Canada Integration and Inclusion services

CIIS Employer HR Resources

Toolkit 3: Retention, Engagement & Career Growth

A practical employer guide to retaining and developing diverse talent long term

Purpose

This toolkit helps employers strengthen retention, engagement, career development, performance feedback, and continuous improvement practices. It is designed for organizations that want to move beyond hiring and create workplace systems where diverse employees can succeed and grow.

How to use this toolkit

Each chapter can be read independenty or used as part of a broader retention review. Each chapter includes one consolidated downloadable tool for employers.

Intended Audience

Employers, HR professionals, supervisors, managers, executives, and organizational leaders responsible for employee experience, retention, development, and workplace culture.

Research Grounding

This toolkit is informed by CIIS's 2024 report on Black immigrant employment barriers in Canada, which highlighted employer resource gaps, retention needs, mentorship, workplace culture guidance, and the need for stronger employer accountability.

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Chapter 1 Understanding Retention Challenges

CIIS Research Insight

CIIS's 2024 research found a clear demand for employer resources on hiring and retaining Black immigrants. More than half of respondents had observed or experienced a lack of employer resources on this issue, and 68.3% strongly agreed that employers need more guidance on hiring and retaining Black immigrants. This supports the need for practical retention tools that go beyond recruitment and focus on the employee experience after hire.

Section 1: Employees Leave for More Than One Reason

Employees rarely leave an organization because of one isolated event. Turnover usually builds over time through a combination of role frustration, unclear expectations, limited recognition, poor manager relationships, lack of growth, or a sense that the workplace does not offer a realistic future.

Employers sometimes interpret resignation as a sudden decision, but employees often disengage quietly before they leave. They may stop contributing ideas, avoid optional activities, reduce effort, or begin exploring opportunities elsewhere. These early shifts are easy to miss when managers focus only on task completion.

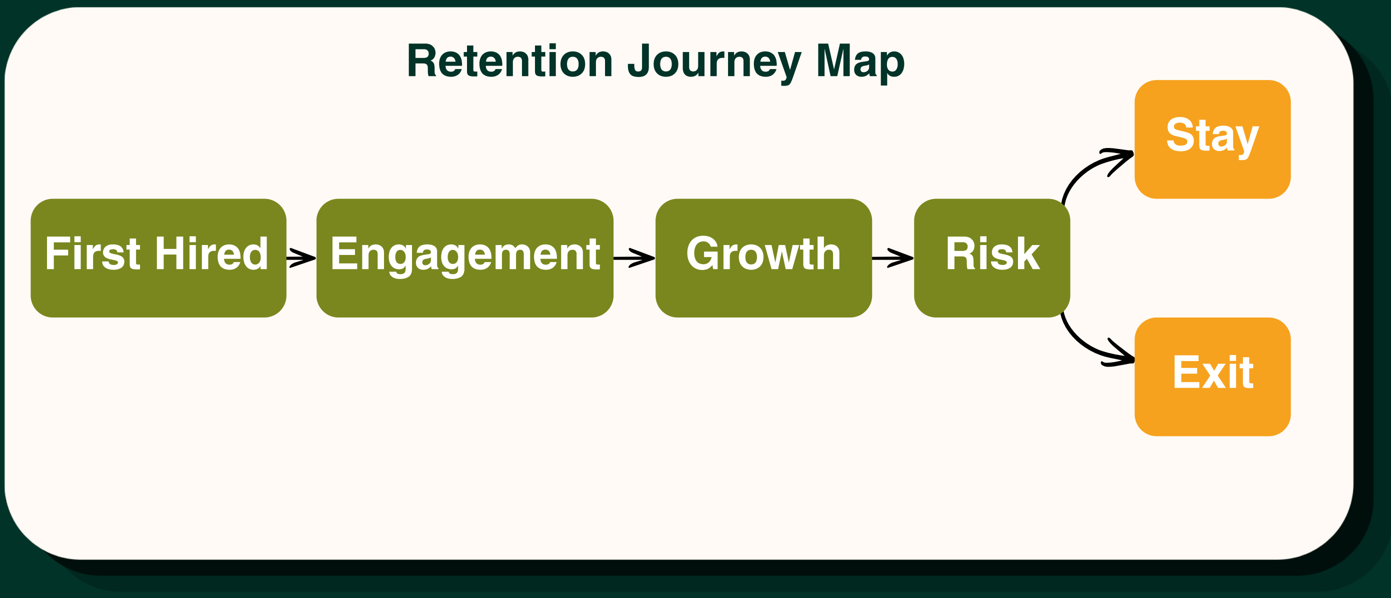
Retention improves when employers treat employee experience as an ongoing responsibility rather than a problem to solve after someone gives notice. The strongest retention practices are proactive. They help employees understand expectations, receive feedback, build relationships, and see a pathway for growth.

