MARATHON COUNTY EMPLOYEE BELONGING AND INCLUSIVITY STUDY

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A Study Commissioned by
Marathon County

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Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy and Service

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose

Marathon County has placed a lot of emphasis on supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion in recent years. The team wanted to know how Marathon County employees feel about their place of employment: Do they feel they belong? Do they feel valued and respected by their co-workers and managers, whatever their differences may be (e.g., ethnic background, gender, religion)? To answer these questions, the research team developed an inventory of items related to employee perceptions of belonging and inclusion, surveyed employees of Marathon County, and conducted follow-up focus groups with select members of the organization.

Process

In November 2018, a total of 776 employees of Marathon County were invited to complete a broad inventory to assess feelings of belonging, shared values, support for diversity, communication, fairness, care, respect, and positivity at Marathon County. In January 2019, researchers held three focus group sessions with female law enforcement employees, individuals with diverse identities, and young professionals. A total of 390 employees completed the questionnaire and 21 employees participated in the focus group sessions.

Primary Findings

1 **The questionnaire sample is well-represented by different groups working for Marathon County.** The sample provided a broad cross-section of the employee population in terms of gender, ethnic heritage/background, employee position, and employment tenure.

2 **Most employees report a sense of shared values and purpose at work.**

3 **Most employees report a positive view of teamwork and cooperation in the workplace and have a sense of being respected by fellow employees.**

4 **Marathon County employees perceive support for diversity in the workplace.** When asked specifically about facing discrimination or being treated differently because of their personal background, respondents overwhelmingly agree that this was not the case.

5 **Female employees do NOT report more negativity than male employees.** When there are differences, female employees offer more *positive* responses than male employees.

6 **For the most part, minority employees do NOT report more negativity than white employees.** This includes items assessing their perceptions of workplace quality and of individual belonging.

7 Minority populations encourage the County to continue to be sensitive to issues of diversity.

8 Perceptions of fairness in the workplace could be improved.

9 Communicating openly and allowing employees to have a voice could be improved.

10 There is a small but significant group of workers that overall are less satisfied than the vast majority of their co-workers. Nearly all of these non-reporters are white though other demographic factors (such as age, gender, tenure at work) are unknown.

Key Recommendations

1 Invest in quality leadership.

2 Provide and encourage leadership education that is focused on building trust, positive communication, and positive employee interactions.

3 Provide professional/skill development opportunities for employees at all levels (e.g., supervisory and non-supervisory).

4 Promote and encourage shared responsibility for an inclusive culture at Marathon County.

5 Be more intentional about offering safe routes for conversation and problem solving around issues of diversity, inclusivity and discrimination.

6 Provide safe routes for employees to voice general concerns and frustrations.

OVERVIEW

Purpose

In consultation with Marathon County leaders (Brad Karger, Frank Matel, Kelly Gross, Dan Fiorenza), WIPPS researchers Eric Giordano and April Bleske-Rechek designed a questionnaire to measure employees' perceptions of workplace belonging and inclusivity at Marathon County.

In the pages to follow, we provide details on the instrument design, survey process and methodology; the demographic breakdown of employees who responded; quantitative results from the questionnaire responses provided by employees; and a summary of the feedback and experiences that focus group participants shared. Finally, with both the quantitative and qualitative data in hand, and recognizing the many strengths the organization already displays, we offer recommendations to Marathon County leadership for building a stronger, more inclusive workplace culture.

Questionnaire

A. Question Topics
The questionnaire included a number of subscales:

1. Negative Experiences at Work (7 items; adapted from Pew Research Center). Sample items include:
   o Felt isolated in the workplace
   o Been excluded from work events or gatherings
2. The Gallup Workplace Audit (10 items about various aspects of the workplace). Sample items include:
   o I know what is expected of me at work.
   o At work, my opinions seem to count.
   o The mission/purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important.
3. Person-Organization Fit (4 items; adapted from Saks & Ashforth, 1997). Sample items include:
   o The values of this organization (Marathon County) are similar to my own values.
   o This organization (Marathon County) is a good match for me.
4. Shared Values, Shared Vision, and Sense of Purpose (6 items). Sample items include:
   o I identify with the goals of this organization.
   o My co-workers and I (agree) over work values.
5. Care and Trust (5 items). Sample items include:
   o I have confidence in the integrity of my co-workers.
   o I feel part of a warm, caring group at work.
6. Teamwork and Cooperation (3 items). Sample items include:
   o People here take responsibility for improving the work environment.
   o My co-workers and I cooperate easily.
7. Individual Belonging and Self-Expression (5 items). Sample items include:
   o I feel free to be myself at work.
   o Even when something bad happens at work (e.g., I have a negative social interaction with a peer, etc.), I don't question whether or not I belong at MC.

8. Respect and Appreciation (3 items). Sample items include:
   o I feel appreciated here.
   o I feel respected at Marathon County.
9. Communication and Voice (8 items). Sample items include:
   o I have input into decisions made at work that affect me.
   o I can voice a contrary opinion without fear of negative consequences.
10. Loyalty and Intent to Stay (5 items). Sample items include:
    o I would recommend this institution as a great place to work.
    o I see myself still working at MC in two years' time.
11. Fairness (6 items). Sample items include:
    o People from all backgrounds have equal opportunities to succeed at MC.
    o My job performance is evaluated fairly.
12. Support for Diversity (8 items). Sample items include:
    o At Marathon County, I have been treated respectfully regardless of my differences.
    o My department builds teams and/or seeks viewpoints that are diverse.
13. Reporting Concerns (3 items). Sample items include:
    o If I had a concern about my own experience of harassment or discriminatory treatment, I would be comfortable reporting that concern.
    o If I had a concern about a co-worker experiencing harassment or discriminatory treatment, I would be comfortable reporting that concern.

B. **Open-Ended Questions**
   On the final pages of the questionnaire, employees responded to three open-ended questions:
   1. Do you feel Marathon County supports an inclusive work culture where everyone feels they belong and are respected? Why or why not?
   2. What is one thing Marathon County could do to create a more inclusive work culture?
   3. What is one thing you, personally, could do to create a more inclusive work culture?

C. **Demographics Questions**
   Employees were also asked to report their basic demographic information:
   1. Age
   2. Gender
   3. Ethnic background
   4. Years of employment at Marathon County
   5. Department of employment at Marathon County
   6. Type of employment position (e.g., manager, lead worker) at Marathon County

Distribution

The questionnaire was offered to all Marathon County employees in early November 2018 primarily via an online Qualtrics platform. However, several departments whose employees do not generally access computers received paper copies of the questionnaire along with pre-addressed and stamped return envelopes. Altogether, we received a total of 390 responses by December 20, when data compilation and analysis began. With a total employee count of 776, the response rate was 50.26%.

Analytics

All data were analyzed with SPSS 24.0. All group differences that are described as statistically significant were held to the convention of a Type I error rate of < .05. Throughout the report, means presented in graphical form are accompanied by error bars that provide the 95% confidence interval estimate of the relevant means.

Focus Groups

In early January 2019, after reviewing trends in the data, the team conducted three 1.5-hour focus group sessions. The composition of the focus groups was determined by Marathon County leadership and consisted of the following three subsets: 1) female employees in law enforcement; 2) employees in traditionally underrepresented groups; and 3) "young professionals" at Marathon County, each of whom had worked at the county for six years or less. At these focus group sessions, we asked for individual responses to several follow up questions (see Appendix A).

FINDINGS

Demographic Characteristics of Employees

A. Gender Breakdown

Human resources data on Marathon County show that 52% of employees are female and 48% male. As shown below in Figure 1, 367 employees responded to the question about their gender (23 left it blank). Of those answering the question, 41% were men and 49% were women. Another 10% responded with Transgender, Other, or (most commonly) Prefer Not to Answer.
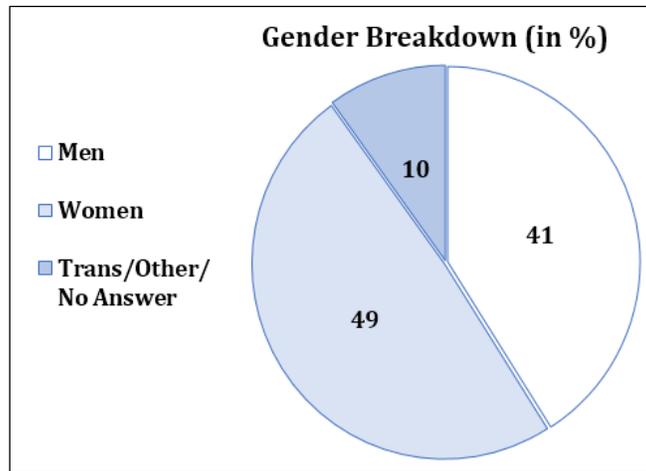
Gender Breakdown (in %)

- Men
- Women
- Trans/Other/No Answer

10

41

49

Figure 1

B. Ethnic Background

Human resources data on Marathon County show that 95% of employees are white. Of the 365 who responded to the question about their ethnic background or heritage (25 left the question blank), 79% reported of European descent (white), and 7% were of either African descent, American Indian/Alaskan Native descent, Asian descent, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander descent, Hispanic/Latino descent, International descent, or two or more ethnicities. Another 14% selected the response "Prefer Not to Answer."
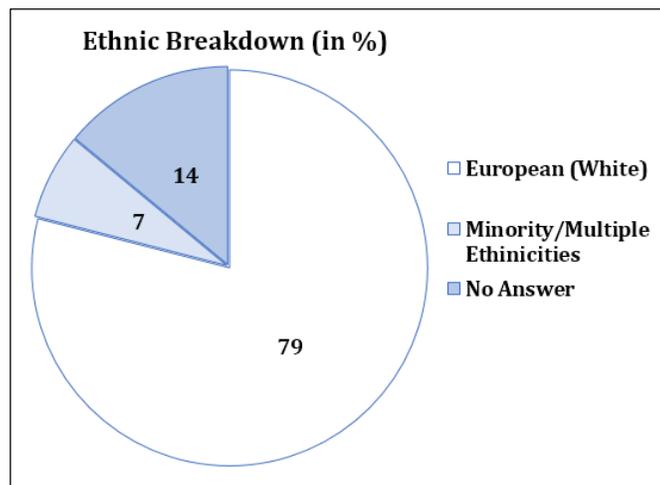
Ethnic Breakdown (in %)

- European (White)
- Minority/Multiple Ethinicities
- No Answer

14

7

79

Figure 2

C. Age

As shown below, 367 responded to the question about their age (23 left it blank). Of those answering the question, 12% were 30 years old or younger, 22% were between 31 and 40, 22% between 41 and 50, 23% between 51 and 60, and 11% between 61 and 70. Another 12% selected the response "Prefer Not to Answer."
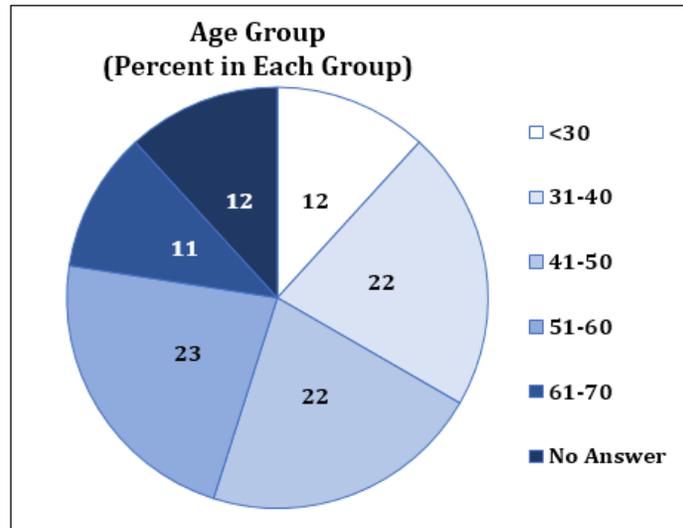

Figure 3

D. Employment Characteristics

Respondents varied in terms of their employment characteristics (see Tables 1-3 below). As with gender, age, and ethnic background, about 10% of employees left this item blank or, when given the opportunity (as in the case of Years Employed at Marathon County), chose the response "Prefer not to answer." As shown below, about half of responding employees had been with MC for 10 years or less, and about half for 11 years or more. Responding employees represented all of the county departments, with the smallest number of responding employees coming from the District Attorney's office and the largest number coming from Social Services. Employees at all levels, from non-supervisor/non-lead through manager, were represented in the data.

Years Employed at MC	% of Respondents (Valid *N*=363)
< 1 year	8%
1-5 years	30%
6-10 years	18%
11-15 years	8.5%
16-20 years	8.5%
>20 years	15%
No answer	12%

Table 1

Department at MC	% of Respondents (Valid *N*=347)
Aging & Disability Resource Ctr	10%
Central WI Airport	5%
Clerk of Courts	4%
Conserv., Planning, & Zoning	6%
District Attorney	.3%
Facilities and Capital Mgmt	4%
Health Dept	8%
Highway Dept	11%
Library	8%
Parks, Rec, and Forestry	5%
Sheriff	13%
Social Services	17%
Solid Waste	2%
Other (Corp. Council, etc.)	8%

Table 2

Employee Position	% of Respondents (Valid *N*=353)
Manager	12%
Supervisor	10%
Lead worker	10%
Non-supervisor, Non-lead	68%

Table 3

Trends in the Quantitative Data

A. **Negative Events in the Workplace**

In a recent national report out of the Pew Research Center (released on Dec. 14, 2017) a larger percent of women than men reported that they had experienced certain negative events at work, such as the following, *because of* their gender:

- Earned less than someone else who was doing the same job
- Treated as if you were not competent
- Experienced repeated, small slights
- Received less support from supervisors than did someone else who was doing the same job
- Been passed over for the most important tasks
- Felt isolated in the workplace
- Been denied a promotion

Marathon County employs more women than men and has placed a lot of emphasis on equity in recent years. The team wanted to know how Marathon County employees would respond to these items. We added one more item to the list ("Been excluded from work events or gatherings"). Then, we asked all employees to report if they had experienced each of these negative situations/events while working at Marathon County. Next, we asked all employees to report if they had experienced each of these situations/events while working at Marathon County *because of their race/ethnicity, color, gender, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, veteran's status, religious beliefs, disability or socio-economic status.*

All ratings were given on a five-point scale: *Never (1)*, *Rarely (2)*, *Sometimes (3)*, *Often (4)*, and *Very Often (5)*. The take-away results from the table and graphs to follow are mostly positive:

Participant Responses with and without reference to diversity factors	Have you ever experienced…? Mean rating:	Have you ever experienced… *because* of your differences? Mean rating:	Have you ever experienced… *because* of your differences? Mean rating Men/Women:	Have you ever experienced… *because* of your differences? Mean rating White/Minority/ No Answer:
Have you been treated as if you were not competent?	2.02	1.44	1.36/1.41	1.37/1.48/**1.73**
Have you experienced repeated, small insults or slights?	1.91	1.42	1.42/1.34	1.34/1.41/**1.75**
Have you received less support from supervisors than someone else doing the same job?	2.06	1.46	1.45/1.35	1.37/1.44/**1.90**
Have you been passed over for the most important tasks?	1.93	1.36	1.36/1.31	1.30/1.52/1.65
Have you felt isolated in the workplace?	1.97	1.45	1.41/1.39	1.37/1.52/**1.83**
Have you shown interest in, but not received, a promotion?	1.83	1.36	1.43/1.22	1.25/**1.56/1.90**
Have you been excluded from work events or gatherings?	1.60	1.36	1.38/1.31	1.31/1.48/**1.67**

Note. For Racial/Ethnic Group means, White N=288, Minority N=27; Other/Prefer Not to Answer N=49.

