general, my employer tries to do the right thing for its employees” and “I am realizing my potential at work.” Results indicated significant differences between groups for feeling valued as a whole person ( $F(2, 349)=265.556, p<.05$ ), feeling connected ( $F(2, 349)=139.497, p<.05$ ), recognizing and acting ( $F(2, 349)=138.855, p<.05$ ) and realizing potential or growing ( $F(2, 349)=119.224, p<.05$ ). Further, Bonferroni post-hoc comparisons indicate significant differences exist among all groups. Specifically, those who feel their organization cares are more likely to feel valued as a whole person, connected to their organization, that their organization does the right thing and like they are realizing their potential at work compared to those who feel neutral or that their organization does not care. These results can be further observed in figures five through eight.

## LEVEL THREE

Finally, the third level of organizational caring involves meeting employees’ higher-level needs, such as feeling a sense of purpose and making the world a better place. To examine how these factors are related to caring, we compared groups on the items: “My work has purpose” and “I believe my organization makes the world a better place.” Results from one-way ANOVAs for each item revealed significant differences in feeling a sense of purpose ( $F(2, 348)=55.830, p<.05$ ) and making the world a better place ( $F(2, 349)=156.725, p<.05$ ). Bonferroni post-hoc comparisons further revealed significant differences existed among all groups for each item. This indicates that those who feel their organization cares are more likely to feel a sense of purpose and feel like their organization contributes to making the world a better place than those who are neutral or feel like their organization does not care for its employees. These results are further depicted in figures nine and ten.



## LEVEL ONE CARE ELEMENTS

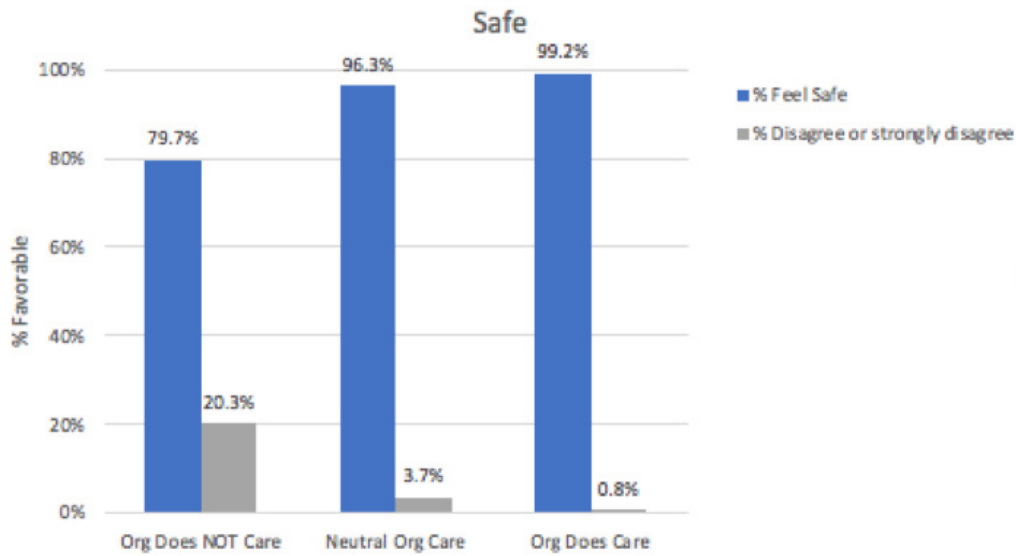


Figure 1. Within group distribution for physical safety and security. Percentage indicates within group agreement.