For diverse employees, the decision to stay may also be shaped by whether they feel respected, visible, and fairly treated. If employees believe they must constantly prove themselves, navigate bias quietly, or accept limited access to opportunity, they may begin to disconnect even when they are performing well.

Employers can improve retention by asking better questions before problems become serious. A stay conversation, regular check-in, or structured review of retention risks can reveal concerns that may not appear in performance data. These practices help managers act earlier and more thoughtfully.

A practical retention review should include both individual and system-level questions. The individual question asks what this employee may need. The system question asks whether the same issue appears elsewhere. This helps employers avoid fixing one case while missing a repeated workplace pattern.

Managers should be encouraged to document themes from stay conversations without turning them into surveillance. The goal is to understand what supports commitment and what may be weakening it, then use that information to improve the employee experience.



Reflection Questions

What does this section reveal about our current workplace practices?

Where might employees experience barriers, uncertainty, or limited access?

What is one practical improvement we can implement in the next 60 to 90 days?

Section 2: Retention Challenges for Diverse Talent

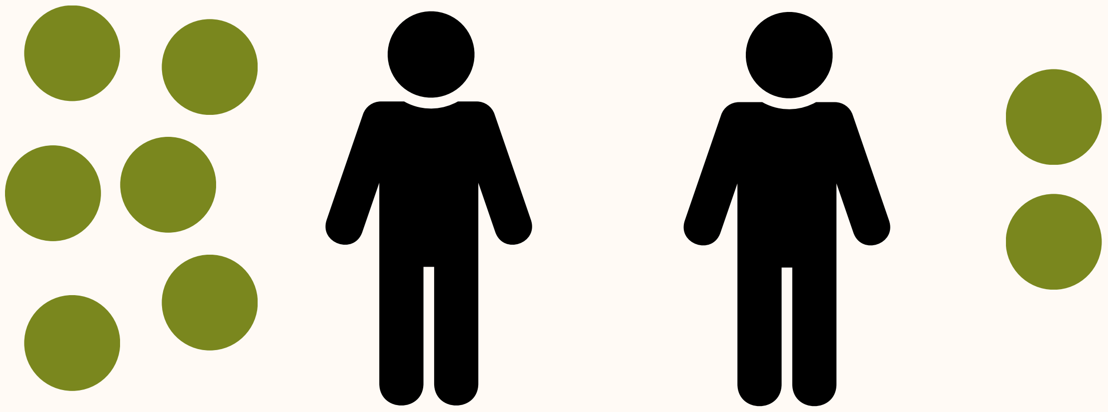
Diverse employees may experience the workplace differently from colleagues who are more familiar with local norms, professional networks, or informal organizational culture. These differences do not reflect lower capability. They often reflect uneven access to information, relationships, and informal support.

Retention challenges may appear when employees do not understand how decisions are made, who has influence, how to access opportunities, or how advancement works. If important information is shared informally through networks that some employees are not part of, career progression can feel unclear or out of reach.

Skilled immigrants may also face the pressure of rebuilding professional credibility in a new country, even when they bring strong qualifications and experience. If employers fail to recognize that transition, employees may feel undervalued or stuck below their capability level.

The CIIS 2024 research reinforces this concern. Respondents identified guidance on workplace culture and expectations, mentorship, networking, and retention-focused employer resources as important supports. These findings suggest that retention requires both individual support and employer accountability.