Table 4

As reinforced in Table 4 above and in the Figure 4 and 5 histograms below, the vast majority of responding employees reported that these types of negative events were infrequent. The rated frequency of these experiences was consistently and only weakly correlated with working at Marathon County for longer periods (which is expected because more years at Marathon County would allow more time for negative events to occur). However, reports of the frequency of these experiences happening *because of one's differences* related to age, gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation gender expression, and other factors of diversity was not consistently related to working longer at Marathon County (i.e., the correlations were negligible to weak in magnitude).
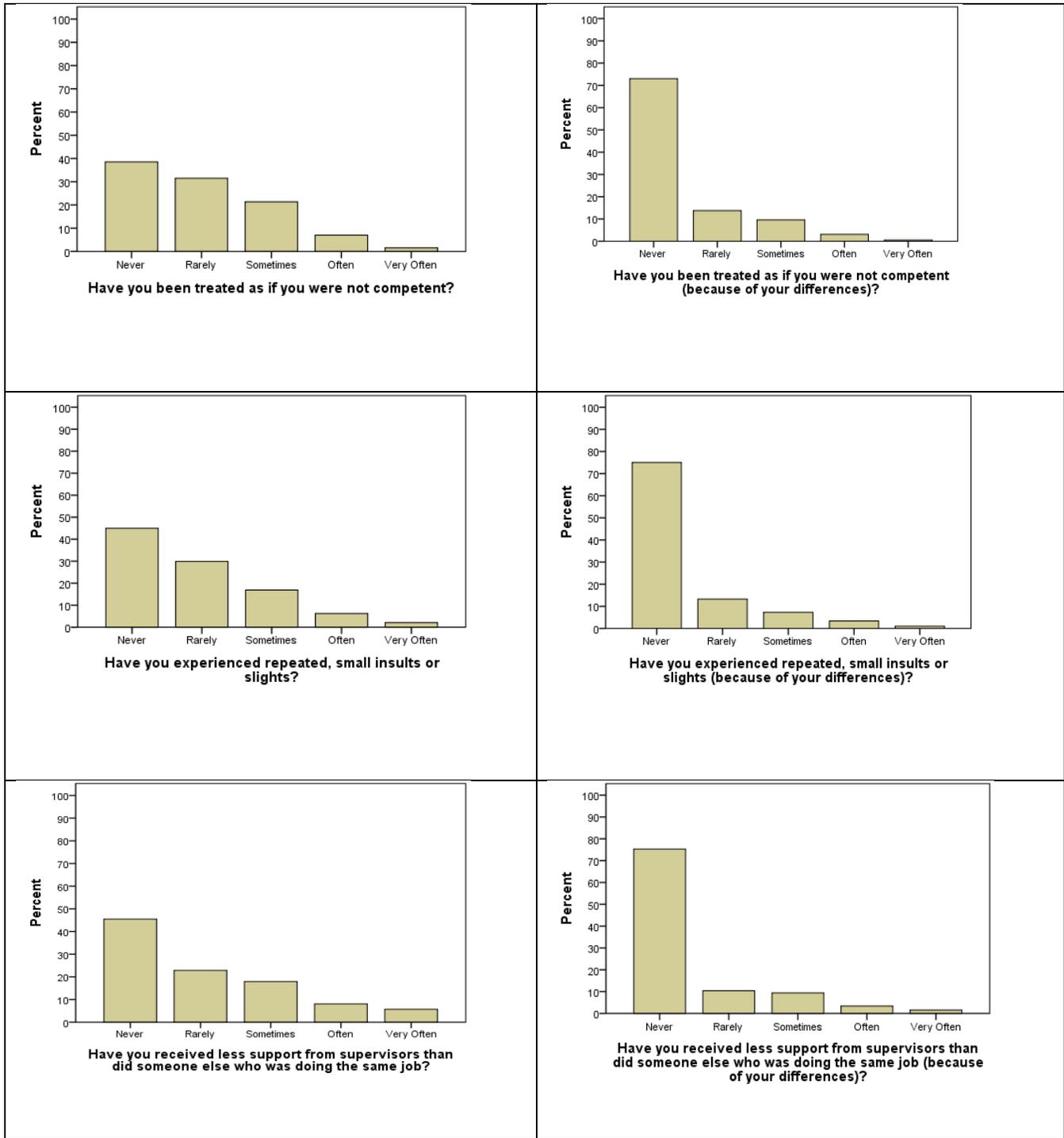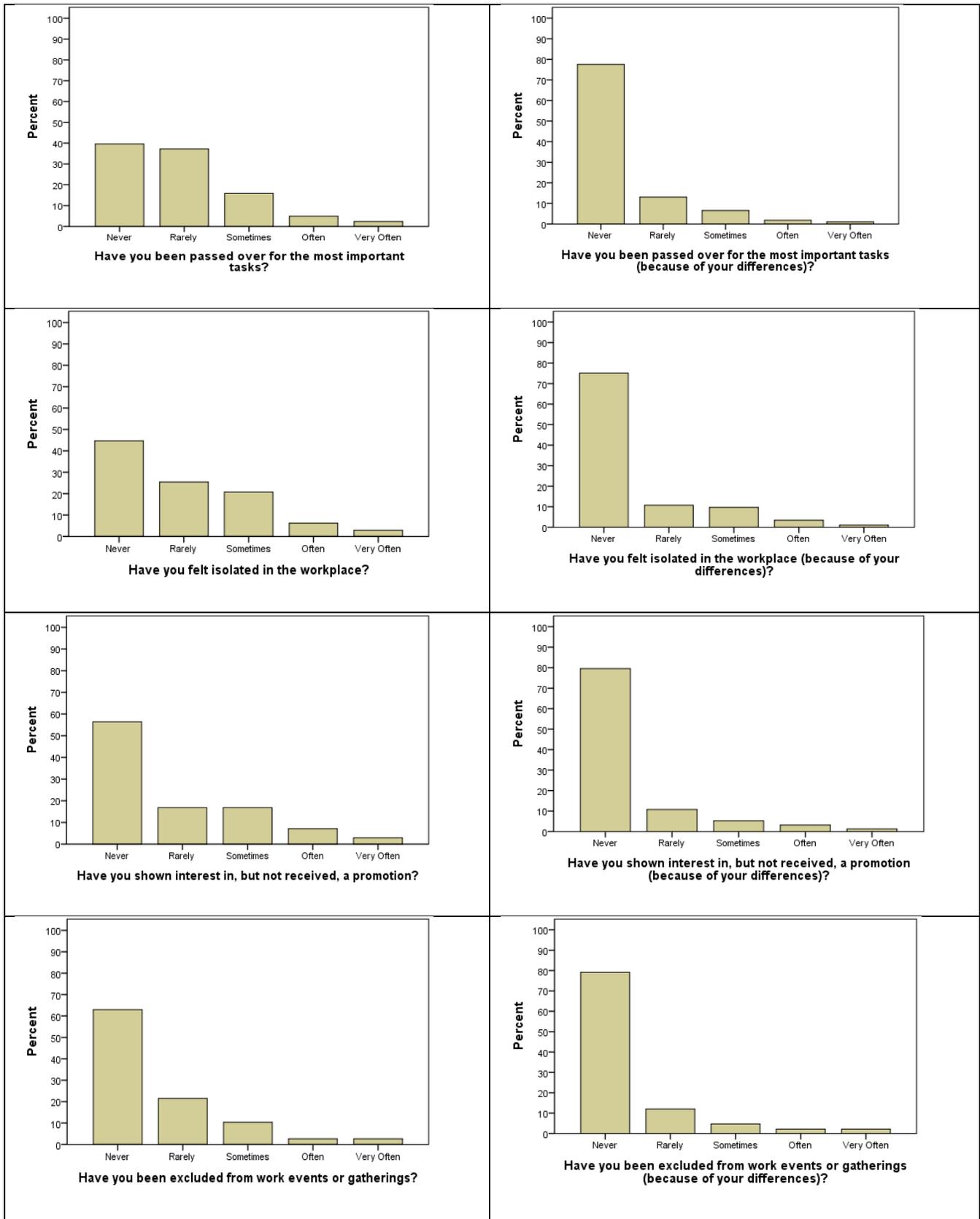
Figure 4

Figure 5

B. Key Takeaways

1. Most employees reported that they had never or only rarely experienced these negative events in the workplace.
2. Women did not experiene negative workplace events any more often more than men did.
3. Ethnically diverse employees did not reliably report experiencing negative events in the workplace any more often more than white employees did.
4. When employees were asked if they had experienced any negative workplace events because of their differences, ratings were even lower, indicating that workplace culture in Marathon County is remarkably safe and welcoming for workers with diverse backgrounds.

C. The "No Response" Exception

Employees' ratings of how frequently they had experienced one type of negative event were strongly correlated with their ratings of how frequently they had experienced other types of negative events in the workplace (Cronbach's alpha = .88). Likewise, ratings of how often they had experienced negative events *because of their differences* were highly correlated (Cronbach's alpha = .94). Because of this high level of internal consistency, we created composite variables for these two sets of items. Then, we explored mean scores for these composite variables by Gender, Ethnic Group, and Years of Employment at Marathon County (Figures 6-8). The common theme is that employees who were unwilling to report their basic demographics (less than 10% of those surveyed) also reported experiencing more negativity at work.[1]

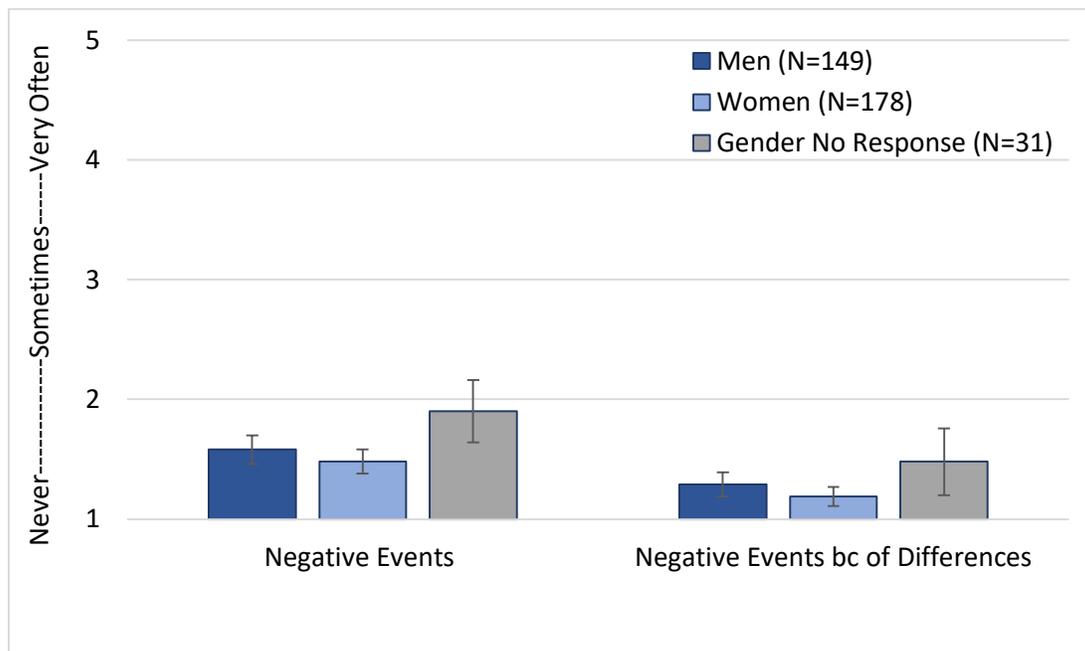**Perceptions of Negative Experiences in the Workplace by Gender**

Figure 6

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[1] The vertical lines intersecting each bar in Figures 6-8 (and throughout this report) indicate the 95% confidence interval around that mean. This is equivalent to a margin of error or an estimate within which we can be 95% confident the true group mean would fall within the indicated range if we sampled repeatedly from the population of interest. (Error bars represent ±2 SEM.)

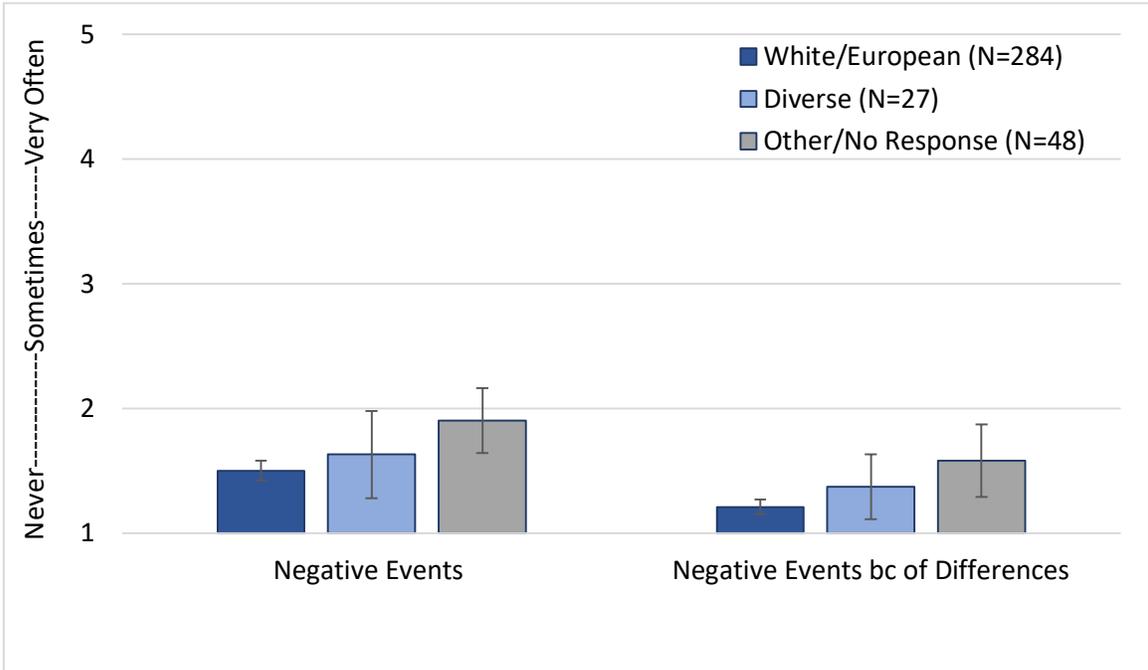**Perceptions of Negative Experiences in the Workplace by Ethnic/Racial Descent**

Figure 7

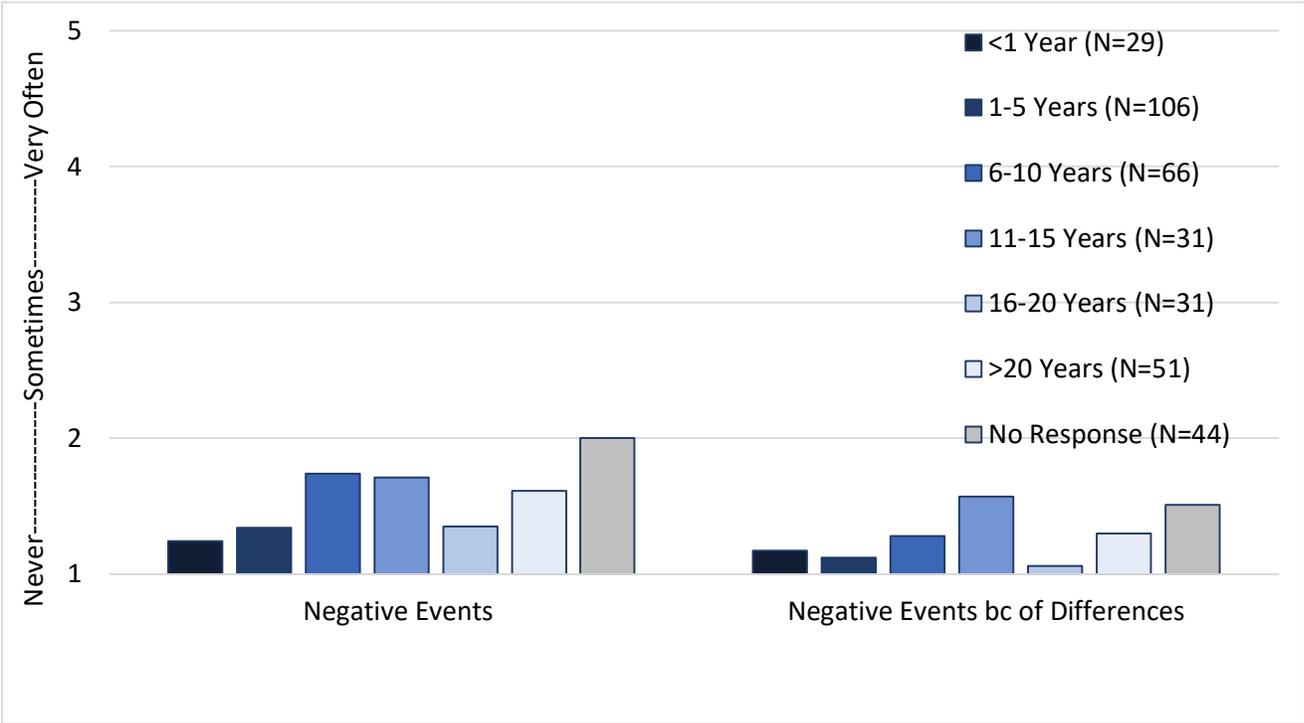**Perceptions of Negative Experiences in the Workplace by Years at Marathon County**

Figure 8

D. The Gallup Workplace Audit

The Gallup Workplace Audit is commonly used among vocational psychologists as a broad measure of work satisfaction. Employees at Marathon County had high scores, overall. However, only 55% agreed or strongly agreed that they had recently received praise or recognition for doing good work.
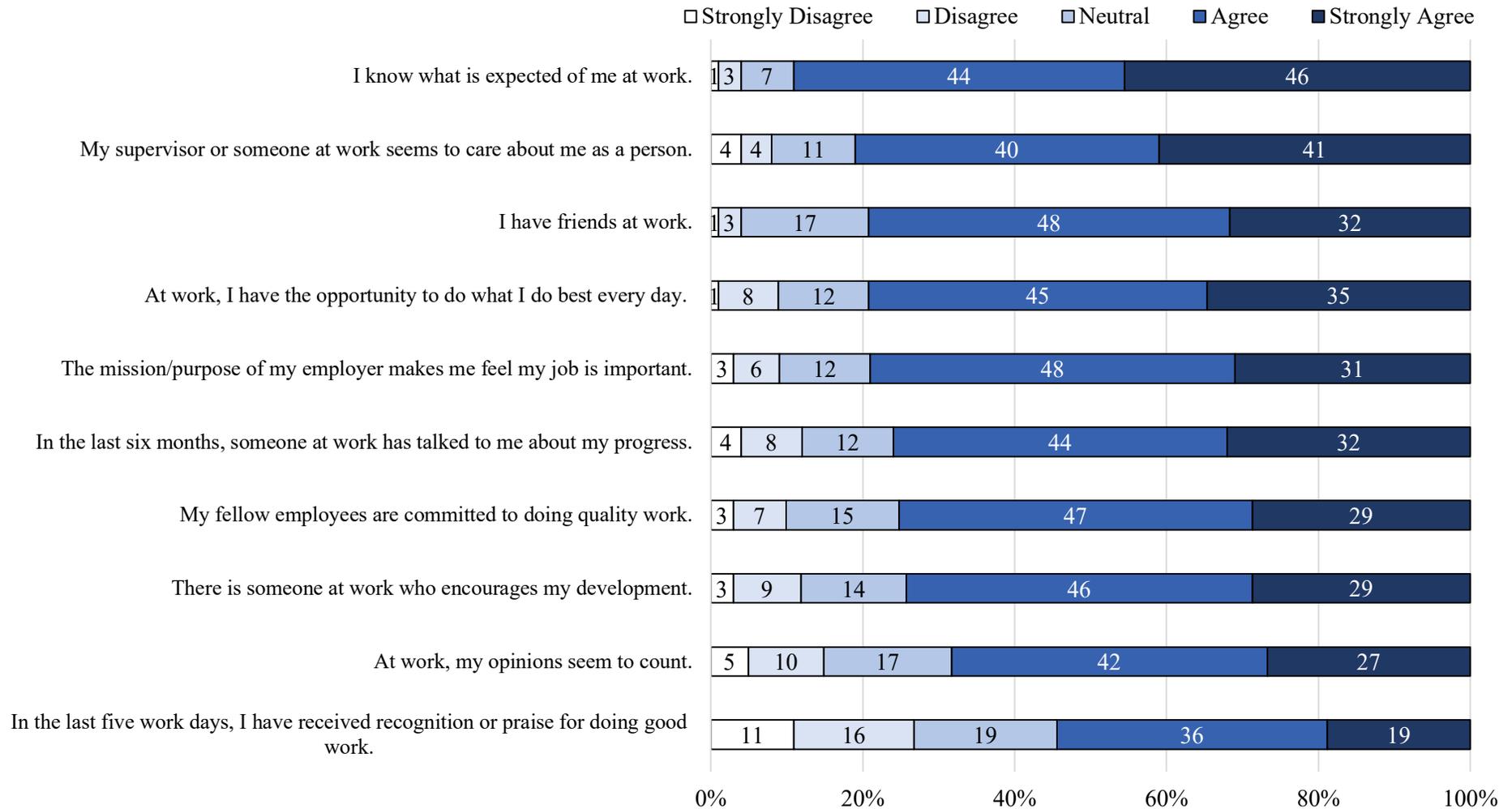
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I know what is expected of me at work.	1	3	7	44	46
My supervisor or someone at work seems to care about me as a person.	4	4	11	40	41
I have friends at work.	1	3	17	48	32
At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.	1	8	12	45	35
The mission/purpose of my employer makes me feel my job is important.	3	6	12	48	31
In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress.	4	8	12	44	32
My fellow employees are committed to doing quality work.	3	7	15	47	29
There is someone at work who encourages my development.	3	9	14	46	29
At work, my opinions seem to count.	5	10	17	42	27
In the last five work days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.	11	16	19	36	19

Figure 9

15

Employees' responses to one item on the Gallup Workplace Audit correlated strongly with how they responded to the other items (Cronbach's alpha = .90). Thus, we aggregated each employee's responses to the Gallup Audit items and compared employees' overall satisfaction (as reflected by aggregate scores on the Audit), by demographic category. The results are shown in Figures 10 and 11 below (error bars reflect ± 2 SEM). Notably, women did not score lower on the Audit compared to men, and ethnic minority employees did not score lower on the Audit compared to white employees. However, similar to what we have already seen, the employees who did not disclose their age or ethnic heritage were less satisfied, overall, than those who did disclose demographic information about themselves.