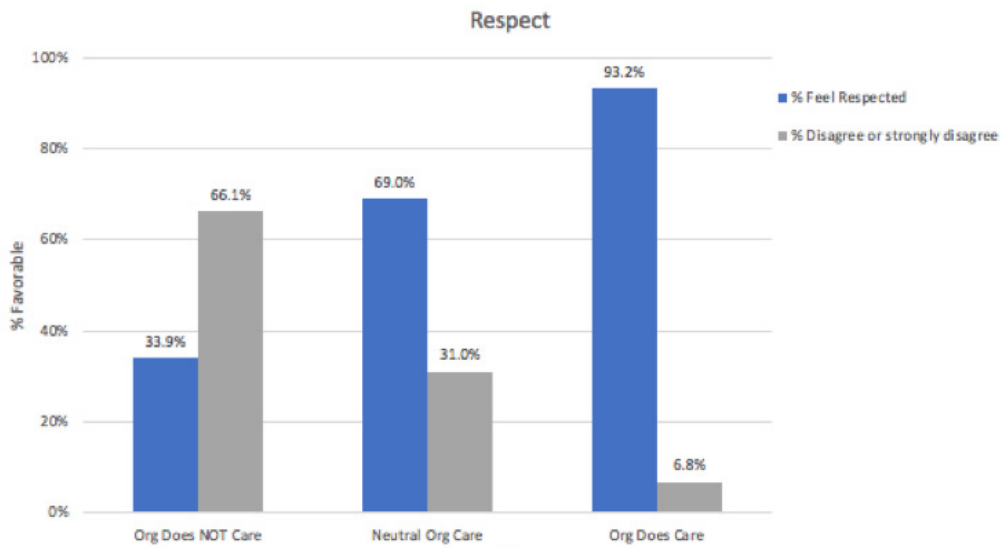


Figure 2. Within group distribution for dignity and respect. Percentage indicates within group agreement.





## LEVEL ONE CARE ELEMENTS

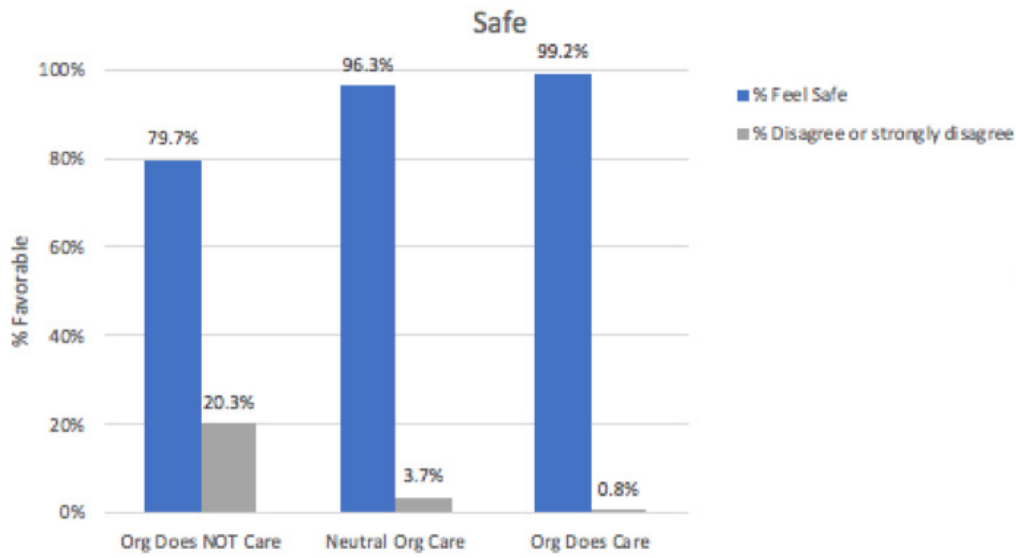


Figure 1. Within group distribution for physical safety and security. Percentage indicates within group agreement.