Equal Talent with Unequal Opportunities



Employers can respond by making support visible and systematic. Career pathways, mentorship, manager check-ins, and development conversations should not depend on whether an employee already knows how to ask for them. The organization should build access into its normal people practices.

Diverse employees may also be cautious about naming barriers directly, especially if they are new to the organization or have previously experienced dismissal when raising concerns. This makes manager trust and confidentiality especially important.

Employers should look for practical signs of unequal access. For example, who receives stretch assignments, who is included in informal problem-solving conversations, who is encouraged to apply internally, and who is assumed to need more time before being considered for advancement.

Retention improves when employers make support predictable rather than personality-dependent. Employees should not need to have the "right" manager or informal connection in order to receive guidance and opportunity.

Reflection Questions

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Section 3: Workplace Inclusion and Retention

Inclusion is a retention issue because employees are more likely to stay where they feel respected, heard, and able to contribute without constantly adjusting themselves to fit narrow expectations. A workplace can be diverse in representation and still weak in inclusion if employees do not experience fairness in everyday interactions.

Inclusion is shaped through meetings, feedback, recognition, assignments, informal relationships, and how managers respond to concerns. These routine experiences tell employees whether they belong, whether their contributions are valued, and whether the workplace is safe enough for honest participation.

Retention is affected when employees feel overlooked for visible work, excluded from informal networks, or recognized less often than peers. Even small patterns can accumulate. Over time, employees may decide that their effort is not leading to growth, influence, or meaningful connection.

Managers have a significant role in making inclusion practical. They decide who gets invited into discussions, who receives stretch work, whose ideas are acknowledged, and how concerns are handled. When managers practice inclusion consistently, employees are more likely to remain engaged.

Employers should not rely on broad inclusion statements alone. They should examine how inclusion is experienced in daily work. Engagement surveys, stay interviews, manager training, and team-level reviews can help reveal whether employees feel connected and valued.

Inclusion becomes visible when employees can influence decisions, ask questions without embarrassment, receive useful feedback, and see their contributions recognized. These everyday experiences shape whether employees believe the workplace is a place where they can build a future.

Employers should pay attention to the difference between participation and belonging. An employee may attend meetings and complete tasks while still feeling disconnected from influence, recognition, or growth.

A useful practice is to review inclusion at the team level. Team-level habits often determine whether organizational inclusion commitments are experienced as real or as statements that do not change daily work.

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Section 4: Burnout and Workplace Stress

Burnout affects retention because employees who feel exhausted, unsupported, or unable to recover may eventually leave, even when they like their work. Burnout is not only about workload volume. It can also come from unclear priorities, lack of control, poor communication, emotional labour, or repeated experiences of exclusion.

Diverse employees may face additional stress when they feel they must carefully manage how they speak, respond, or advocate for themselves. They may also carry the burden of representing a group, educating others, or navigating assumptions about capability and fit. These pressures can be invisible to managers.

Workplace stress becomes more serious when employees do not feel safe raising concerns. If employees believe that asking for help will be viewed as weakness or that boundaries will be punished, they may stay silent until disengagement is advanced.

Employers can reduce burnout risk by reviewing workload, role clarity, communication expectations, flexibility, and support. Managers should pay attention to changes in energy, responsiveness, participation, and attitude, especially when high-performing employees begin to withdraw.