Gallup Workplace Audit Scores by Gender
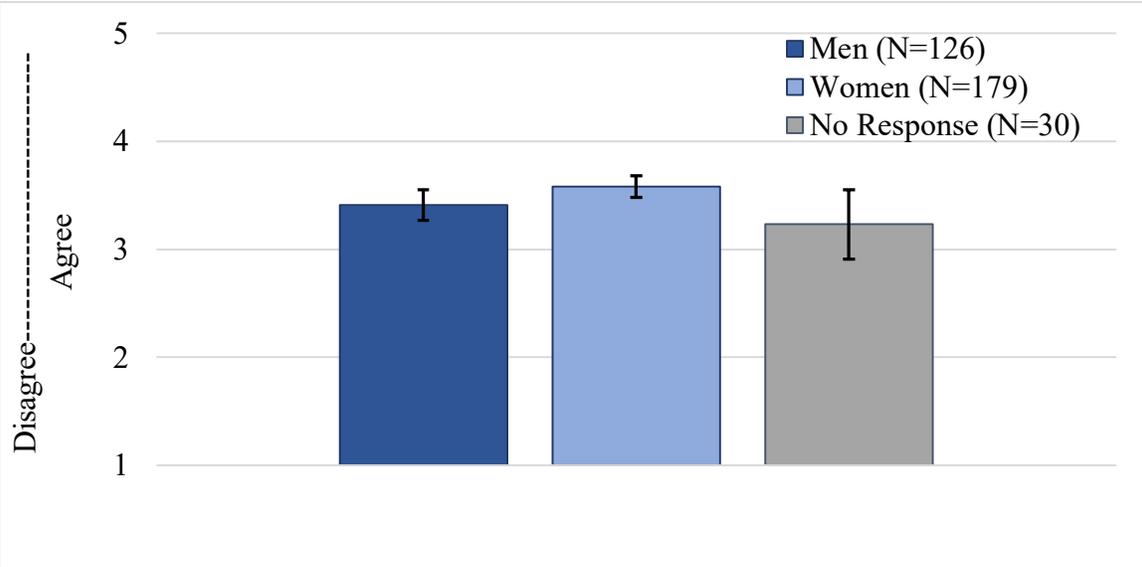
Figure 10

Gallup Workplace Audit Scores by Ethnic Heritage/Descent
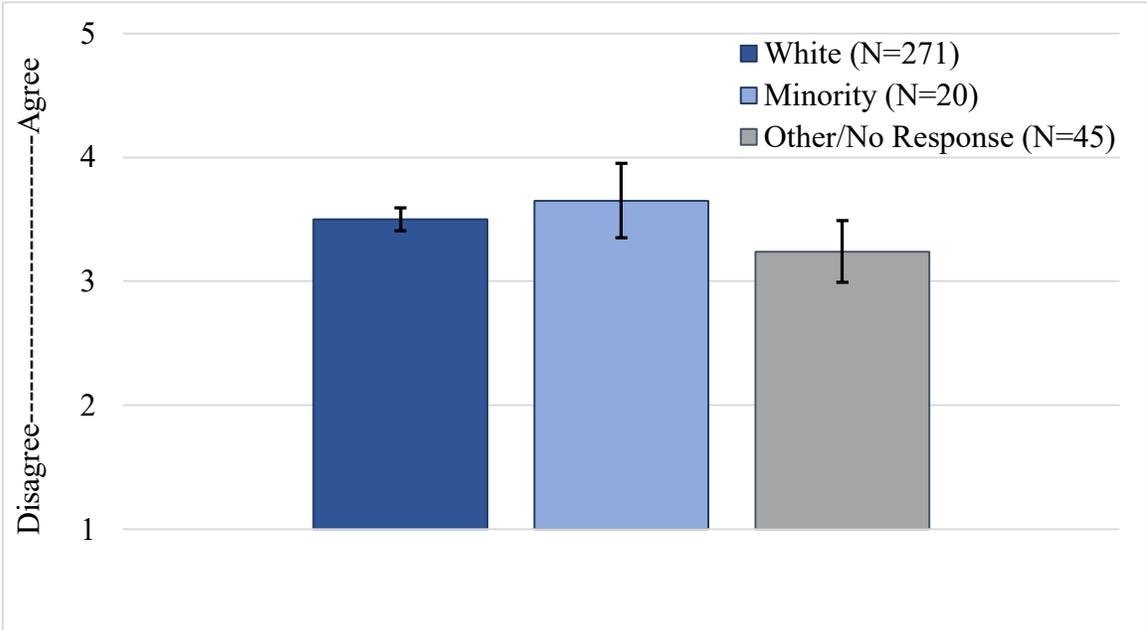
Figure 11

E. Mean Ratings by Individual Item

Employees responded to the remaining statements using five-point scales (1=*strongly disagree* to 5=*strongly agree*), and all statements in a given subscale were coded prior to data analysis so that a higher score indicated the same direction of response for all items within the subscale.

One place to start in evaluating the remaining items is to look at the overall mean response to each individual item. A comparison of the five individual statements that received the most favorable responses with the five individual statements that received the least favorable responses gives a hint of the trends to come on the remaining pages (see Table 5 below).

As we will see, employees felt their work was important and valuable, they identified with the values and goals of Marathon County, and they felt respected by their co-workers. At the same time, many employees felt ambivalent about having their opinion valued and about their ability to voice a dissenting opinion or view without fear of repercussions from above or fear of offending someone else.

Mean Response Rate to Individual Items

Item	Mean (1 - 5)
The work of this organization is important and valuable.	4.55
My work is meaningful to me.	4.42
People in this organization pull together in the face of deadlines or crises.	4.24
My co-workers and I treat each other with respect.	4.13
My co-workers and I cooperate easily.	4.12
Perception of Person-Organization Fit (average of four items)	4.10
In my department or work unit, people in general are treated respectfully regardless of their differences.	4.10
At Marathon County, I have been treated respectfully regardless of my differences.	4.09
I feel like I can rely on my co-workers when I need support.	4.06
I identify with the goals of this organization.	4.05
At Marathon County, people in general are treated respectfully regardless of their differences.	4.03
I have (not) personally experienced negativity from coworkers because of my differences.	4.02
I see myself still working at Marathon County in two years' time.	4.00
Marathon County values diversity.	3.97
People from all backgrounds have equal opportunities to succeed at Marathon Co.	3.95
If I had a concern about me or a co-worker experiencing harassment or discriminatory treatment, I would know where/how to report that concern.	3.94
I have (not) witnessed instances of bias against diverse groups at work.	3.94
My co-workers listen and are responsive when I present ideas.	3.92
I have confidence in the integrity of my co-workers.	3.92
I would recommend this organization (Marathon County) as a great place to work.	3.91
My co-workers share common values regarding way people should be treated at work.	3.91
I feel free to be myself at work.	3.88
Marathon County enables me to balance work and personal life.	3.86
I feel a strong sense of loyalty to Marathon County as an organization.	3.84

If I had a concern about a co-worker experiencing harassment or discriminatory treatment, I would be comfortable reporting that concern.	3.82
My co-workers and I (agree) over work values.	3.82
At Marathon County, I see strong leadership support for diversity.	3.81
My co-workers are interested in who I am as a person.	3.78
I feel respected at Marathon County.	3.78
I feel appreciated here.	3.73
There's a free flow of ideas in my workplace.	3.72
If I had a concern about my own experience of harassment or discriminatory treatment, I would be comfortable reporting that concern.	3.71
I have input into decisions made at work that affect me.	3.70
On Mondays, my co-workers and I are happy to see each other.	3.70
I feel part of a warm, caring group at work.	3.70
Even when something bad happens (e.g., I have a negative social interaction with a peer, etc.), I don't question whether or not I belong at Marathon County.	3.69
Most of us share a vision of the direction this organization should take over the next several years.	3.67
My department builds teams and/or seeks viewpoints that are diverse.	3.65
People here take responsibility for improving the work environment.	3.65
When there are career opportunities at my organization, I am aware of them.	3.65
Senior managers watch out for their employees' well-being.	3.62
When I speak up, my opinion is valued.	3.60
I rarely think about looking for a job with another employer.	3.56
My opinions and suggestions are listened to and respected by people in leadership positions here.	3.56
My employer motivates me to go beyond what I would in a similar role elsewhere.	3.56
My job performance is evaluated fairly.	3.54
Tasks that don't have a specific owner (e.g., scheduling/participating in events, cleaning up shared space) are divided fairly at Marathon County.	3.50
People I work with are interested in understanding the ways we differ from each other.	3.49
I believe that my total compensation is fair, relative to similar roles at Marathon Co.	3.40
When I have a problem or complaint, I feel I can speak up without fear of retaliation or reprisals.	3.38
At Marathon County, there is open and honest two-way communication.	3.34
I can voice a contrary opinion without fear of negative consequences.	3.32
I (don't) censor what I say at work because I fear I will offend someone.	2.99

Table 5

F. **Rating by Subscale**

Responses to the individual items clustered together as we expected based on the list of subscales provided in the description of the questionnaire (see pages 1-2 of this report. The graph below provides a snapshot of employees' most positive subscale ratings to least positive subscale ratings. On the pages to follow, we provide a breakdown of employee responses to the items in each subscale, and the overall rating by gender and ethnic heritage/descent for each subscale.
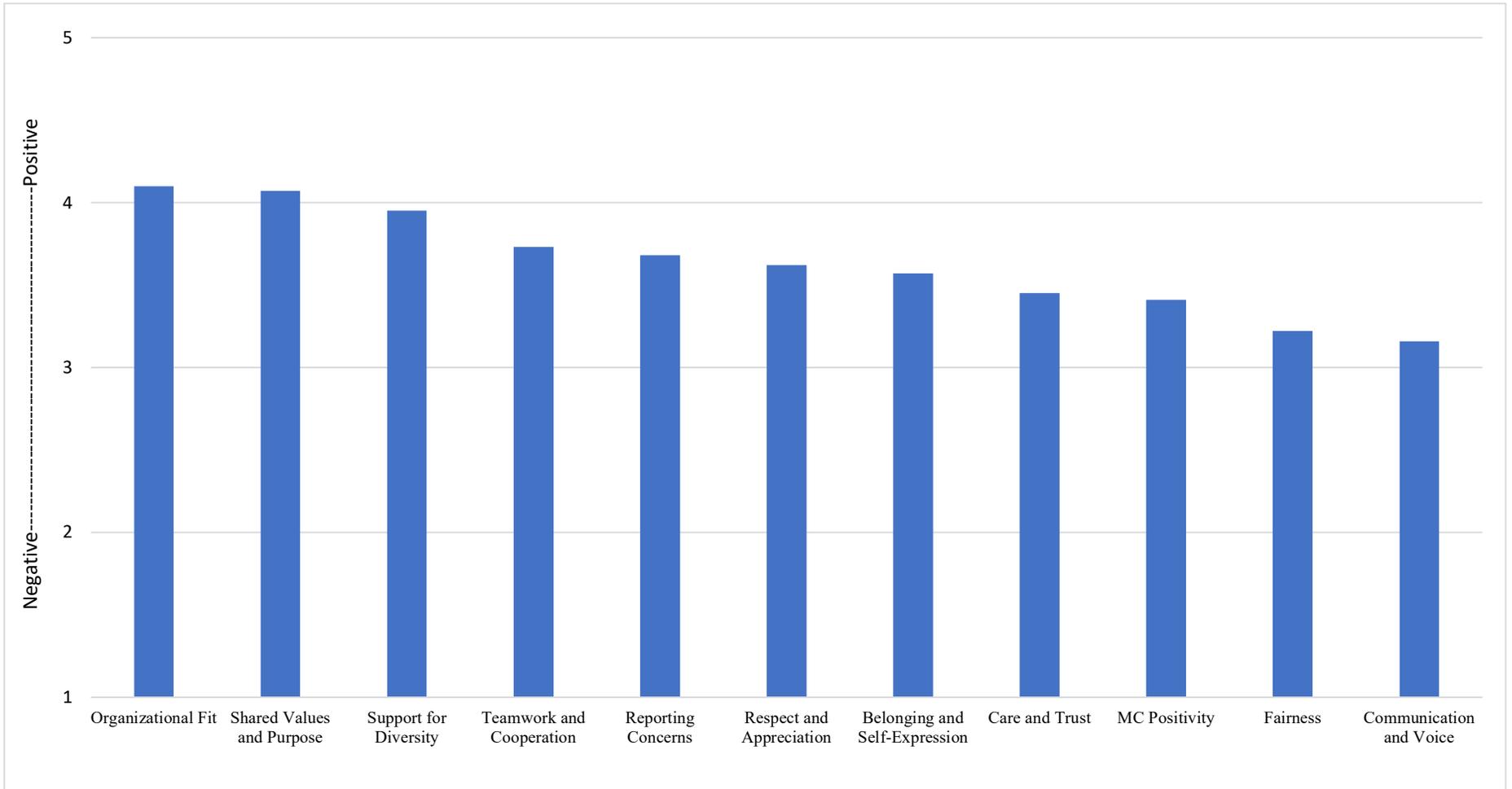
Aggregated Ratings by Subscale

Figure 12

H. Shared Values, Shared Vision, and Sense of Purpose Subscale

The shared values, shared vision and sense of purpose subscale included six items on the questionnaire. As with the items about organizational fit (which were entirely redundant with each other and hence reported in the table above as one item), responses to these items showed that employees found their work meaningful and important. They were less certain that they and their co-workers shared work values and a vision for Marathon County.

Aggregate Shared Values, Shared Vision and Sense of Purpose Subscale[2]
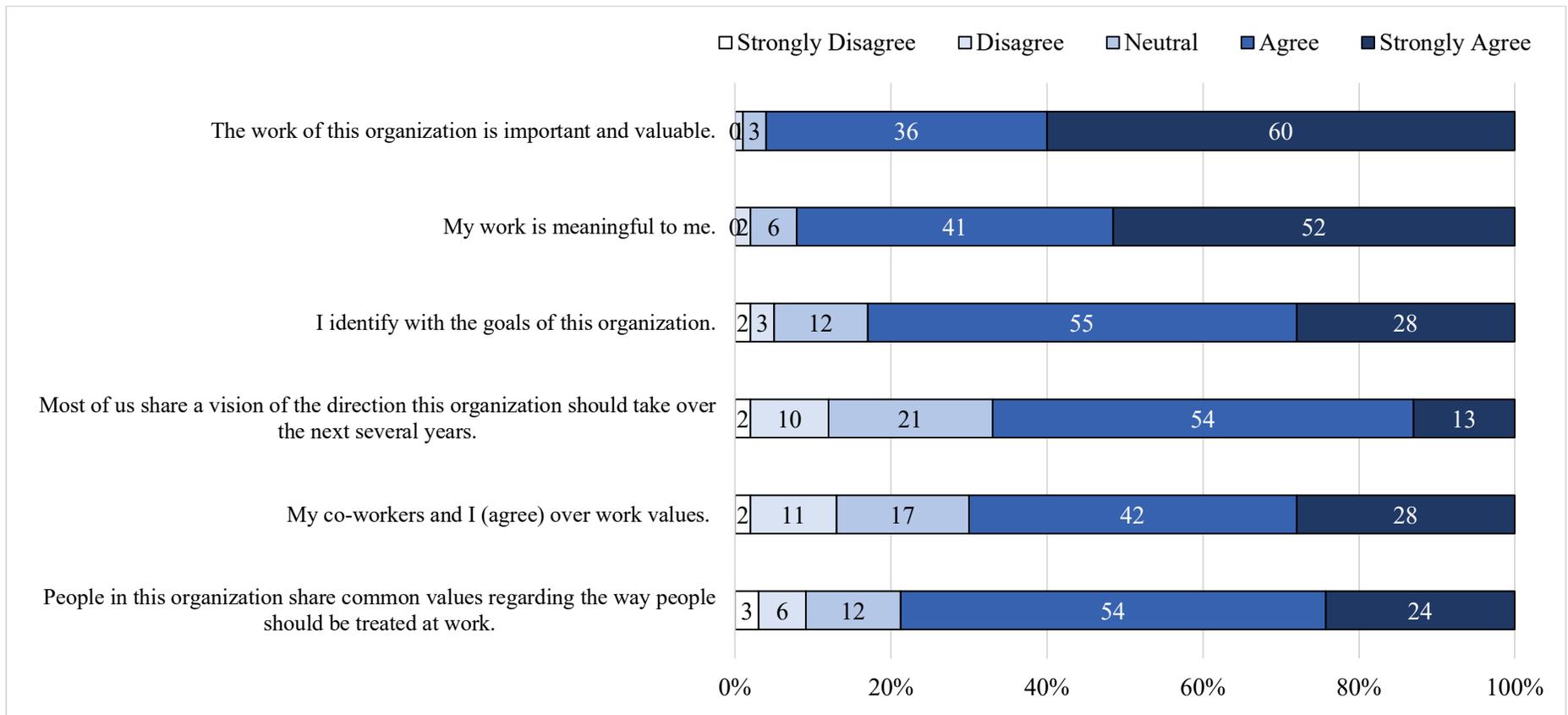
Figure 13

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[2] Cronbach's Alpha = .78

1. **Shared Values, Shared Vision, and Sense of Purpose (Composite Scores) by Gender.** As shown in Figure 14 below, female employees gave slightly more favorable ratings to these items than male employees did.
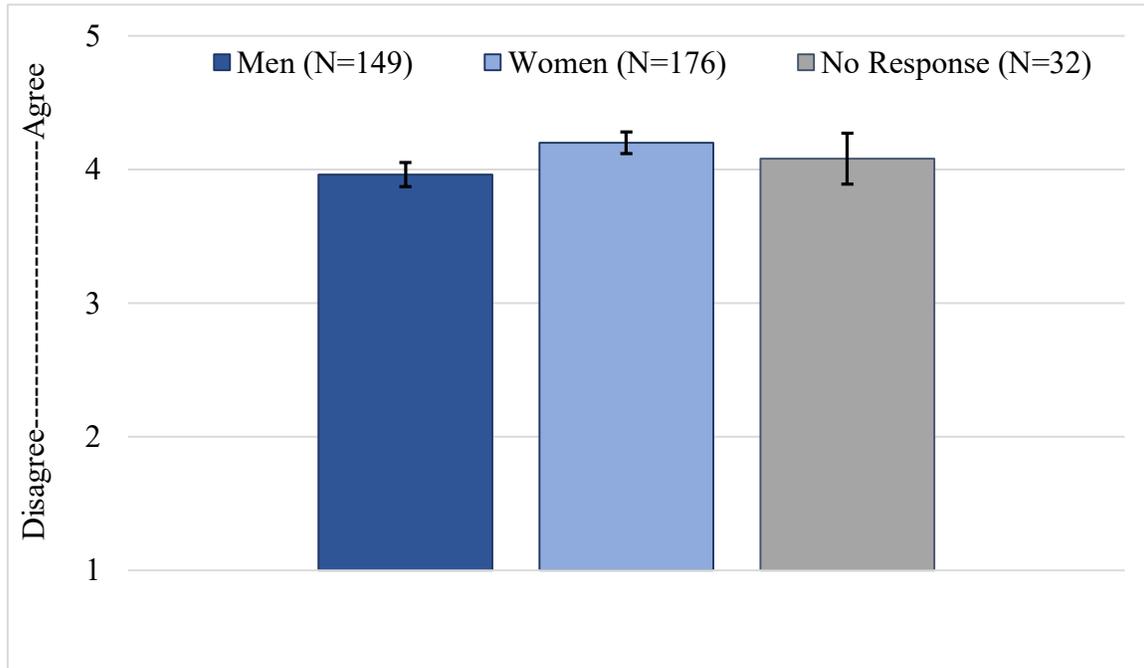
Figure 14