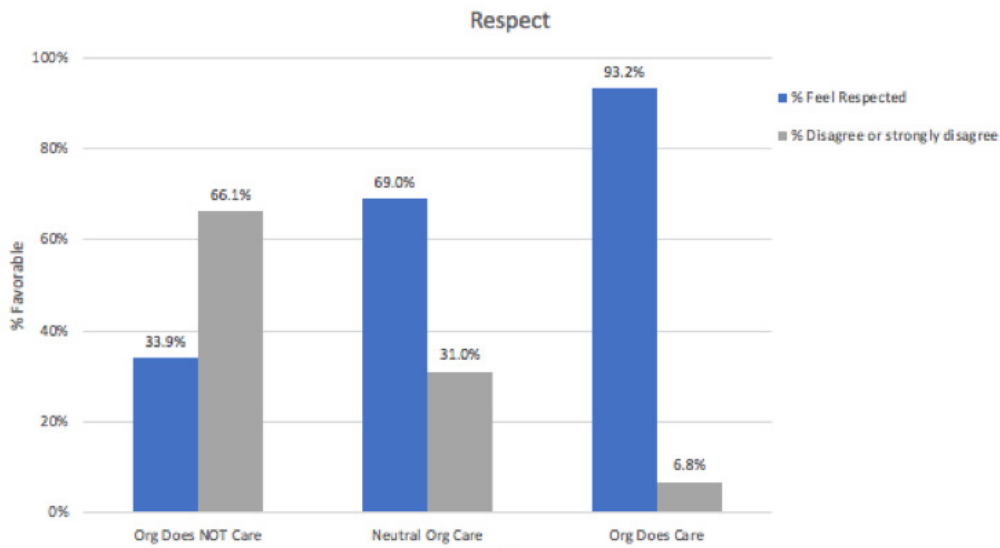


Figure 2. Within group distribution for dignity and respect. Percentage indicates within group agreement.



## LEVEL TWO CARE ELEMENTS

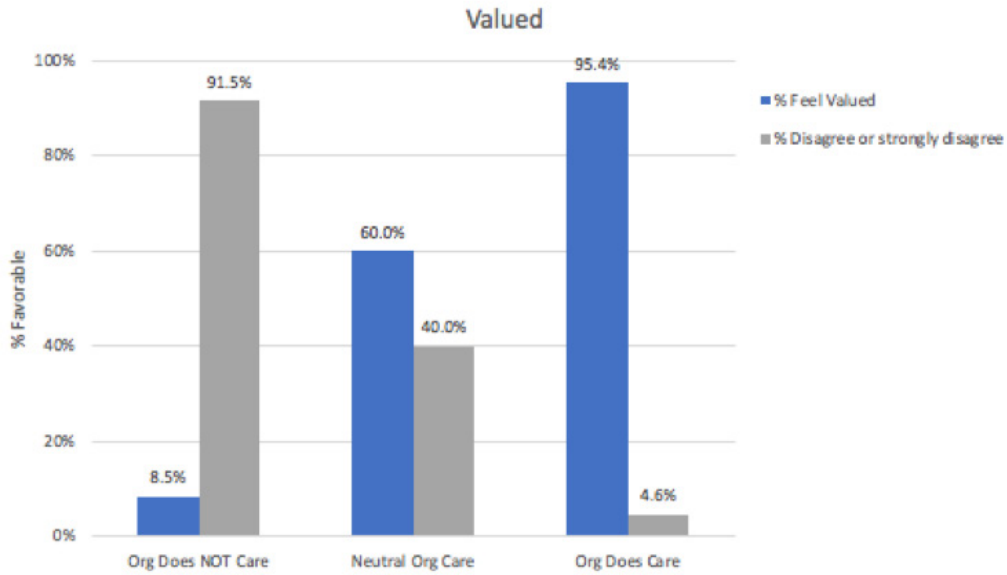


Figure 5. Within group distribution for whole person. Percentage indicates within group agreement.