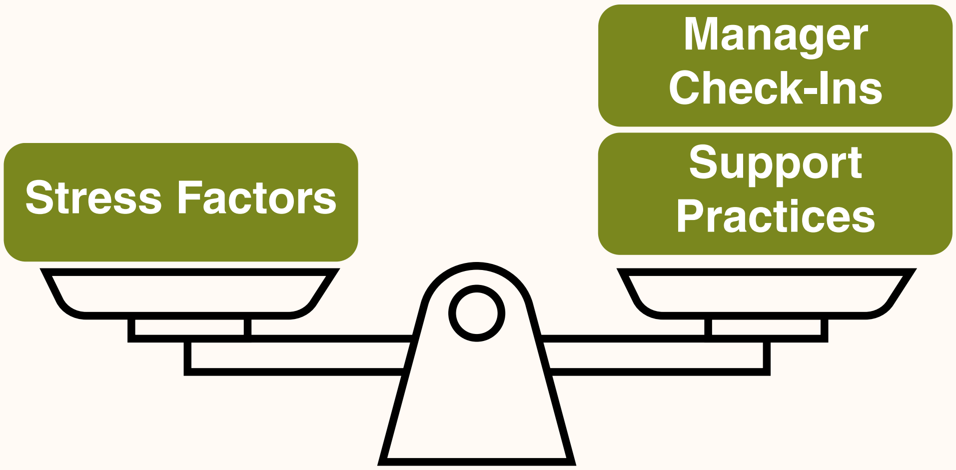
A practical retention strategy includes workload conversations, realistic timelines, respectful flexibility, and clear escalation pathways. These practices help employees remain productive without sacrificing wellbeing.

Workload conversations should be specific. General questions such as “Are you okay?” may not reveal enough. Managers should ask about priorities, deadlines, resources, interruptions, and whether the employee has the authority or information needed to complete work well.

Employers should also recognize that high performers are not immune to burnout. In fact, reliable employees may receive more work because they are trusted, which can create silent strain if managers do not actively monitor capacity.

Retention improves when wellbeing is treated as part of performance sustainability. Employees who can recover, ask for help, and clarify priorities are more likely to contribute consistently over time.

Workload and Wellbeing Balance



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Section 5: Identifying Early Warning Signs

Early warning signs of disengagement are often subtle. An employee may contribute less in meetings, stop volunteering for projects, avoid development conversations, or become less responsive to informal team connection. These signs do not always mean an employee is planning to leave, but they should prompt curiosity and support.

Managers should avoid assuming that silence means everything is fine. Some employees hesitate to raise concerns because they do not want to appear difficult, ungrateful, or unprofessional. This may be especially true for employees who are still building confidence in a new workplace or who have experienced bias in previous environments.

A structured approach helps managers respond without overreacting. Instead of waiting for resignation signals, managers can schedule check-ins that explore workload, role clarity, support, growth, and connection. These conversations should be calm, practical, and focused on removing barriers where possible.

Employers should also look for patterns across teams. If several employees from similar backgrounds are leaving, declining development opportunities, or reporting limited growth, the issue may be systemic rather than individual.

Retention risk should be reviewed as part of regular people management. When organizations monitor early signs and act respectfully, they have a better chance of keeping skilled employees engaged and committed.

Early signs should be addressed through curiosity rather than accusation. A manager who says, “I’ve noticed you seem less engaged lately, and I want to understand what support may be useful,” creates a different conversation from one that begins with criticism.

Employers should train managers to recognize changes without making assumptions about the cause. A change in participation may relate to workload, unclear expectations, team conflict, health, caregiving pressure, or lack of growth.

When early warning signs are discussed respectfully, employees are more likely to share useful information before the problem becomes a resignation or performance issue.

Early Warning Dashboard

Engagement
61%

Growth
Stalled

Connection
Low

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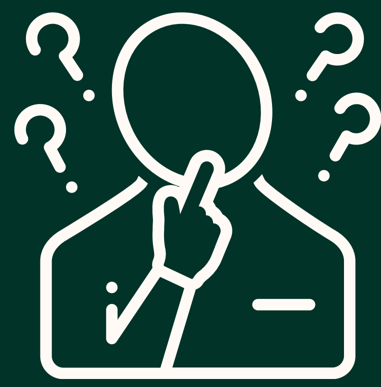
Chapter Takeaway



Retention challenges are easier to address when employers recognize early signs, understand employee experience, and act before disengagement becomes resignation.

Building Inclusive Career Development Pathways

CIIS Research Insight

The CIIS 2024 research identified career coaching or mentorship and networking opportunities as key supports that Black immigrant women need to better navigate the Canadian workforce. These findings are directly connected to retention because employees who cannot access guidance, networks, or development opportunities may disengage or seek growth elsewhere.