2. **Shared Values, Shared Vision, and Sense of Purpose (Composite Scores) by Ethnic Heritage/Background.** As shown in Figure 15 below, white employees and minority employees responded similarly to these items.
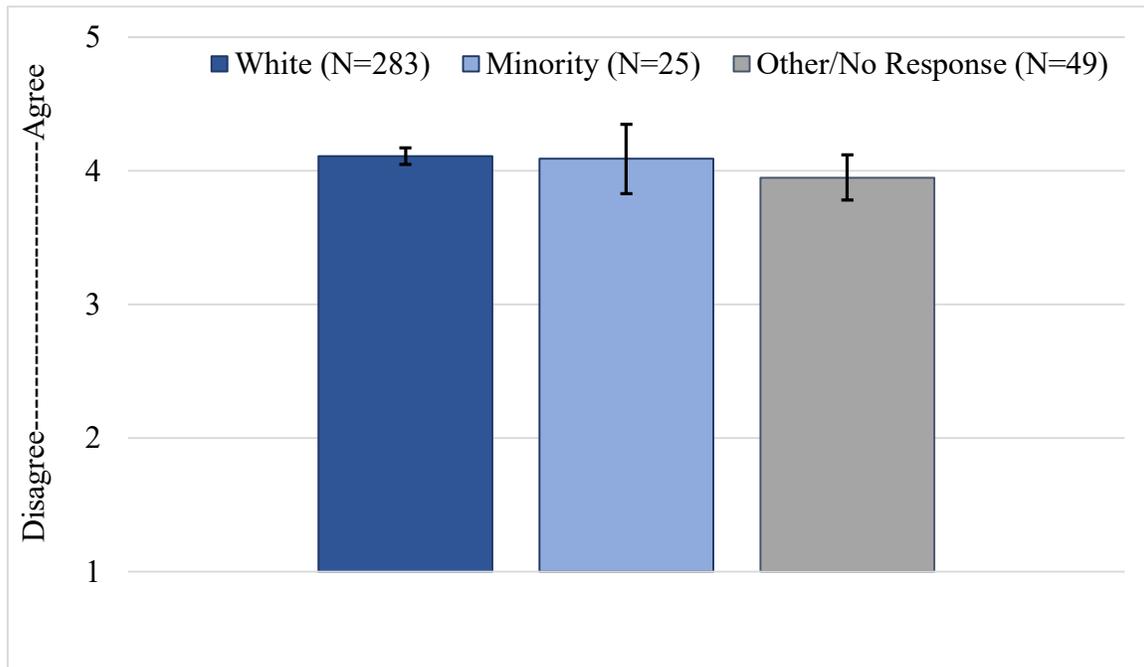

Figure 15

I. Care and Trust Subscale

This subscale included five items that clustered together (see Figure 16 below). There are three elements to which nearly 35% or more of employees responded neutrally or with some level of disagreement: *Senior managers can be trusted to safeguard employees' best interests*; *On Monday, my co-workers and I are happy to see each other*; and *I feel part of a warm, caring group at work*.
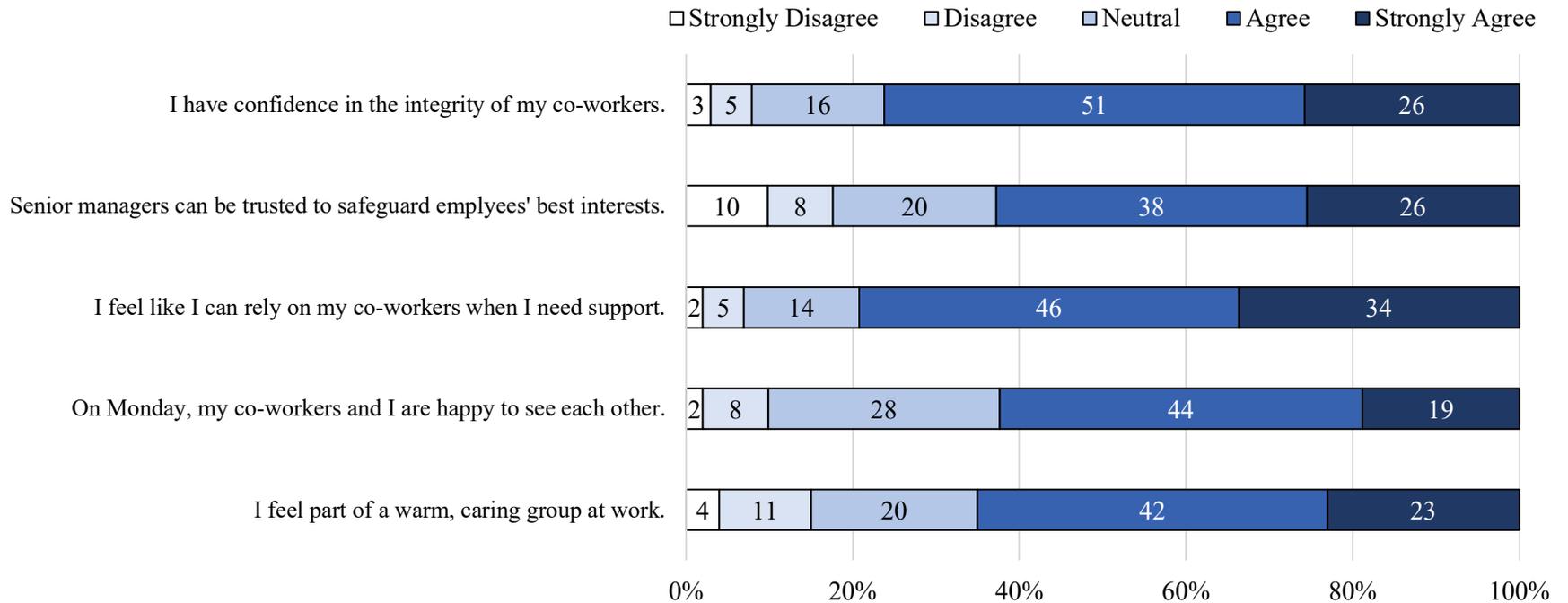
Aggregate Care and Trust Subscale[3]

Figure 16

1. **Care and Trust (Composite Scores) by Gender.** As shown in Figure 17 below, female employees gave more favorable ratings to these items than male employees did. Female employees also responded more positively than employees who did not disclose their gender.
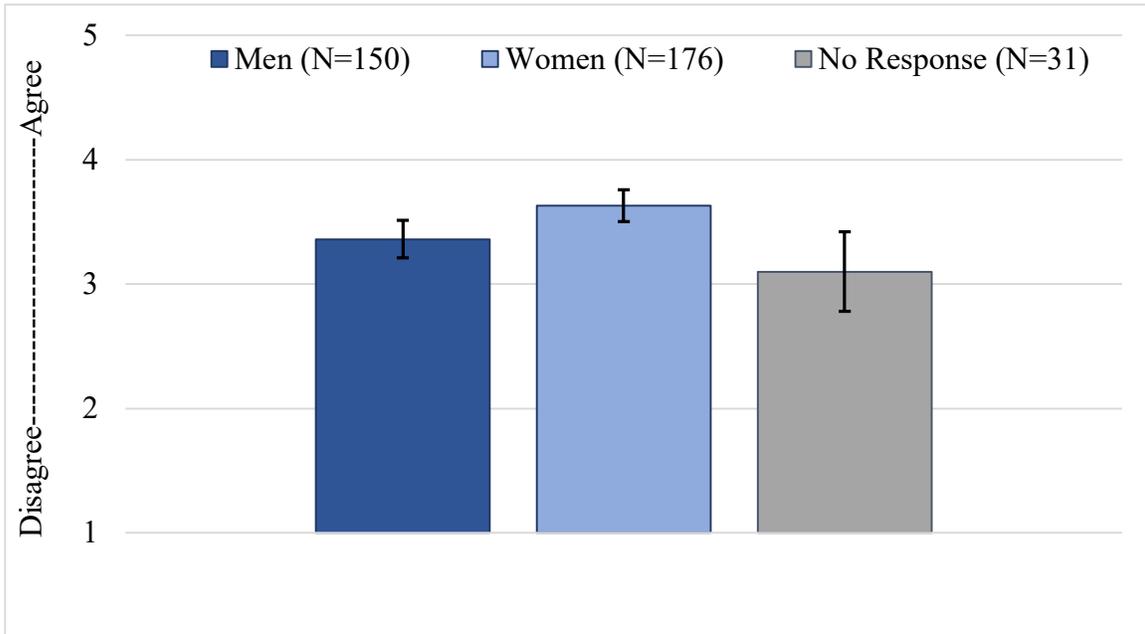

Figure 17

2. **Care and Trust (Composite Scores) by Ethnic Heritage/Background.** As shown in Figure 18 below, white employees and minority employees did not respond differently to this set of items. Employees who disclosed their ethnic heritage responded more positively than did employees who did not disclose their ethnic heritage.
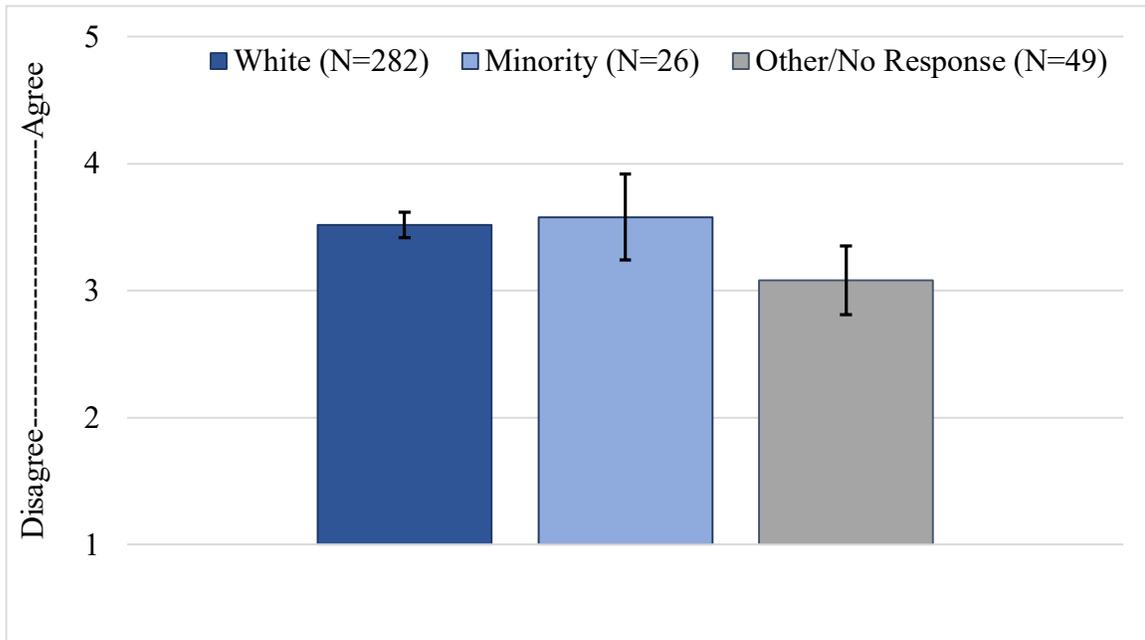

Figure 18

J. Teamwork and Cooperation Subscale

This subscale included three items that clustered together (see Figure 19 below). There are two questionnaire elements to which 83% or more employees agreed or strongly agreed: *My co-workers and I cooperate easily* and *People in this organization pull together in the face of deadlines or crises*. Workers were more ambivalent about the third item: *People here take responsibility for improving the work environment*, suggesting some room for improvement.
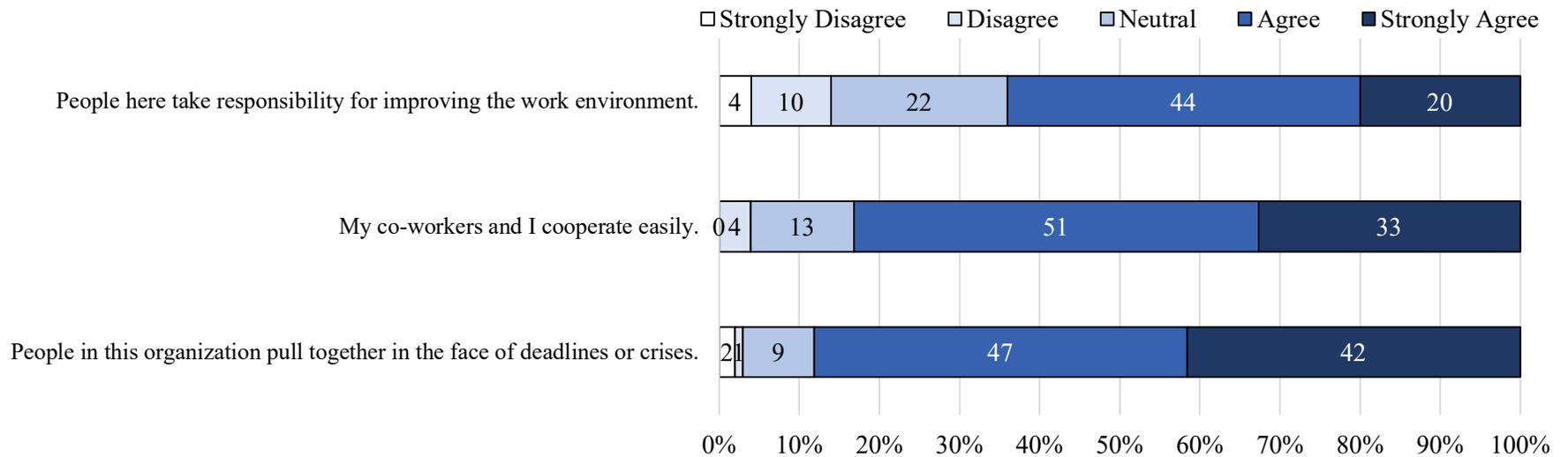
Aggregate Teamwork and Cooperation Subscale[4]

Figure 19

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1. **Teamwork and Cooperation (Composite Score) Subscale by Gender.** Figures 20 and 21 reveal no reliable differences in composite score data for the Teamwork and Cooperation Subscale based on gender or ethnic heritage/background.
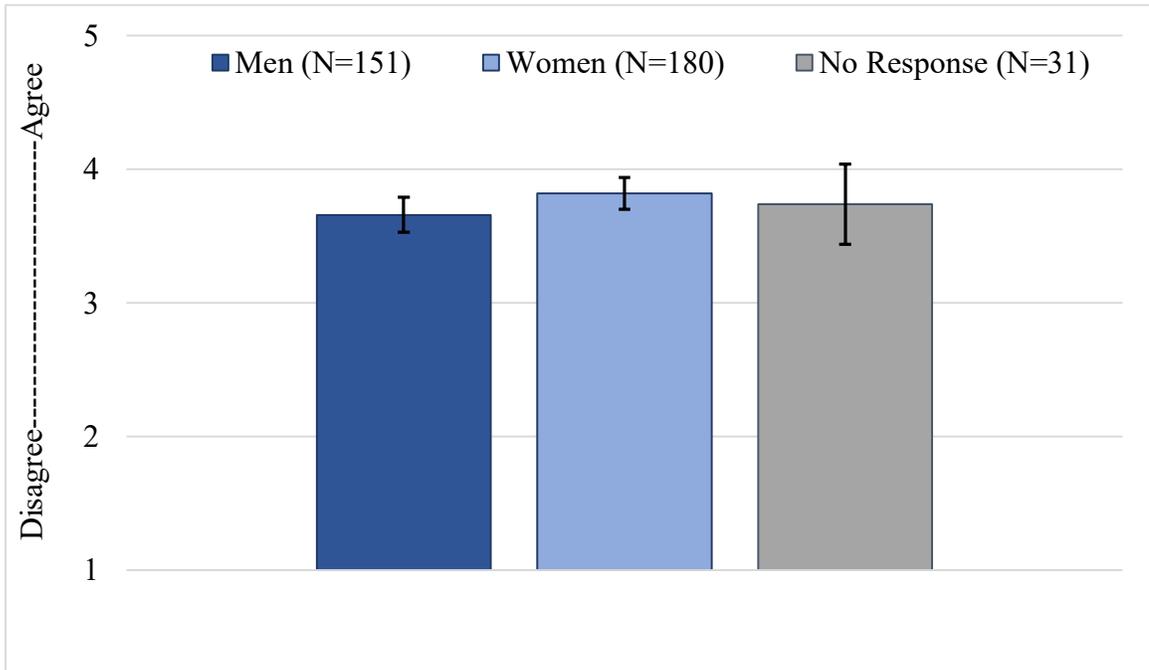

Figure 20

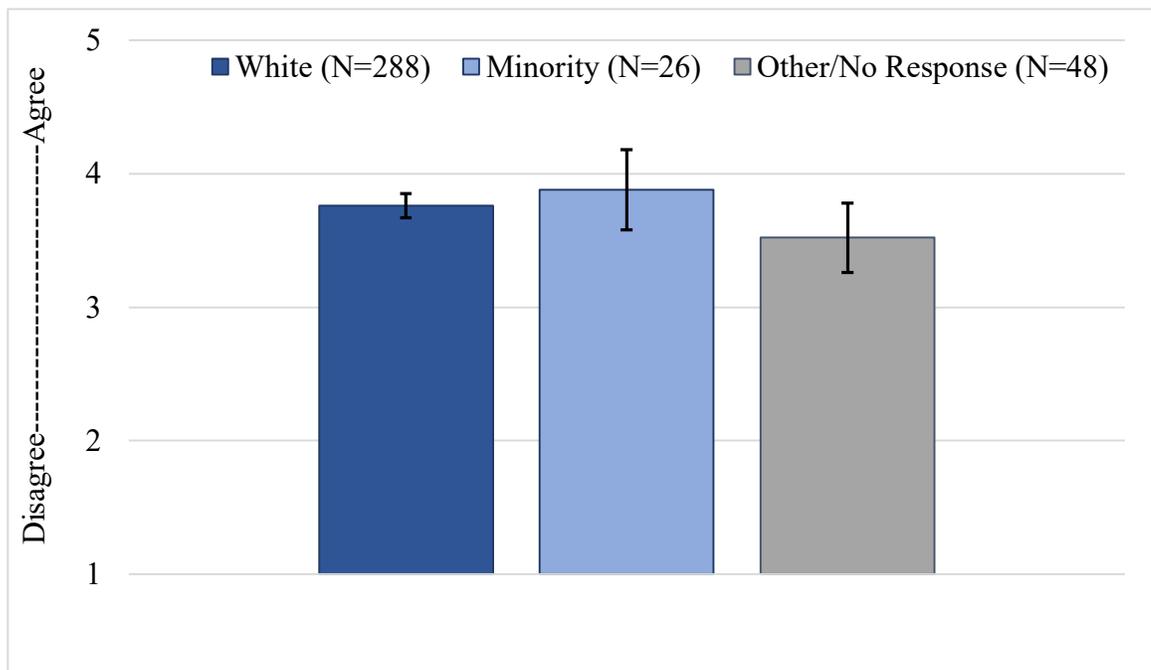2. **Teamwork and Cooperation (Composite Score) Subscale by Ethnic Heritage/Background**

Figure 21

K. Individual Belonging and Self-Expression Subscale

This subscale includes five questionnaire items that cluster together (see Figure 22 below), two of which are among the lowest mean scores for individual items on the questionnaire: *I (don't) censor what I say at work because I fear offending someone* and *People I work with are interested in understanding the ways we differ from each other.*