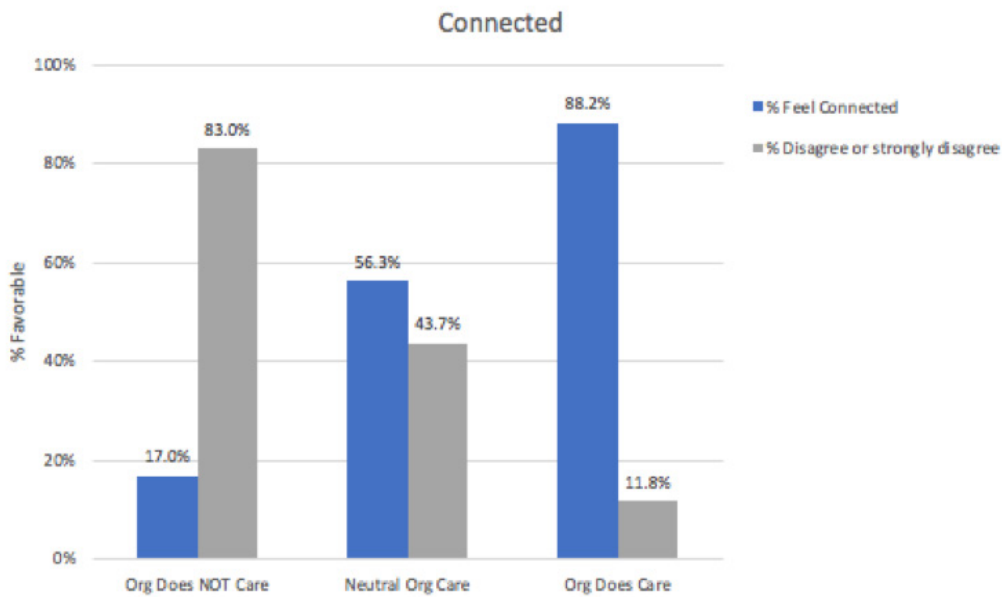


Figure 6. Within group distribution for listen and connect. Percentage indicates within group agreement.



## LEVEL TWO CARE ELEMENTS

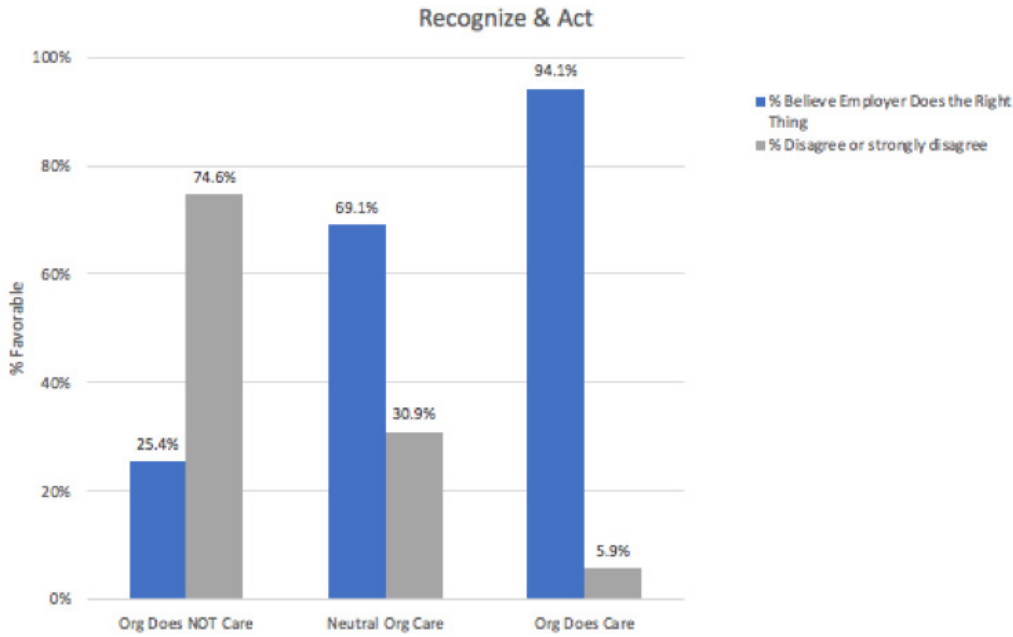


Figure 7. Within group distribution for recognize and act. Percentage indicates within group agreement.