Section 1: Career Growth as a Retention Driver

Career growth is one of the strongest signals that an employer values an employee's future. When employees see realistic opportunities to learn, advance, and take on meaningful work, they are more likely to remain engaged. When growth feels unclear or inaccessible, even satisfied employees may begin looking elsewhere.

Career development does not always mean promotion. It may include skill-building, exposure to new projects, leadership practice, cross-functional work, mentorship, or preparation for future roles. The important point is that employees understand how they can continue progressing.

For diverse employees and skilled immigrants, the pathway to growth may be less obvious if they are unfamiliar with informal workplace expectations or internal advancement norms. They may not know when to express interest, how to position achievements, or who can help them navigate opportunities.

Employers can improve retention by making career development more visible. Managers should discuss growth early, revisit it regularly, and help employees connect their current work to future possibilities.

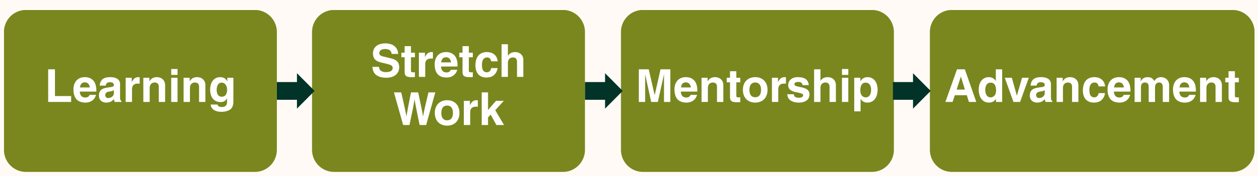
A strong career pathway gives employees both direction and agency. It shows what skills matter, how readiness is assessed, and what support is available to help employees develop.

Career development is particularly important for employees who joined the organization with strong previous experience but entered at a lower level than their capability. Without a growth pathway, these employees may view the role as temporary rather than as a place to build long-term contribution.

Employers should create development pathways that are realistic for different roles. Not every position has the same promotion ladder, but most employees can still benefit from learning, stretch work, project exposure, and expanded responsibility.

A good career conversation should leave the employee with clarity. They should understand what is possible, what is required, and what support is available.

Career Pathway



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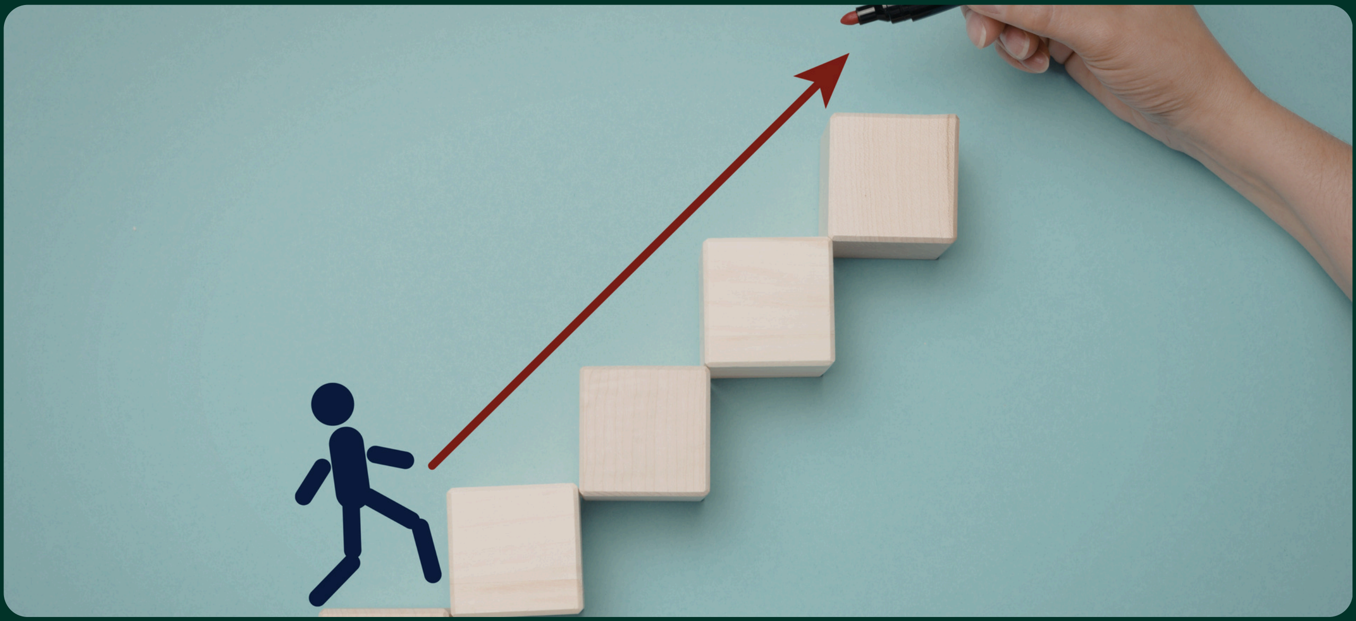
Section 2: Access to Advancement Opportunities