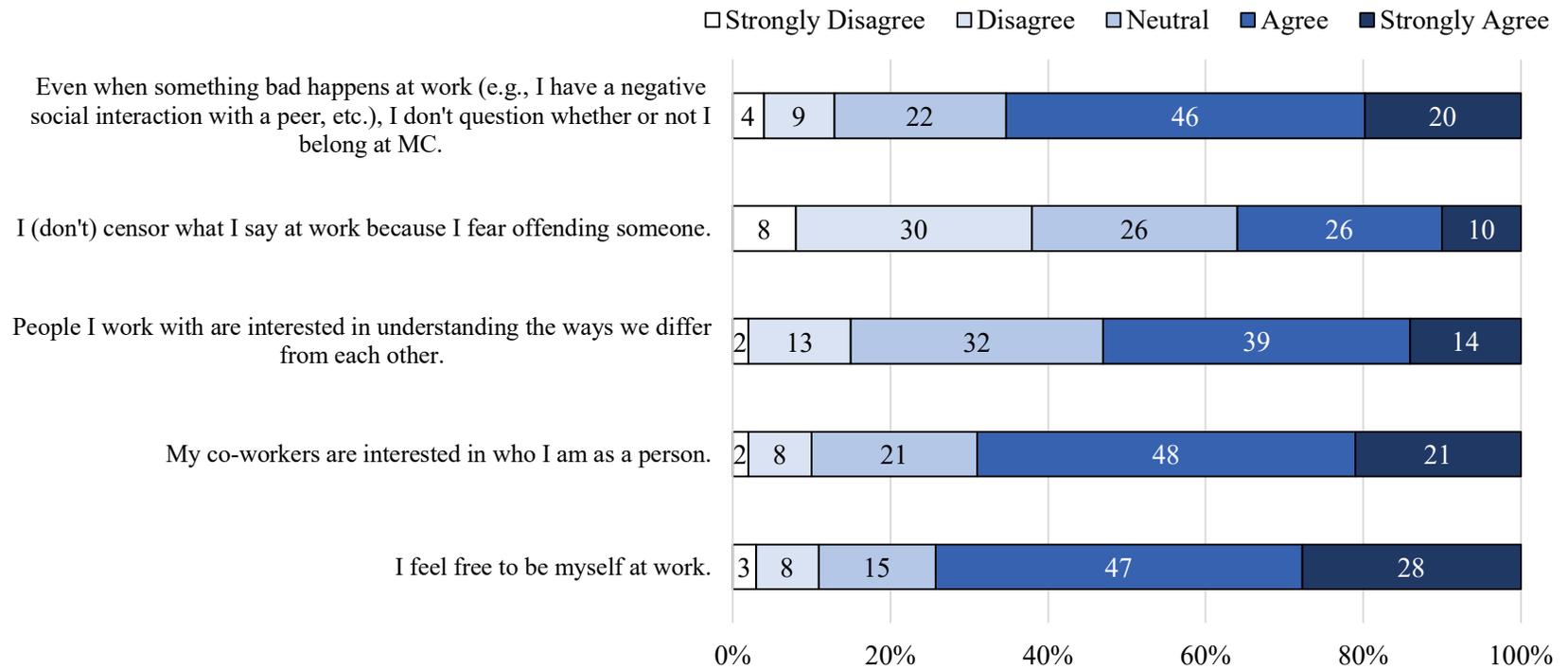**Aggregate Individual Belonging and Self-Expression Subscale[5]**

Figure 22

1. **Individual Belonging and Self-Expression (Composite Score) Subscale by Gender.** Figures 23 and 24 reveal no significant differences in feelings of individual belonging and self-expression based on gender or ethnic heritage or background. However, the "No Response" group scored consistently lower.
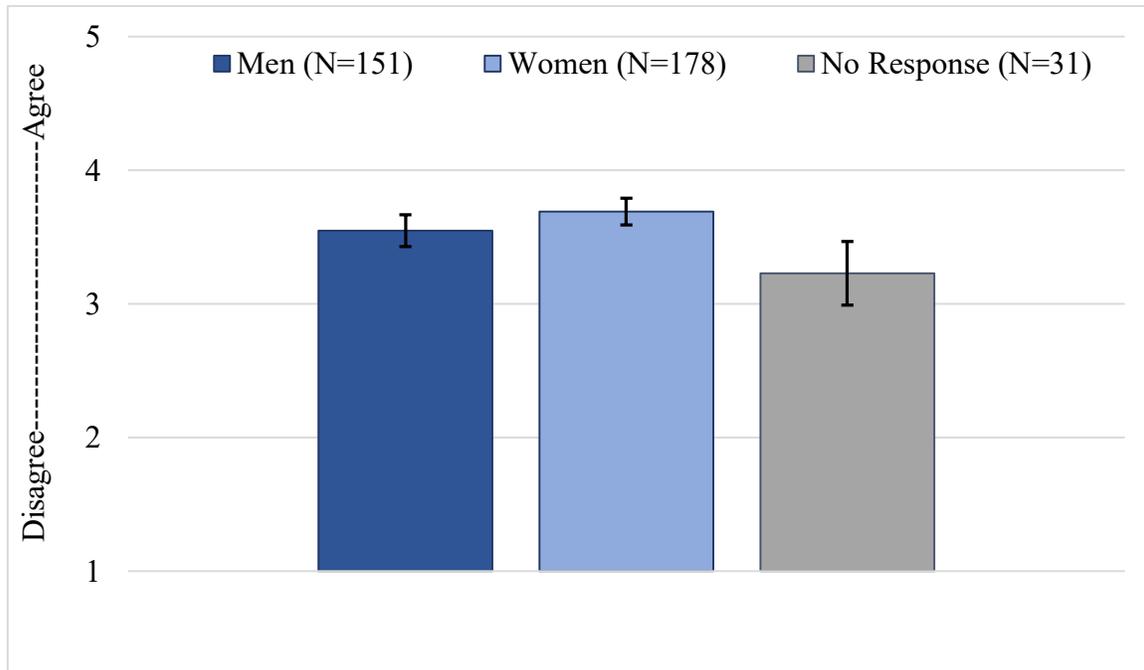

Figure 23

2. **Individual Belonging and Self-Expression (Composite Score) Subscale by Ethnic Heritage/Background**
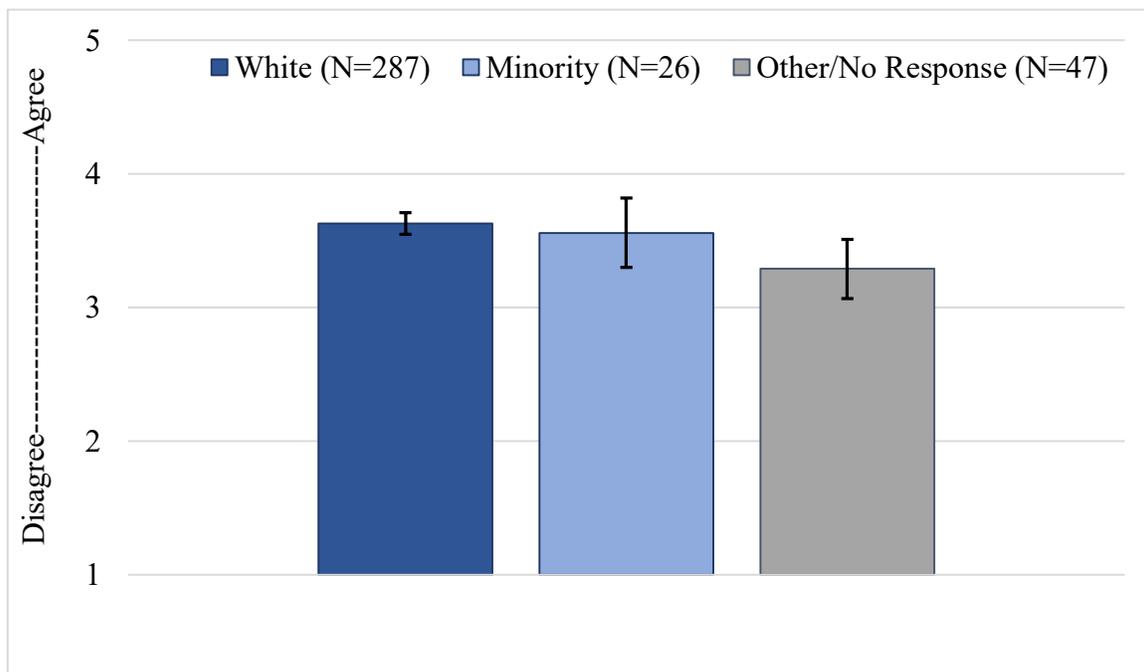

Figure 24

L. Respect and Appreciation Subscale

This subscale includes three items that cluster together (see Figure 25 below). There is reason for optimism here as most employees agree or strongly agree that they feel respected and appreciated at work.

Aggregate Individual Respect and Appreciation Subscale[6]

Figure 25

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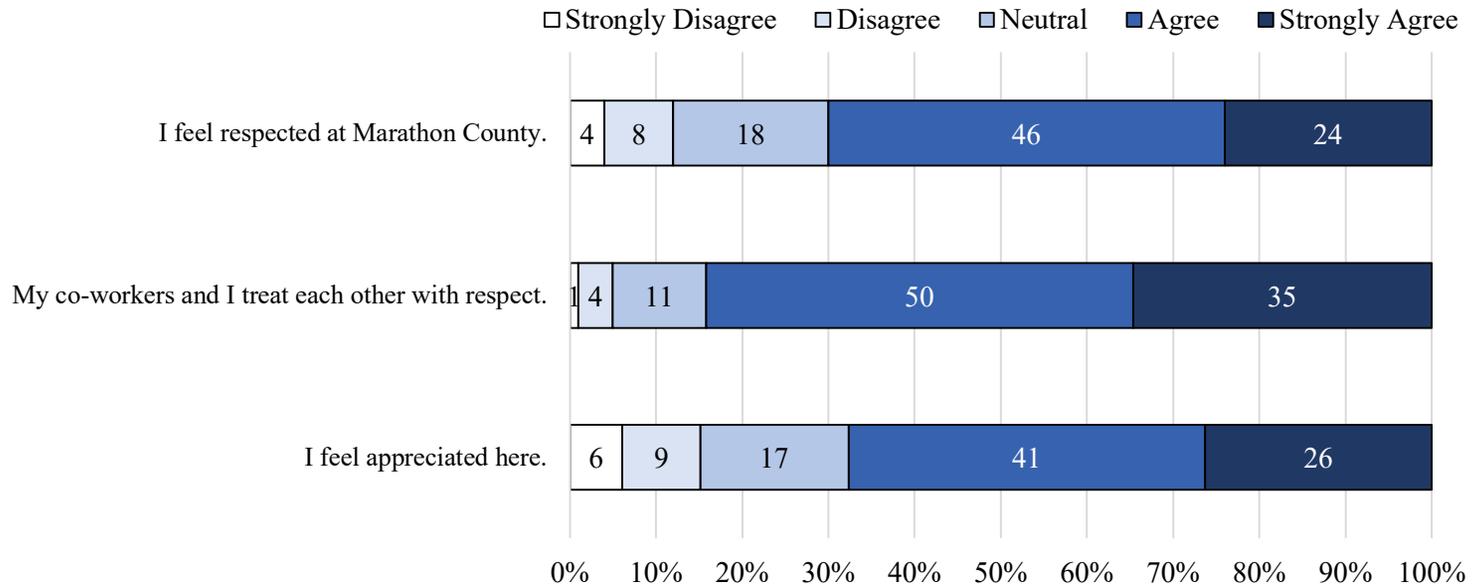
1. **Respect and Appreciation (Composite Score) Subscale by Gender.** Figure 23 and 24 illustrate that women scored slightly higher than men in perceptions of respect and appreciation, while white and minority employees did not differ systematically. The "No Response" group scored consistently lower in both comparisons.

Figure 26

2. **Respect and Appreciation (Composite Score) Subscale by Ethnic Heritage/Background**
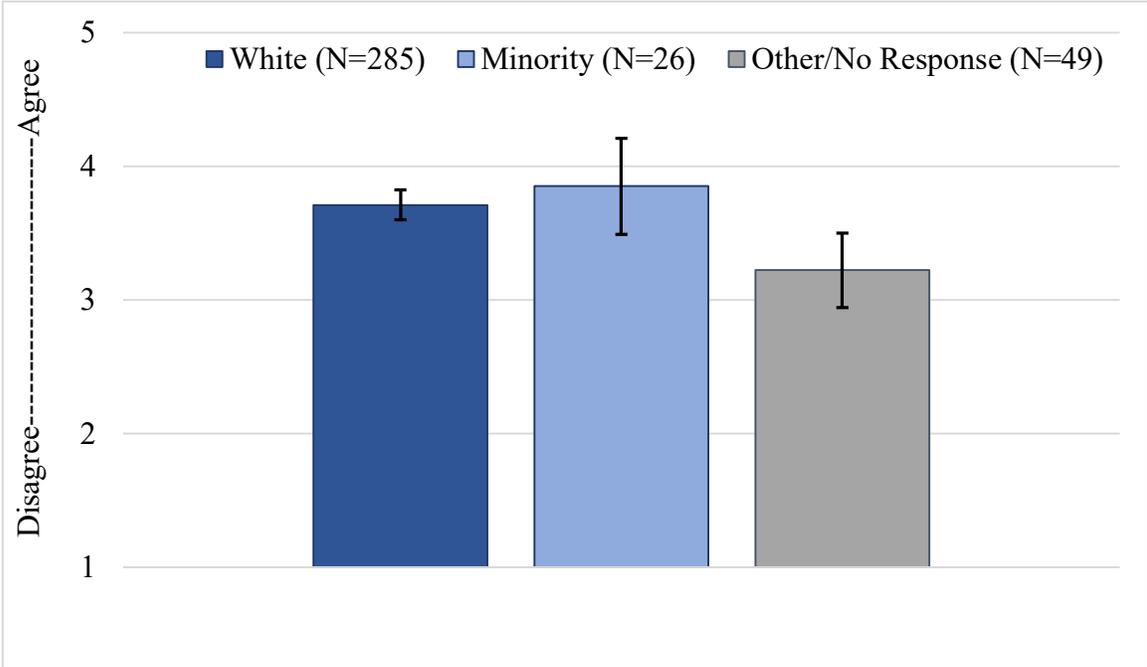
Figure 27

M. Communication and Voice Subscale[7]
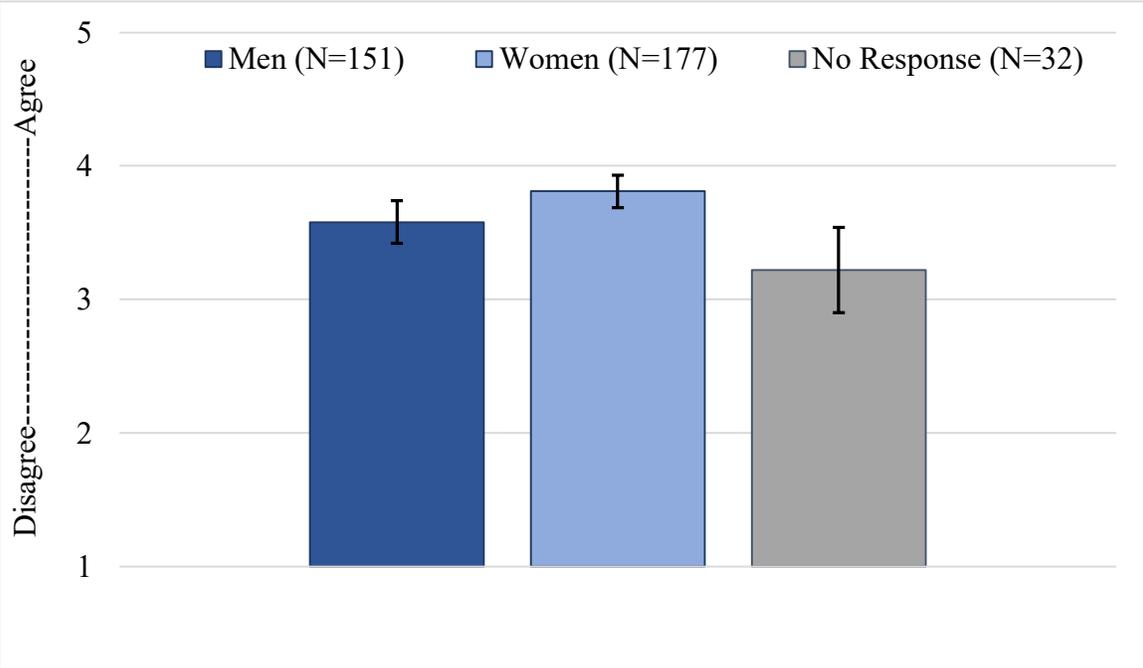
This subscale includes eight questionnaire items that cluster around the issue of communication and voice (see Figure 28 below). Three of these are among those for which employees expressed the lowest mean scores for individual items on the questionnaire, including: *I can voice a contrary opinion without fear of negative consequences; At Marathon County, there is open and honest two-way communication;* and *When I have a problem or complaint, I feel I can speak up without fear of retaliation or reprisals.*

Figure 28

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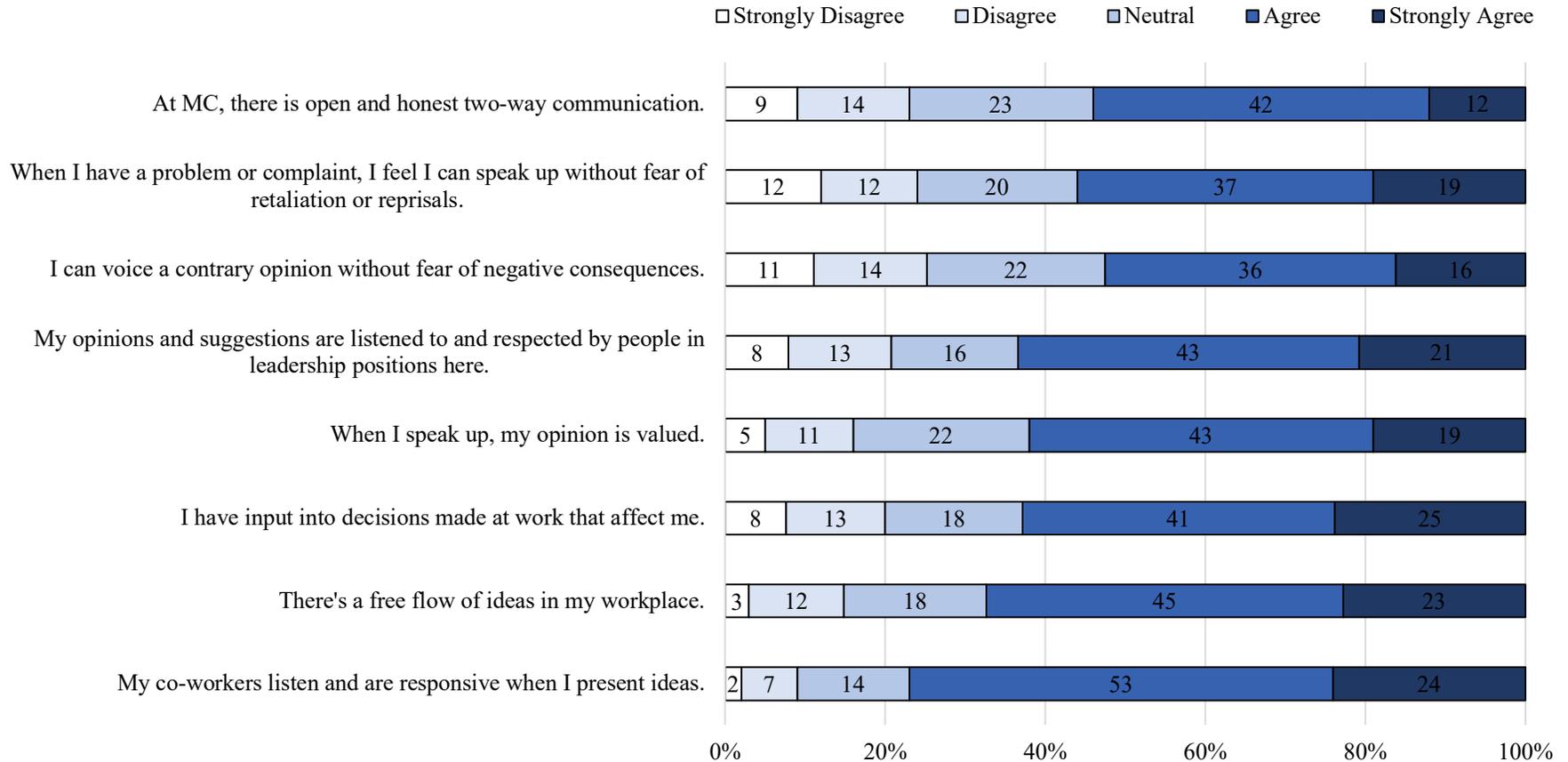
1. **Communication and Voice (Composite Score) by Gender.** Following previous patterns, Figures 29 and 30 reveal no significant difference in feelings of communication and voice based on gender or ethnic heritage/background. However, the "No Response" group again scored lower.
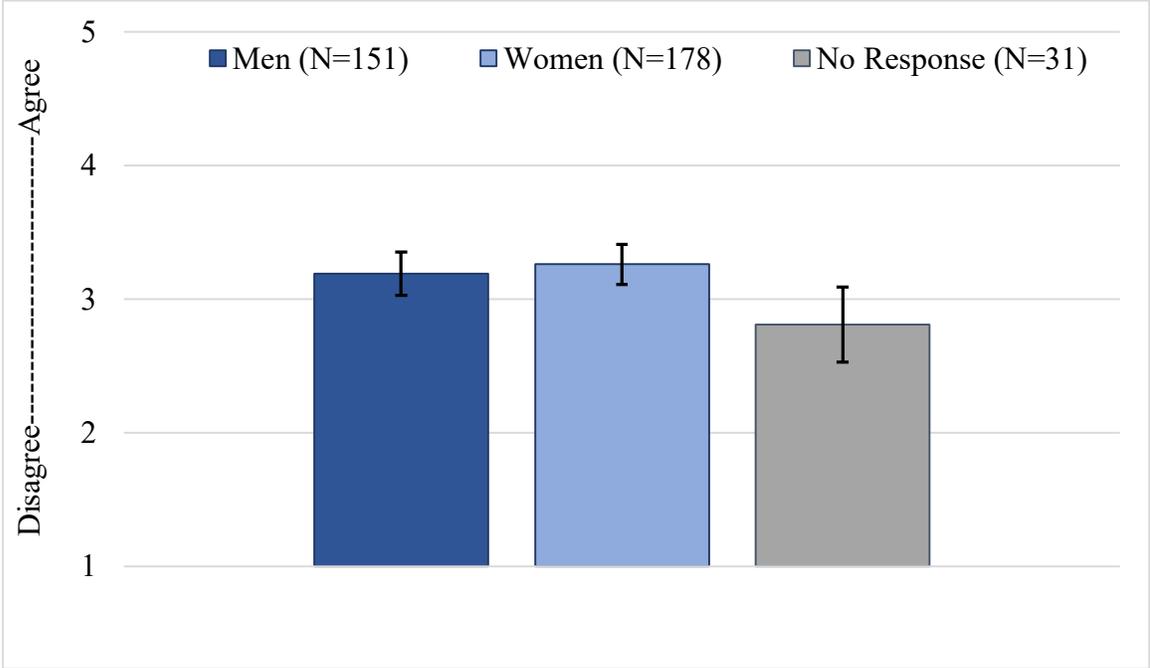
Figure 29