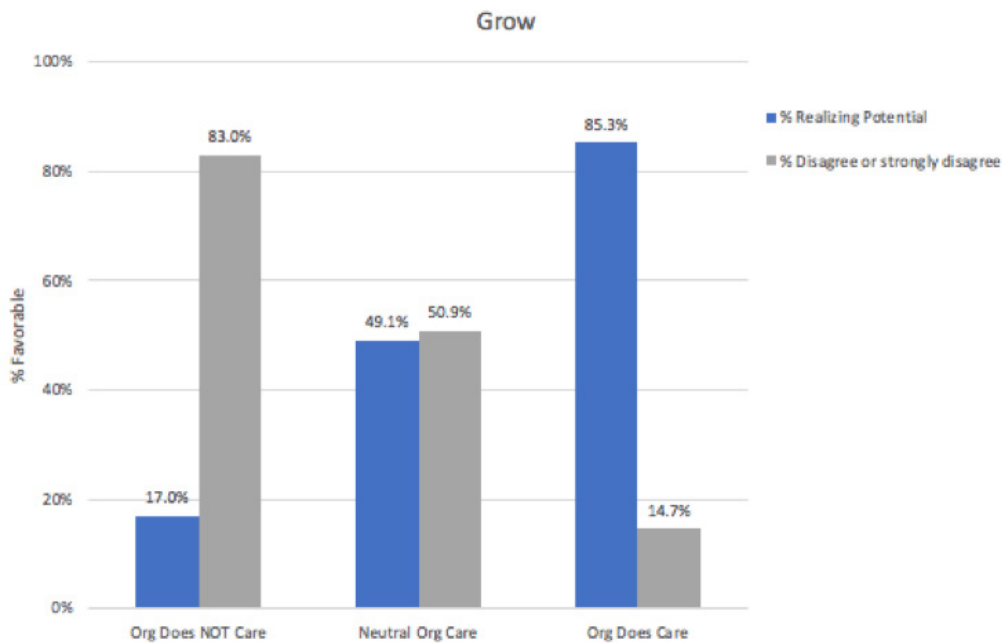


Figure 8. Within group distribution for grow. Percentage indicates within group agreement.



## LEVEL THREE CARE ELEMENTS

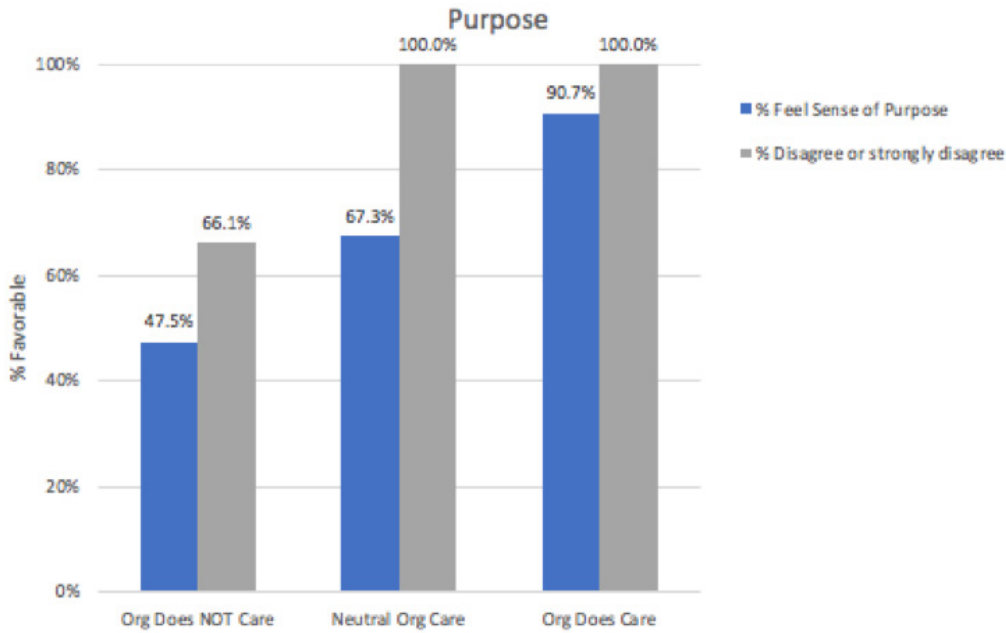


Figure 9. Within group distribution for finding purpose. Percentage indicates within group agreement.