Access to advancement is not only about whether opportunities exist. It is also about who hears about them, who is encouraged to apply, who receives stretch assignments, and who is viewed as having potential.

Some employees gain access to advancement through informal networks, manager advocacy, or visibility in high-profile projects. Employees outside those networks may be equally capable but less likely to be noticed. This can create uneven career progression even in organizations that believe they are fair.

Employers should review how development opportunities are shared. Are opportunities posted openly? Are stretch assignments distributed thoughtfully? Do managers encourage a range of employees to prepare for future roles? These questions help reveal whether advancement access is broad or concentrated.

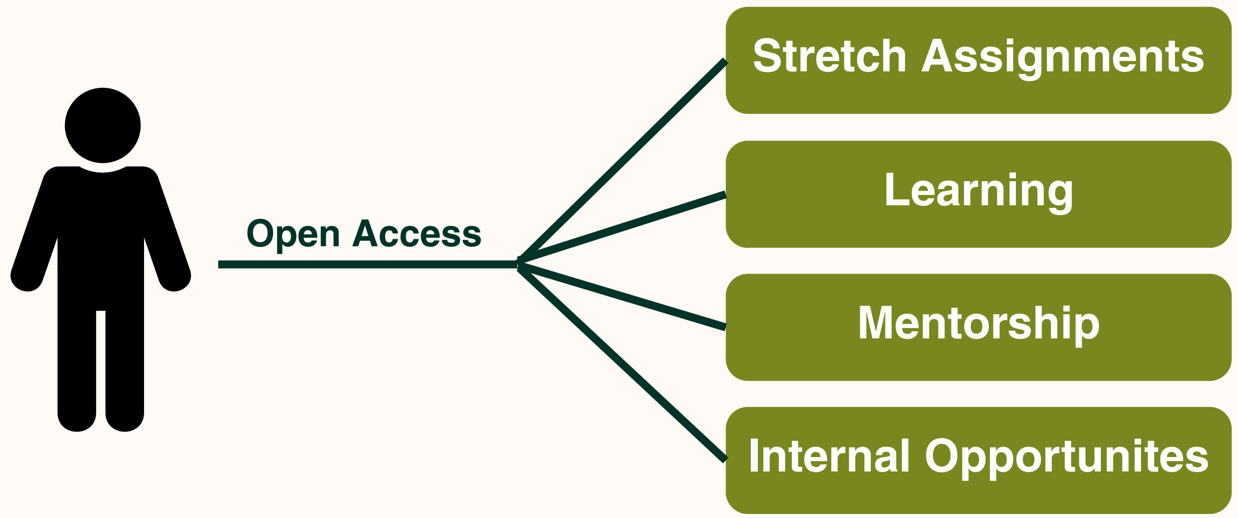
Diverse employees may also face assumptions about readiness, communication style, leadership potential, or cultural fit. These assumptions can limit opportunity unless managers are trained to evaluate potential using clear criteria.