2. **Communication and Voice (Composite Score) by Ethnic Heritage/Background**
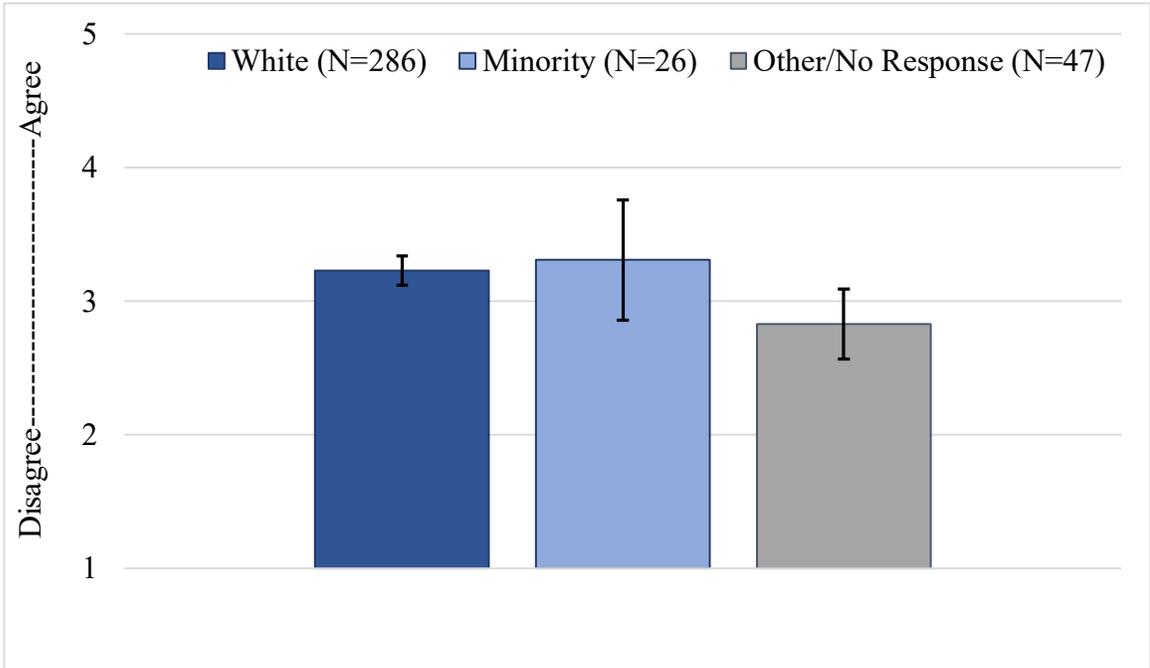
Figure 30

N. Marathon County Positivity (Loyalty, Intent to Stay) Subscale[8]

This subscale includes five questionnaire items that cluster around the issue of positive feelings towards Marathon County as an employer, issues of loyalty, and intent to stay (see Figure 31 below). In general, the results show broadly positive feelings about Marathon County as an employer, with 75% saying they would recommend the County as a "great place to work" and only 8% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.
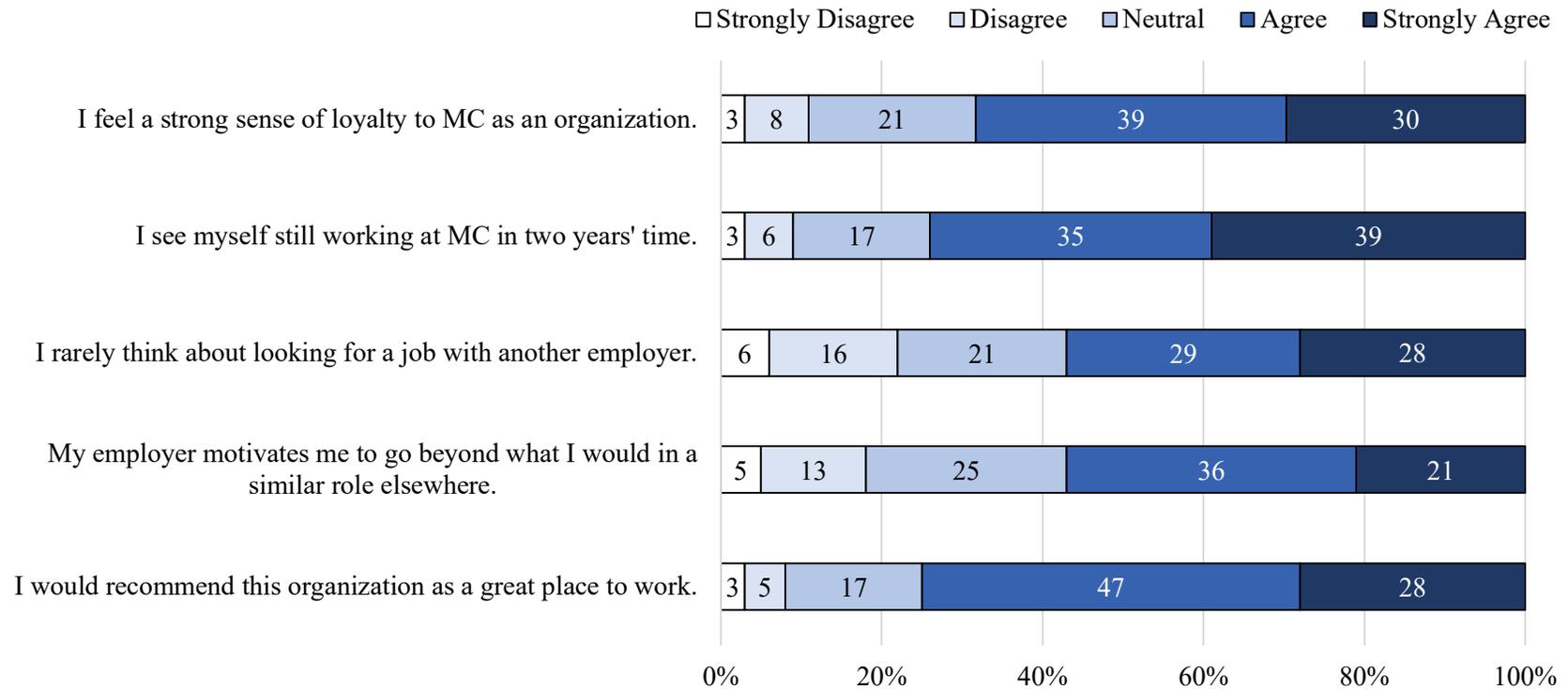
Figure 31

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[8] Alpha = .89

1. **Positivity (Loyalty, Intent to Stay) Composite Score by Gender.** Figure 32 reveals that women in the workplace report more loyalty and intent to stay at Marathon County compared to their male counterparts and non-respondents.
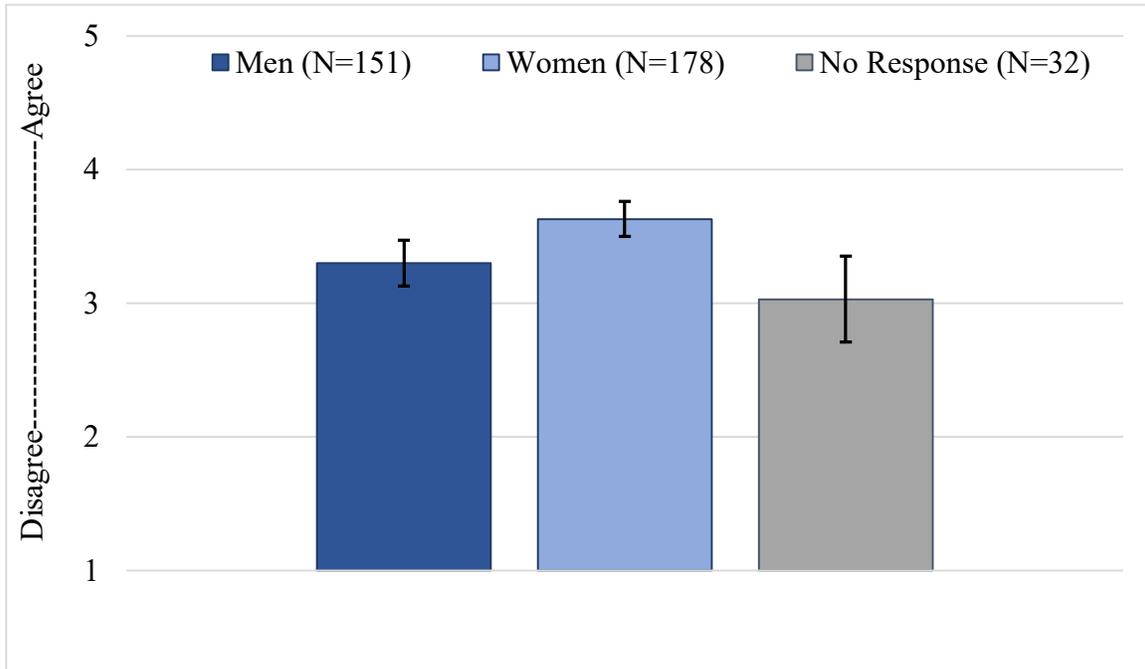
Figure 32

2. **Positivity (Loyalty, Intent to Stay) Composite Score by Ethnic Heritage or Background.** White and minority employees did not differ in their loyalty and intent to stay at Marathon County. However, the "No Response" group again scored lower.
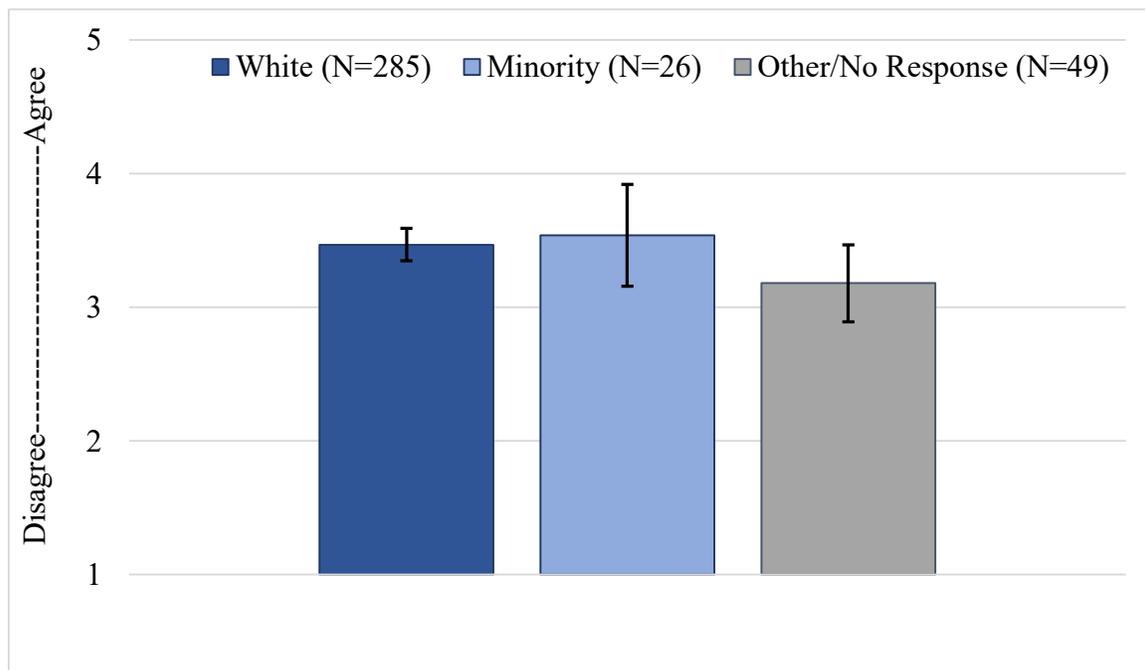
Figure 33

O. Fairness Subscale[9]

This subscale includes six questionnaire items that cluster around the issue of fairness in terms of work-life balance, opportunities, division of tasks, job performance, and compensation. Although the Subscale results are fairly positive overall, Figure 34 reveals some room for improvement on the following: *Tasks that don't have a specific owner . . . are divided fairly* and *I believe that my total compensation is fair, relative to other roles at Marathon County*.
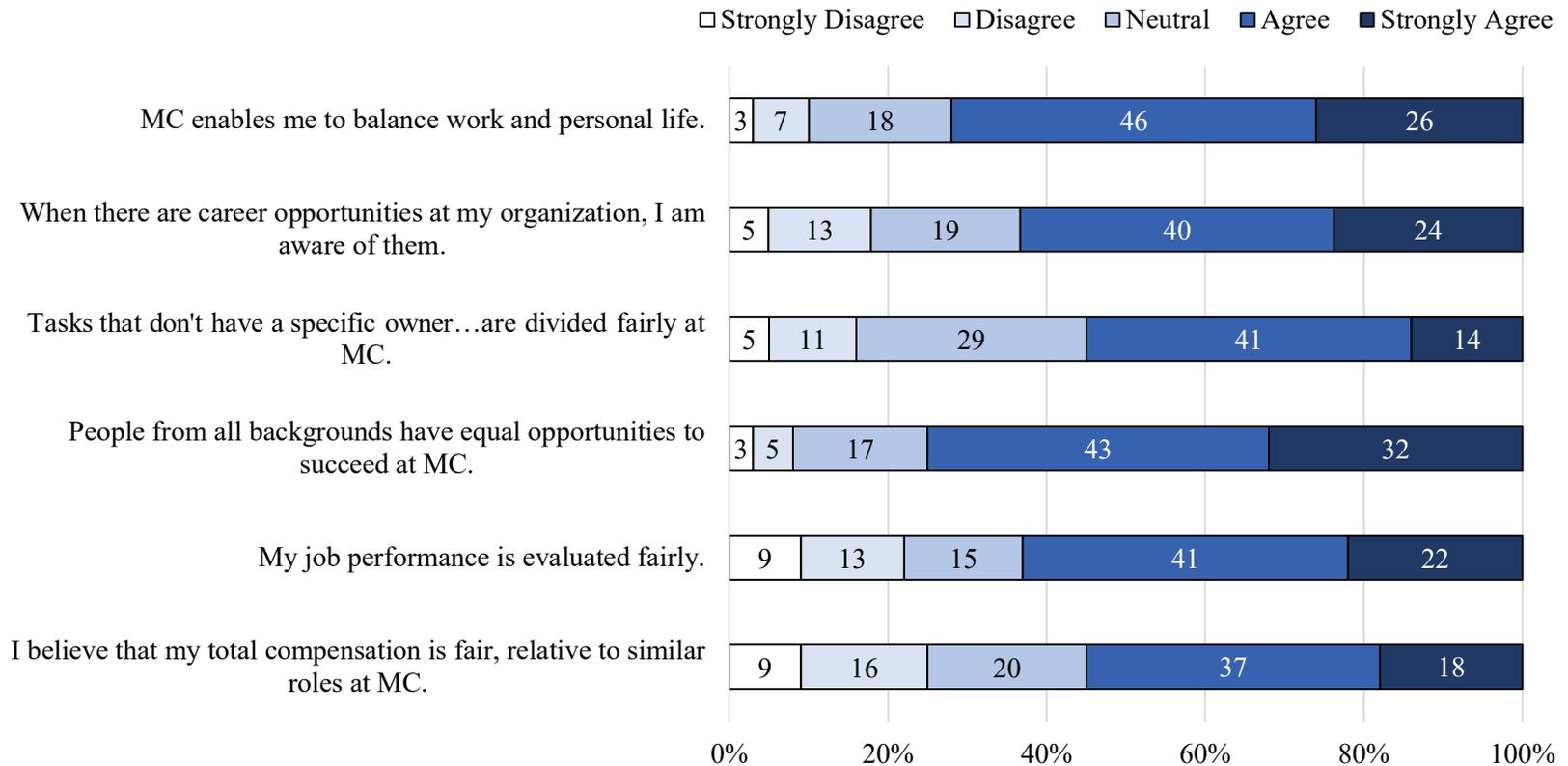
Figure 34

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[9] Alpha for just the bottom 4 items = .79; the top two items did not fit this cluster well.