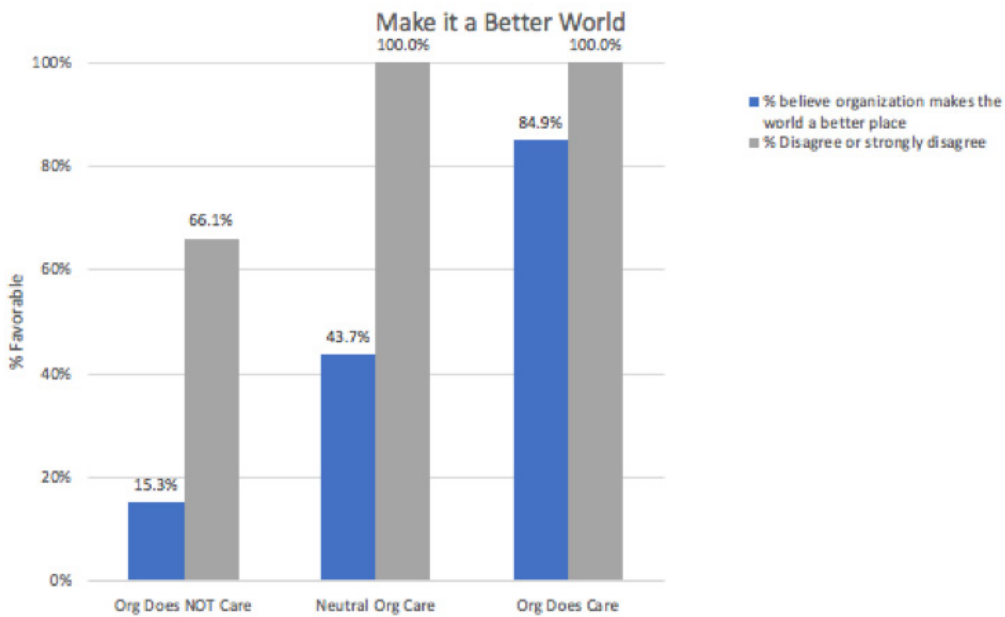


Figure 10. Within group distribution for make it a better world. Percentage indicates within group agreement.



## DISCUSSION

Our research found that employees who felt they were safe and respected, engaged in meaningful work and trusting of their organizations were more likely to feel their organizations cared about them. Additionally, results indicated that employees who felt valued as a whole person, felt connected to what was happening in their organizations, felt as though their organization tries to do the right thing and felt like they were realizing their true potential at work were more likely to report perceiving their organization cared about them. Finally, we found that employees who felt a sense of purpose and felt like their organization contributed to making the world a better place were more likely to feel their organizations cared about them. See the Appendix for full details about our research study and results.

## FUTURE RESEARCH

Although the care elements approach is based on abundant academic literature and research on organizational support as it relates to the concept of “care,” the taxonomy itself is the first of its kind. We therefore recognize more research is needed that explores the relationships between organizational care and its predictors and outcomes and allows for iterations of this model.

## CONCLUSION

As the nature of the modern workplace continues to shift from one driven by the needs of employers to one centered around the experience of employees, organizations are recognizing the need to demonstrate to their workers that they care about them. Research has found that when employees perceive support from their organizations, they are more committed to the organization and have higher levels of engagement, performance and well-being. To demonstrate caring, leaders at all levels must dedicate organizational resources and their own efforts toward making employees feel supported by the organization’s policies, procedures and climate it creates, as well as their coworkers. We provide a toolkit for organizations looking to foster a greater sense of care and support among employees.



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## APPENDIX

Table 3. Care Survey Items

Item	Question	Dimension
25	I feel like my organization cares about me.	Perceived Organizational Caring
2	I feel safe at work.	Physical Safety & Security (Level 1)
10	I am respected at my organization.	Dignity & Respect (Level 1)
3	I am paid fairly for the work I do.	Fairness & Trust (Level 1)
18	I trust my organization.	Fairness & Trust (Level 1)
19	I trust my manager.	Fairness & Trust (Level 1)
20	I trust my co-workers.	Fairness & Trust (Level 1)
26	I feel personally engaged in my work.	Meaningful Work (Level 1)
21	I feel valued by my organization.	Whole Person (Level 2)
11	I feel connected to what's happening in my organization.	Listen & Connect (Level 2)
17	In general, my employer tries to do the right thing for its employees.	Recognize & Act (Level 2)
13	I am realizing my potential at work.	Grow (Level 2)
12	My work has purpose.	Finding Purpose (Level 3)
16	My organization has a positive culture.	Caring Culture (Level 3)
24	I believe my organization makes the world a better place.	Make it a Better World (Level 3)
4	Information flows openly throughout my overall organization.	Organizational Support
5	I receive adequate information within my organization.	Organizational Support / Inclusion
6	I get enough time off work.	Organizational Support
7	I have the resources I need to be able to do my job effectively.	Organizational Support
8	I get the right amount of feedback to be able to do my job effectively.	Organizational Support
9	My work allows for some flexibility in how, where, and when I work.	Organizational Support
14	At work, there's a sense that "we're all in this together."	Organizational Support
15	My manager "looks out" for me.	Organizational Support
23	The leaders of my organization inspire me to give 100%.	Organizational Support