Fair access requires process. Organizations should make development opportunities visible, encourage employees to express interest, and ensure managers are accountable for supporting growth across their teams.

Access should be examined at the point where opportunity is first offered. If managers privately invite only certain employees to take on visible assignments, advancement may become unequal before formal promotion processes begin.

Employers should encourage managers to rotate development opportunities where appropriate and to document how stretch assignments are chosen. This does not need to be bureaucratic. It simply creates awareness and fairness.

Employees are more likely to stay when they believe opportunity is not dependent on favouritism, proximity, or informal networks.



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Section 3: Transparent Promotion Processes

Promotion processes affect trust. When employees do not understand how promotion decisions are made, they may assume that advancement depends on relationships, visibility, or subjective preferences. This can weaken engagement, especially among employees who already feel less connected to informal networks.

A transparent promotion process explains what readiness looks like, what evidence is considered, who is involved in decisions, and how employees can prepare. Transparency does not mean every employee will be promoted. It means employees understand the path and the standard.

Employers should avoid vague promotion language such as “leadership presence” or “executive fit” unless these concepts are clearly defined. Ambiguous terms can create bias and make it harder for employees to understand what to develop.

Managers should have regular conversations about readiness. These conversations should identify strengths, gaps, timelines, and practical steps. Employees should not discover promotion expectations only after they have been passed over.

A fair promotion process strengthens retention because employees can see how decisions are made and what they can do to progress. Even when promotion is not immediate, clarity helps maintain trust.

Transparency also helps managers. When promotion criteria are clear, managers can give more useful guidance and avoid making promises they cannot support. This protects trust between managers and employees.

Organizations should be honest about timing and availability. If promotion opportunities are limited, employees should still understand how to prepare and what alternative growth opportunities may exist.

Fair promotion systems support retention because employees can see a path, even when the next step requires time and development.

Promotion Readiness Pathway

Criteria | **Evidence** | **Development Actions** | **Decision Review**

Readiness

Ready

Reflection Questions

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Section 4: Leadership Development for Diverse Talent

Leadership development helps organizations build future capacity while retaining employees who want to grow. Diverse employees may bring strong leadership experience that is not always recognized because it was gained in another country, sector, or cultural context.

Employers should be careful not to equate leadership only with one communication style. Some employees lead through collaboration, calm decision-making, technical credibility, relationship-building, or community influence. Leadership potential can be expressed in many ways.

Development opportunities should include practical exposure. Employees need chances to lead meetings, manage projects, mentor others, present work, solve problems, and participate in decision-making. Training alone is rarely enough.

Mentorship and sponsorship are also important. A mentor may provide guidance, while a sponsor actively advocates for visibility and opportunity. Both can be helpful, particularly for employees who do not have established professional networks within the organization.

Employers should review who is being prepared for leadership and why. If leadership pathways consistently favour the same profiles, the organization may be missing capable employees who need access, feedback, and opportunity rather than remedial support.

Leadership development should not rely only on employees self-nominating. Some employees may not put themselves forward because they are unfamiliar with internal norms or because previous workplaces discouraged self-promotion.

Managers should be asked to identify potential broadly and to explain what evidence supports their assessment. This reduces the risk that leadership potential is recognized only in employees who already resemble current leaders.

Developing diverse leaders strengthens organizational capacity because it expands decision-making perspectives and improves representation in roles that shape culture and strategy.

Reflection Questions

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Section 5: Career Planning Conversations

Career planning conversations help employees connect their current work to future goals. These conversations should be practical, honest, and ongoing. A single annual discussion is rarely enough to support meaningful development.

Managers should ask employees about career interests, skills they want to build, barriers they are experiencing, and opportunities they would like to explore. The conversation should include both employee aspirations and organizational realities.

For employees navigating a new workplace culture, career planning may also include guidance on internal processes, visibility, networking, and how to prepare for advancement. This support should be offered without assuming the employee lacks ambition or capability.

Good career planning includes specific actions. These may include training, shadowing, project participation, mentorship, feedback goals, or a timeline for reviewing progress. Without action, career conversations can feel encouraging but empty.