1. **Fairness (Composite Score) by Gender.** Figure 35 reveals that women in the workplace feel that the workplace is slightly fairer than men and those who did not list their gender feel it is.
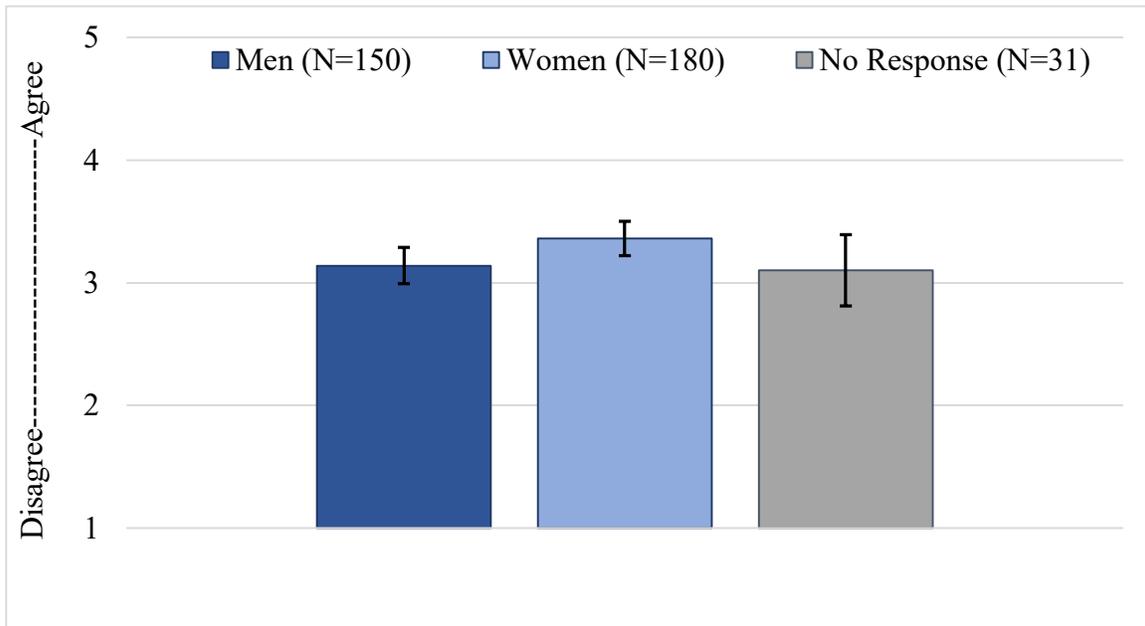
Figure 35

2. **Fairness (Composite Score) by Ethnic Background/Heritage.** Figure 36 reveals no reliable ethnic group differences in perceptions of fairness. There was substantial variability in the responses from minority employees, as indicated by the wide error bars around their mean.
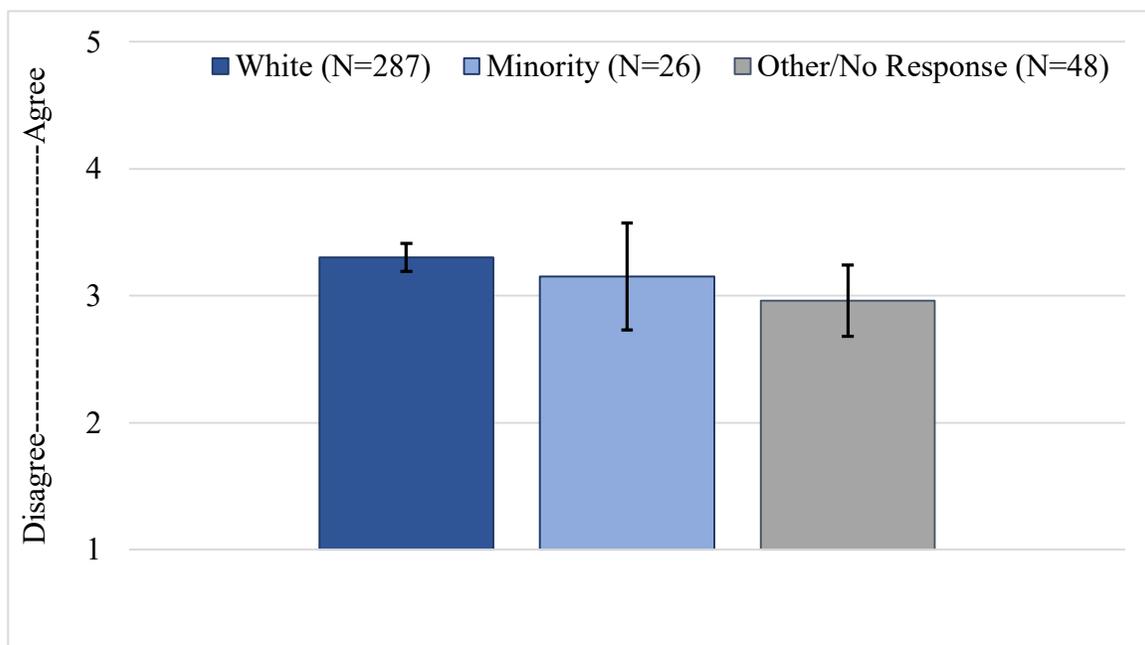
Figure 36

P.   Support for Diversity Subscale[10]

This subscale includes eight questionnaire items that cluster around the issue of support for diversity. The results are overall very positive, with most employees agreeing that the County supports diversity in the workplace. Figure 37 reveals some room for improvement on the following: *My department builds team and/or seeks viewpoints that are diverse*.

□Strongly Disagree   □Disagree   □Neutral   ■Agree   ■Strongly Agree

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
At MC, I have been treated respectfully regardless of my differences.	2	4	13	45	36
I my department or work unit, people are treated respectfully regardless of their differences.	2	6	12	40	40
At MC, people in general are treated respectfully regardless of their differences.	2	4	15	48	31
My department builds teams and/or seeks viewpoints that are diverse.		5	10	22	41	22
At MC, I see strong leadership support for diversity.		4	8	18	44	27
Marathon County values diversity.	3	4	16	49	28
I personally have (not) experienced negativity from co-workers because of my differences.		3	12	11	30	45
I have (not) witnessed instances of bias against diverse groups at work.		3	13	14	29	42

Figure 37

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[10] Alpha = .93

1. **Support for Diversity (Composite Score) by Gender.** Overall, men and women agree there is support for diversity in the Marathon County workplace, with women's ratings higher than men's ratings. Those who gave "No Response" agreed less than women did with these items.
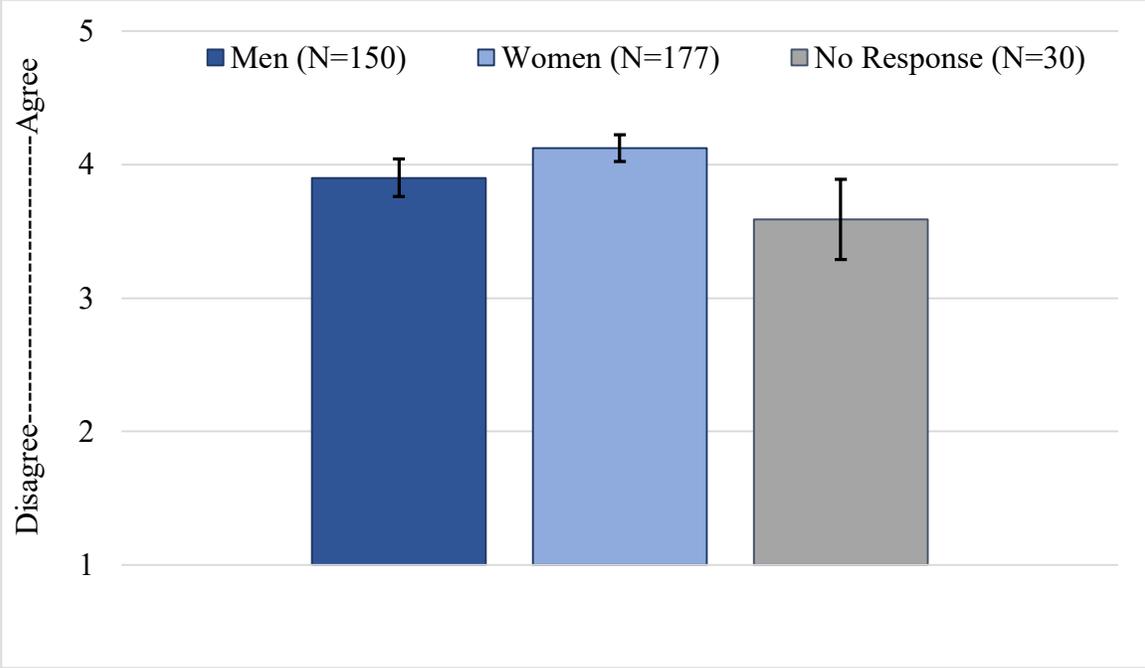
Figure 38

2. **Support for Diversity (Composite Score) by Ethnic Background/Heritage.** Figure 39 reveals that white workers on average feel the workplace is more supportive of diversity than do those who answered "No Response" to their ethnic background.

Figure 39

37
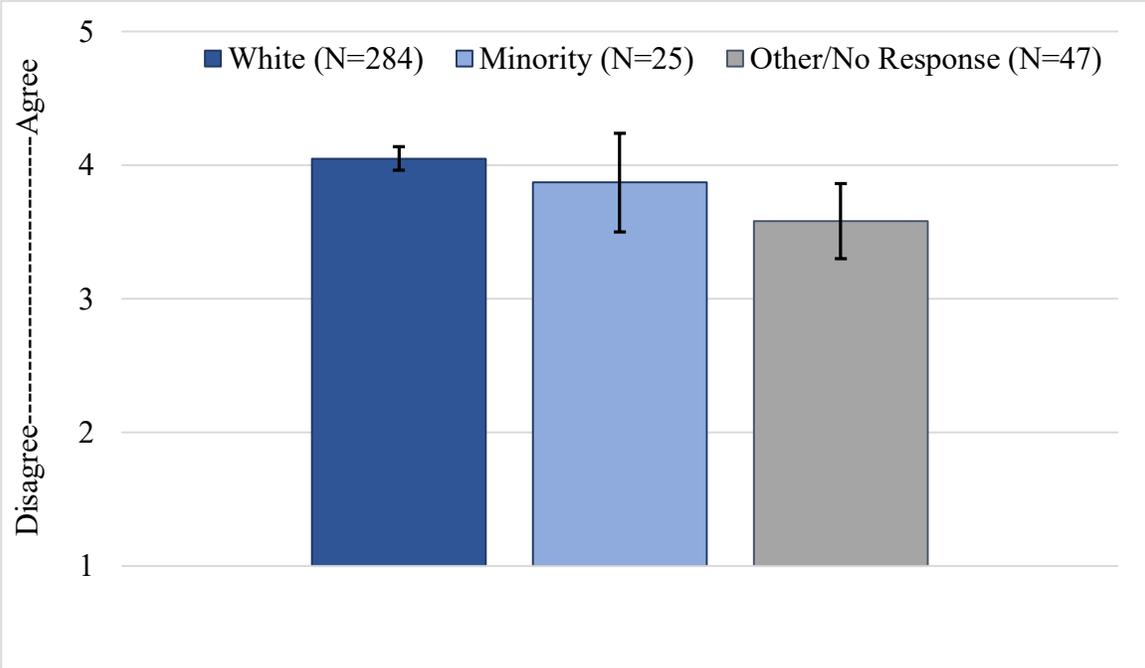
Q. Support for Diversity Subscale[11]

This subscale includes three questionnaire items that cluster around the issue of reporting harassment or discriminatory treatment. Although the Subscale results are positive overall, Figure 40 reveals room for improvement. Ideally, close to 100% of employees would feel comfortable reporting concerns about harassment and discrimination.

☐Strongly Disagree ☐Disagree ☐Neutral ■Agree ■Strongly Agree

If I had a concern about my own experience of harassment or discriminatory treatment, I would be comfortable reporting that concern.
| 5 | 15 | 12 | 41 | 27 |

If I had a concern about a co-worker experiencing harassment or discriminatory treatment, I would be comfortable reporting that concern.
| 5 | 11 | 10 | 45 | 29 |

If I had a concern about me or a co-worker experiencing harassment or discriminatory treatment, I would know where/how to report that concern.
| 4 | 9 | 9 | 46 | 32 |

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

Figure 40

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[11] Alpha = .93

1. **Reporting (Composite Score) by Gender.** Figure 41 reveals that there is little overall difference between men and women around reporting harassment or discrimination in the workplace. Again, those who gave "No Response" were less favorable.

Figure 41

2. **Reporting (Composite Score) by Ethnic Heritage/Background.** Figure 42 reveals that there is little overall difference between white and minority employees around reporting harassment or discrimination in the workplace. Again, those who gave "No Response" felt less positive than self-reporting white employees.
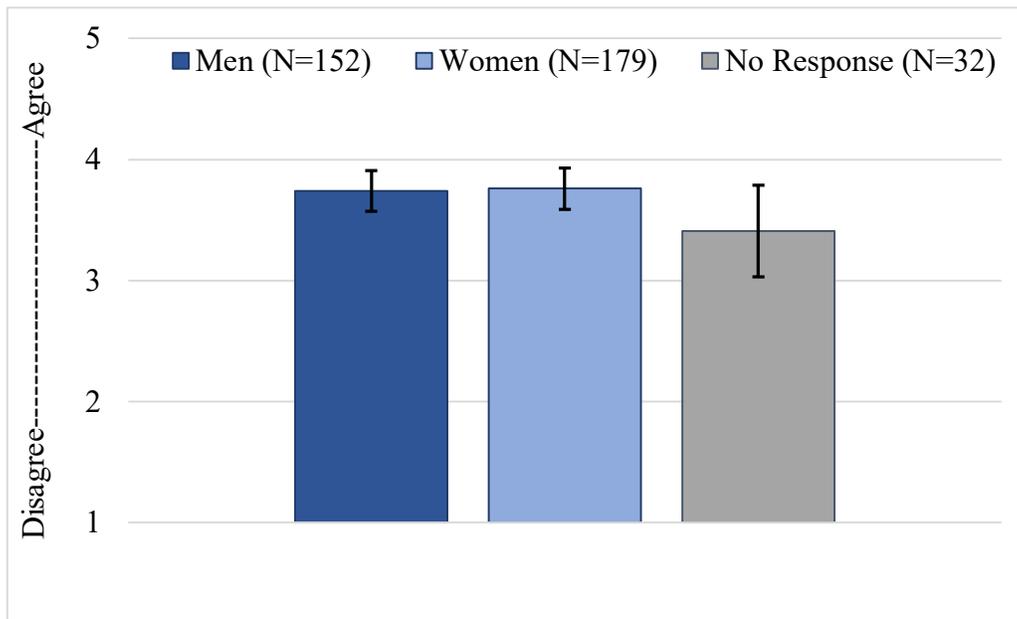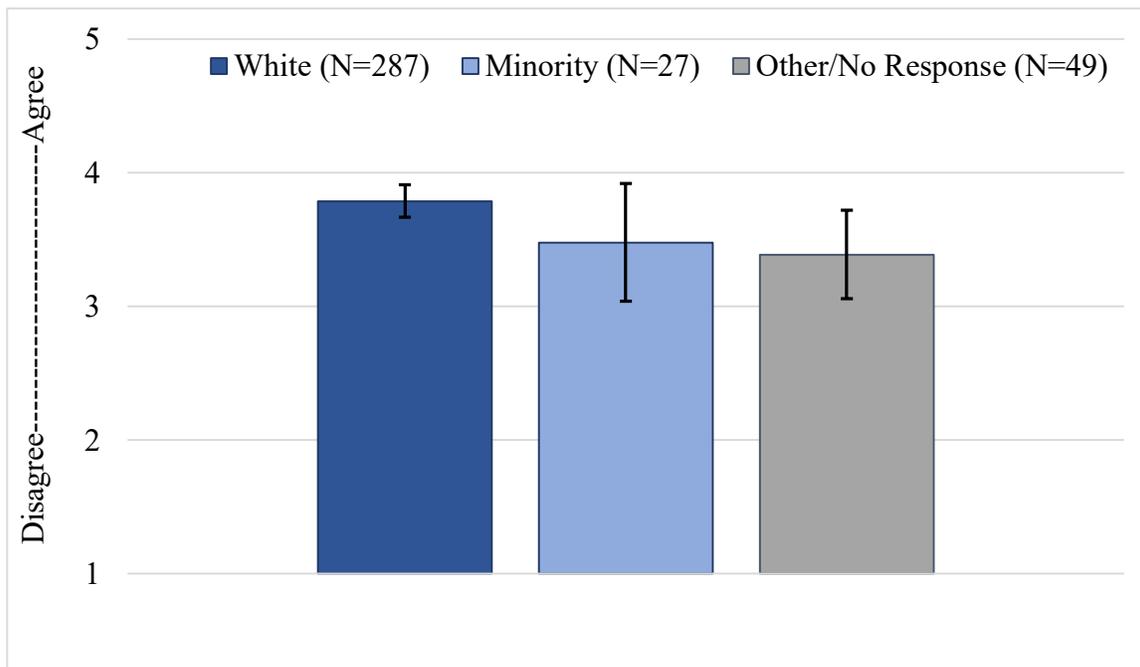

Figure 42

SUMMARY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Primary Findings

1 **The questionnaire sample is well-represented by different groups working for Marathon County.** The sample provided a broad cross-section of the employee population in terms of age, gender, ethnic heritage/background, and employment tenure. For example, based on the actual ethnic/racial background of Marathon County employees, approximately 80% of existing non-white employees participated in the survey. Of those self-reporting gender, slightly more females participated in the survey than males (49%/41%) in comparison to the actual gender ratio of the employee population (52%/48%). The age distribution and tenure of survey respondents was similar the actual population as reported by Marathon County.

2 **Most employees report a sense of shared values and purpose at work.**
For the sample as a whole, employees score high in feeling like their personality is a good fit for Marathon County, that the work of Marathon County is important, and that there exists strong sense of shared values and purpose.

Relevant quotes:
"To make it a positive work environment, people have to know what they are working for, why they are working, and how they fit into the County vision, mission and goals. It helps when people can say that I do a certain thing and this is how it helps the county."

"I do enjoy working for Marathon County. It is lot different. I came from the private sector before. Our director here has values and stresses that a lot. She does a lot of implementing things to go along with those values."

"I think the structure is really well put together around the core values and I think that happens across all departments. You have a monthly or an annual rounding process with your superior and you are able to voice your concerns and you are able to talk and discuss the core values and get constructive feedback. Within our department, people are held accountable to the core values. So it is easier to go up to someone and talk about something and not be negative about it or be afraid of retribution because that's not part of the core value and their superiors will hold them accountable for that if that happens. Just to know that you have that safety net makes it easier to talk about things."

3 **Most employees report a positive view of teamwork and cooperation in the workplace and have a sense of being respected by fellow employees.** The vast majority of employees across demographic categories feel they are respected at work and experience a positive environment that supports a collaborative work culture.

Relevant Quotes:

"As a whole my department gets along well and are positive and supportive of one another. Even if we disagree on things we are very respectful and I like coming to work a lot. . . . I feel like I have co-workers who are friends who support me and I support them back; I couldn't ask for anything better."

"I think the leadership in Marathon county is the best it has ever been now. I have been here 23 years. Our current supervisor is excellent. We have had several leaders come and go—but the current leader leads by example and makes it easier for everyone to do what they are supposed to do. Both of my supervisors are excellent and everyone is great to work with. So I have no complaints honestly about my division."

"We have been through a lot of staff and we got rid of a lot of deadwood . . . it was people who were mostly core values violators. Gone are the days of this clique sitting here taking about you. That doesn't happen anymore. . . . I see a lot less of that happening."

"I work with a great team. When we have time, we try to go out and have out of work time together. But we are focused and we try to have a good time at work. It doesn't mean we don't have our bad days or busy days, but I enjoy working for the county for a little over five years now."

"When I first came here, the immediate supervisors were perceived a jerks, basically. People were being disciplined and you were sent home and sat and stewed for months. Luckily that has changed and so has the morale. It just appears throughout all of the divisions that the leadership has a huge impact on what the morale is in the division and the department as a whole."

"I enjoy working with my co-workers, they are open-minded. We have a great relationship, going out after work for beers. We are all on a sports team together so it is a great place to work."

4 **Marathon County employees perceive support for diversity in the workplace.**
When asked specifically about facing discrimination or being treated differently because of their personal background, respondents overwhelmingly agree that this was not the case.

Relevant Quotes:
"I think our department encourages diversity—they want everyone to challenge ourselves."

"Having a different ethnic background, if we ever have a concern about that and we needed someone to talk to it would be our supervisor or director and I feel like they are very supportive and they normally would try to spot that out. I don't feel like it is tolerated. I haven't had anyone tell me that they feel that way. I know that when I first started there was less people who were Hmong or of different heritage, but my [X] years of being there I have it grow more and they are coming more into the workforce. There wasn't as much in the workforce before."

"I think the culture has really changed and has evolved from what it was before. Everyone is more accepting and they talk a lot about diversity and things like that and accept things about other people."

"I think of things around the core values—one, diversity is a core value and two, when you have an issue with somebody, our expectation is that you speak around the core values . . . "

"The work culture—the way things are ingrained—in that we are going to have a positive work environment--there is a structure and formality to that that does makes it work. In my situation it leads to conversations—and they are structured around accommodations and other things that kind of creates the opportunity for conversation."

5 **Female employees do NOT report more negativity in the workplace than male employees.** For example, women do NOT report having more negative experiences (e.g., insults, being passed over, etc.) than men do. On the composite variables, when there are differences, female employees offer more *positive* responses than male employees.

Relevant Quotes:
"I don't feel that I am any less likely to be promoted as a female. If you can do the job, whether you are male or female, you are just as likely to be promoted. It wasn't like that years ago."

"There was a case where someone sued the department claiming that they were discriminated against because they were female . . . honestly I was in on interviews and she just did not score as well as everyone else. You can say what you want but when you lose your job for a disciplinary reason and your recourse is to sue the place based on discrimination—that just does not hold a lot of weight. It just wasn't the case." [Quote from a female employee.]

6 **For the most part, minority employees do NOT report more negativity about the workplace than white employees.** Self-identified ethnic minority employees do NOT report systematically more negative experiences (insults, being passed over, etc.) than white employees do. This includes items assessing their perceptions of workplace quality and of individual belonging. This was across the board, irrespective of gender, years of service, position, and other factors. Furthermore, as questions were asked specifically about whether employees felt they faced discrimination or were treated differently because of their personal background, respondents overwhelmingly agree that this was not the case.

Relevant Quotes:
"Having a different ethnic background, if we ever have a concern about that and we needed someone to talk to it would be our supervisor or director and I feel like they are very supportive and they normally would try to spot that out. I don't feel like it is tolerated."

"The people who would be responding negatively are no longer there . . . because that type of culture is not accepted—it is against core values."

"I love working for Marathon County and [my department]. I feel very welcomed. And coming from a diverse place, I feel a different level of welcomeness and a desire that my presence and my abilities are truly wanted in this environment. In other [work settings] I [didn't] feel welcome. I do not feel this when working inside Marathon County government."

7 **Minority populations encourage the County to continue to be sensitive to issues of diversity.** This finding emerges from employee comments on the questionnaire and from focus groups. In particular, while employees from underrepresented populations expressed overall satisfaction and positive feelings about the workplace at Marathon County, they also suggested that there are still "awkward moments" with some colleagues and supervisors--and there exist opportunities for continued education and emphasis on the value and importance of diversity and inclusiveness in the workplace.

Relevant Quotes:

"I have actually been referred to as a token twice since I have been here which I find to be a very negative term. I don't own that. I am only a token if I bring nothing to the table and nobody is listening to me. I feel I have both. I am bringing something to the table and Marathon County leadership does take into account what I offer and people see that we have this person at the table… (diverse leadership) lets people know that (MC) values diversity and inclusion and look at the opportunities we bring that are open to the rest of the community."

"We had a staff member who had to take three or four days off from work because that is how long Hmong funerals last. There were some whispers, "Why do they take so long?" "Why is this person doing this?" That can lead to animosity between co-workers—not knowing the situation and not understanding someone's culture or tradition."

"I think there is a difference between *inviting* people to participate and *expecting* them to self-identify. . . . Like, how do you know I self-identify as a person [from an underrepresented group]? . . . I have never self-identified or referred to myself or mentioned something, so how do you know people in the room want to participate. . . . You are not honoring the work by assuming rather than inviting."

"I feel like sometimes maybe people react to me differently because I am different. And when I say react, maybe they don't talk to me or approach me because they haven't had much contact with someone who is different. But I feel like once you either approach or made contact—it is easier once that initial contact happens."

"[W]hen they came up with [a] committee, they are like, 'We need you on it, you are the only Asian.' They kind of pushed me into it even though I don't know what it is. . . . I just kind of sat there . . . like a lame dumb duck. Now that I have been there longer, I have the hang of it and I know what is going on, but at first they said we need you because you are Asian and they wanted to show someone that we are a diverse group."

8 **Perceptions of fairness in the workplace could be improved.** For the sample as a whole, employees score lowest in their perceptions of *fairness* in the workplace.

Relevant Quotes:
"It probably depends on the department, but management does play favorites."

"Continue to hold people accountable who aren't doing what they are supposed to be doing. We have one person in our division right now who doesn't understand that you can't work whenever you want and get overtime for it—that has to be approved. We all see it. How come this is going on? This needs to be addressed because it is ridiculous. As long as they continue to hold people accountable."

"If you bring up a small concern, you can fix it right away because there is a safety net around the core values. But when you come with something more complicated, then it comes down to, 'I am superior, my degree is higher—I am a specialist.' Then it gets really complicated."

"It would be very interesting to know the breakdown of pay based on race, gender, and other indicators. It would be a good self-evaluation to break it down by categories to make sure there is no inequality."

9 **Communicating openly and allowing employees to have a voice could be improved.** Employees also scored lower in terms of *communication* and being able to speak up with a dissonant opinion or have *voice* in things that matter. A small but significant subset of workers reports self-censoring their thoughts and individuality at work. It should be pointed out that in a healthy workplace where all employees are valued, some degree of self-censoring can be seen as a net positive.

Relevant Quotes:
"In my department, you just have to keep your mouth shut."

"When I first started there was a clear divide between management and workers and not a lot of trust. Over the last couple of years, things have changed a lot. But there is still one supervisor that if you go in and vent about an issue it may end up in your evaluation. . . . It's going to take time unless there is a change in supervisor there."

"The lack of respect from management chips away at the core of our culture each day . . . . The divisional line between management and the workers is getting thicker."

"I don't have much say because I am not at a higher level and I don't know if I can say anything for it to matter . . ."

"If you want to talk to [supervisors] about something they make you feel like you are bothering them. Their look on their face is 'go away and leave me alone.'"

"[S]ometimes when it comes down to a . . . direction that me and some co-workers are trying to go toward, we will have a deliberation and have a consensus . . . and we'll go to management . . . and they say, "We understand this and we understand that" . . . but a day later it will drop off and they will dismiss it. I understand that you are management and you are the decision-maker. The issue is relaying it back to the people who were working on that project."

"I kind of see that the full time people can say whatever they want versus part time—they can get rid of me any time that they want. Not having anything covering me or protecting me I tend not to say the wrong thing to the wrong person. There are enough of us on the bottom that we will all voice our opinion and eventually it will go up the chain of command and they will either change it or keep it. It isn't about race or anything, it is just about part time status."

10 **There is a small but significant group of workers that overall are less satisfied than the vast majority of their co-workers.** Unfortunately, this group (approximately 10-14% of respondents) did not report their gender, age, ethnic descent, tenure, department, position or other demographic variables. Who are these non-reporters? Comparing survey responses to data received from Marathon County, this group skews heavily white (somewhere between 89% and 100%), though other demographic differences remain unknown.[12] Whoever they are, demographic non-reporters consistently responded the least positively on essentially every element of the questionnaire.

Relevant Quote:
"The only people who will tell you there is an issue are the people that didn't get the job. And they want to base it on something other than what it truly is—someone who is not qualified for the job."

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[12] Non-response rates based on race and ethnic background can vary widely based on survey mode, length of questionnaire, survey language and cultural sensitivity to content. See, for example, Lindsay L. Sykes, Robin L. Walker, Emmanuel Ngwakongnwi, and Hude Quan. A Systematic Literature Review on Response Rates across Racial and Ethnic Populations. *Canadian Journal of Public Health* (2010), Vol. 101, No. 3, 213-219. However, most research suggests under-reporting by non-white populations. This begs the question why the population of Marathon County employee non-responders skewed heavily white. We suspect it has to do with the nature and purpose of the survey which was deliberately labeled as a study on workplace inclusion. For this reason, we believe that non-whites and those of non-European descent felt it was more important to self-identify. But this still does not explain why a significant number of white employees chose *not* to reveal their race or ethnic background.

Key Recommendations

1 **Invest in quality leadership.**
Many of the positive comments about Marathon County's workplace culture revolved around experiences with high-quality leaders. Employees described positive leaders in their departments, and of the County as a whole, who strengthened the organization in myriad ways. These strong leaders held their employees accountable to performance standards and the core values of the organization; they advocated for skill growth and opportunities for all of their employees; they encouraged and modeled crucial conversations; they showed personal interest in each of their team members and engaged in regular check-ins; they showed openness to new ideas; and they maintained an atmosphere of positivity and transparency. One recommendation, therefore, is that Marathon County continue its efforts to select and invest in high quality leaders.

Relevant Quotes:
"I think the difference really starts at the top. The County Administrator takes these issues seriously and that trickles down to department heads and throughout the county. Positive and proactive leadership makes the biggest difference."

"I have been working for the county long enough to see what it was like before. Just seeing the differences and the changes have been positive. We value work-life balance. That shows through our department leadership."

"I truly believe changes had to do with the change in the director. We had a director before where he would not know you from someone who walked off the street, wouldn't acknowledge you, doesn't know you, would keep his head down all day, didn't really care. We have a different director. She is really on top of everything and she cares. She is also a champion for change . . . I really think it comes from the top down, it really does trickle down. . . . [C]hange can come from the bottom up, too, but it is harder to change when you are at the bottom—to make those changes be effective. It really needs from the top down."

"I like what I see. I like what our leaders are trying to do. I would just ask them to continue to do those things, continue to listen to employees and take those ideas into consideration when making adaptations or modifications to enhance positive culture."

2 **Provide and encourage leadership education that is focused on building trust, positive communication, and positive employee interactions.**
Many of the negative comments from employees centered on poor experiences within their departments with specific members of management. In some departments, employees reported not trusting their department leaders, and in some departments, employees do not fully trust one another. One key form of investment in the leadership of Marathon County would be to provide leaders with regular team discussions and practice using skills such as (1) maintaining

transparency; (2) facilitating positive employee-employee as well as employee-employer ("boss") interactions; and (3) communicating positively and directly. In short, we recommend implementing a strong model of healthy and ethical communication.

Relevant Quotes:
"They have an open door policy where we can go in and talk to a supervisor at any time and know that they are going to listen to what I say. That is a key. They are very approachable and I hope that continues."

"As a member of a small minority at Marathon County, I feel like I do have a responsibility to be a voice and to speak up. I would also like to recommend that our leaders don't look at us to just bring us in when there are opportunities like this. Allow us to be included as leaders. I believe in leadership that looks like the community—management who make up a rich diversity of the community. Not just looking at us for the color of our skins or our disabilities, but having us there as experts guiding decision—we think about things through a different lens."

3   Provide professional/skill development opportunities for employees at all levels (e.g., supervisory and non-supervisory).

One of the most memorable and positive set of comments from employees revolved around receiving professional development opportunities. These opportunities did not necessarily imply advancement; rather, they were offered in recognition of the fact that employees did not have clear opportunities for advancement yet still might want to develop new skills and expand their knowledge base. These employees felt that such opportunities provided massive boosts to morale and diminished some of the sense of hierarchy and differential skill/credentials within the department. One recommendation, then, is that Marathon County work to provide more professional development opportunities for employees of varying levels.

Relevant Quotes:
"The only thing that in the [division I work in] in particular is that there are very few spots for advancement. But [employees] have done other projects or other areas they have taken on as their own, so they have something out of the ordinary or something besides their job to patriciate in. Many people participate in other specialized groups [available in the department]. You are being advanced in other ways. Our administrator [offered] these other professional opportunities that make everyone feel that they are active participants."

"There has been a lot of learning based on [workplace culture] surveys that we did, with the results of that the director took it very serious—all of our supervisors took it very seriously. Some of our results were positive and some of our results were negative. But I think a lot of the negative results caused them to want to learn to be even better. With the director's guidance it helps the supervisors to improve themselves and therefore improve the morale of how things were. Before, when I first started, there have been so many changes with the whole unit. . . . Based on those culture surveys is when they took it more seriously and started doing more training. Like challenging us to have a crucial conversation with someone we work with . . . any negativity that we would have our supervisor would challenge you to be more open about it."

"I would second the more tangible trainings or more customer-service or customer-based oriented training that would impact co-workers as well around a lot of different diversity topics. So the onus is not on diverse staff to be the voice for those issues. I think that is a burden that we all carry in different ways. So, from a trauma-informed care lens it is additionally burdensome when you are the spokesperson for various groups and there isn't a shared understanding of different things."

4 **Promote and encourage shared responsibility for an inclusive culture at Marathon County.** Most employees who responded to the questionnaire reported positive sentiments about feeling included and valued at Marathon County. That said, not everyone did, and some employees with diverse identities expressed concern about being relied upon to encourage inclusivity and respect for diversity. They encouraged diverse teams of workshop leaders, and *invitations* rather than *requests* to lead. It was also noted that one of the best ways to build an inclusive culture was to encourage each and every employee to reach out to individual co-workers and build personal connections with them. As stated by one employee in response to a question about how they could be more inclusive, "(I could) get to know co-workers personally, learn about them as people, not workers."

Relevant Quotes:
"Educating the rest of the workers about different cultures and background —just understanding the clientele we work with. Sometimes I hear comments from other people but I feel that they aren't understanding a different culture or background. We don't know much about why maybe they are the way they are and it could be because of that and this is something I feel that is something that we need more education on---just learning more about different cultural backgrounds."

"Because one comes from a different background does not make one an expert in cultural differences. We are only experts in our lived experience. Having said that, there are tradeoffs to putting up people of minority backgrounds as examples of diversity. On the one hand, it does send a message to the community and co-workers that we value diversity. On the other hand, it may take away from the bigger reality that there needs to be a shared responsibility for all people, white, black, Asian, etc. to uphold the value of inclusion and a safe and welcoming work environment."

"I think it would be nice and culturally sensitive depending on the ethnic groups we have in Wausau, when we have MLK day or certain types of training that we have cultural sensitivity training. So that people know, hey in this culture, this is typical."

"When I first moved to Marathon County at a previous job, cultural sensitivity training was required for leadership. Hmong cultural training was required. That was really helpful."

5 **Be more intentional about offering safe routes for conversation and problem solving around issues of diversity, inclusivity and discrimination.** Particularly in the focus group consisting of underrepresented populations, a consensus emerged that the County lacked formal mechanisms for employees to discuss issues of diversity and inclusion at the workplace. One newer employee summed it by saying that she wanted to discuss some issues about her status but had no idea to whom she should address them.

Relevant Quotes:
"I'll hear certain comments and then I'll chime in, "Maybe the reason they are in an abusive relationship because in their culture—pride is very important and not being ashamed in the community is so important, . . . and to look at it and say, "Why can't she just leave that person?" It could be one that the person doesn't know any English and the person she depends on is that male and culturally she doesn't want to be known as a divorcee because in [the Hmong] community it is so important to be a "model person" so maybe that is affecting how the individual would feel and maybe that is why they would stay in an abusive relationship. I feel like it is just more learning to understand the cultural background of and not to make assumptions."

"We were talking about core values and I would say rounding is a good example of how structure helps. But when it goes outside of job function or job tasks there are situations where there's not a clear opportunity to have that conversation. I think about when awkward conversations occur that aren't about work . . . about disability or somebody thinking they are being helpful or making a joke or something and it gets awkward. I don't think there are clear avenues. There are clear avenues to have the conversation about job performance or about tasks, but if not related to those things it gets murkier. There is less conversation around these types of situations."

"Are conversations happening at the employee level? Is there a diversity committee at the county at a level of the employees—a vehicle to have those broader conversations outside of department heads having a planning or visioning—for employees? What would that look like?"

6 **Provide safe routes for employees to voice general concerns and frustrations.** An issue that received relatively low ratings among respondents has to do with perceptions of communication and voice. Employees from various departments reported feeling that they could not voice a frustration or opposing view without the possibility of retaliation. Feelings of resentment might build if employees feel they have nowhere to safely voice a frustration, especially if it is a legitimate frustration. We recommend that the County consider one or more safe routes by which employees can voice concerns, frustrations and recommendations. One practice that could be explored is known as "Diagonal Engagement"—basically, a carefully constructed communication mechanism that slices down and across an organization both verticlrically and horizontally (i.e., from the department leaders and supervisors down to the non-supervisors and part-time staff).[13] Regular diagonal team meetings, if prioritized by

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[13] See, for example, http://www.talentzoo.com/flack-me/blog_news.php?articleID=8270.

leadership and well-facilitated, can promote candor, confidence and constructive engagement among employees. They can also identify emerging issues or problems and serve as a generative space to to offer new ideas and potential solutions. However, we want to emphasize that this is merely one of multiple potential formal and informal organizational communication strategies that could be explored by Marathon County. The literature on effective organizational communication also suggests that communication mechanisms must be supported by leadership, again underscoring the importance of quality leadership training.

<u>Relevant Quotes</u>:
"There are some people who specialize in different areas, so when you want to work together as a team, they're always like, 'I am the specialist—I need to do my job. This is your job. You do your job.' But you and I need to work together for this institution to work—to flow better. You come to the core values and bring that up, and they kind of just like set them aside and then it becomes a communication problem where it is like, 'I don't know if I can trust you anymore,' so then you kind of work around the bush [*sic*]. That is my experience."

"My voice is always heard but I do know some workers whose voices are never heard. I am not sure it is based on their background because they are white, so I don't know why they are not heard. But my voice is always heard."

Appendix A

Marathon County Inclusivity Study Focus Group Questions

1. Tell us about your overall experience working for Marathon County and for your department—do you find it a place that you enjoy working and an environment you enjoy working in? [Follow up: Do you identify more with your division or department or with the county as a whole?]

2. Research suggests that in some workplaces there is a pay gap between individuals based on differences of race, ethnic heritage, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion or other factors. Have you noticed any pay differences in your workplace based on any of these factors?

3. I would like you to think about advancement and promotion. Have you noticed differences in terms of who is advanced or promoted in your department based on race, gender, age, sexual orientation or any other factor?

4. From your perspective, have any of you ever been treated differently as a result of your personal background? [Probe specific factors—e.g., age, gender, ethnic heritage, etc.]

5. Have you either observed or heard from co-workers that they have been treated differently at work because of their race, ethnic heritage, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, or other factors? Please describe what you saw or heard.

6. One concern that emerged from from the survey data comes from employee perceptions of fairness, communication and voice. In particular, some employees feel unable or unwilling to voice their disagreement or concerns, or feel that they have little or no voice about things that matter to them in the workplace. Can you tell us what you think about this issue?

7. What advice would you have for division or department heads to create/maintain a work environment where all feel respected regardless of one's personal background?

8. Is there anything else you would like to share on this or other topics or is there any question that we didn't ask that you wish we had?