Employers should document career goals and revisit them. This helps employees see that development is taken seriously and gives managers a practical way to support retention through growth.

Career conversations should be separated from performance correction whenever possible. Employees should know that development discussions are not only for addressing gaps. They are also for exploring strengths and future contribution.

Managers should prepare before these conversations by reviewing the employee's work, interests, prior experience, and potential opportunities. Unprepared conversations can feel generic and may weaken trust.

Documentation is useful when it captures agreed goals and support actions. It should not become rigid. Career plans should be revisited as organizational needs and employee interests evolve.

Reflection Questions

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Chapter Takeaway

Career growth strengthens retention when opportunities, promotion expectations, and leadership pathways are visible, fair, and supported by managers.

Employee Engagement and Belonging

CIIS Research Insight

CIIS's 2024 survey comments emphasized employer accountability, cultural awareness, mentorship, workplace flexibility, and the need to shift some responsibility from newcomers alone to employers. These comments are especially relevant to engagement and belonging because they show that employees need workplaces prepared to support inclusion after hiring.

Section 1: Understanding Employee Engagement

Employee engagement reflects the level of connection, commitment, and motivation employees bring to their work. Engaged employees understand their role, feel their contributions matter, and believe the organization supports their success.

Engagement is not created by occasional events or surveys alone. It is shaped by manager relationships, workload, recognition, communication, fairness, and whether employees see a future in the organization. Employers should treat engagement as an ongoing workplace practice.

Diverse employees may disengage when they feel invisible, misunderstood, or excluded from opportunity. They may continue performing well while feeling emotionally disconnected from the workplace. This makes engagement harder to measure through productivity alone.

Employers can strengthen engagement by listening regularly, responding to concerns, recognizing contributions, and ensuring employees can participate meaningfully in team and organizational life.

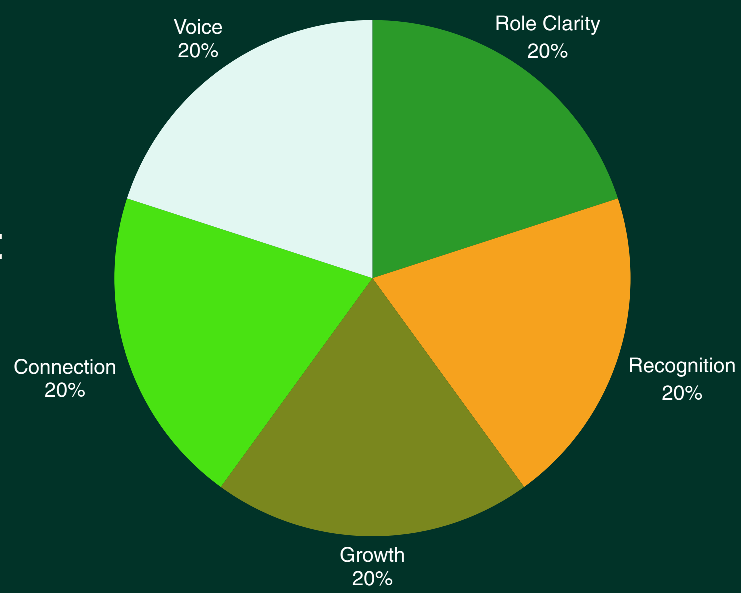
Engagement improves when employees experience alignment between what the organization says and how it operates. If inclusion is presented as a value, employees should see evidence of it in decisions, communication, and development practices.

Engagement should be reviewed through both data and conversation. Survey scores can show trends, but conversations explain what employees are experiencing and what might improve their connection to work.

Employers should avoid assuming that quiet employees are disengaged or that highly visible employees are the most committed. Engagement can show up in different ways across personalities, roles, and cultural communication styles.

Managers should look for whether employees have energy, clarity, connection, and a sense of progress. These indicators often reveal more than attendance or task completion alone.

Employee Engagement Wheel



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Section 2: Psychological Safety at Work

Psychological safety exists when employees feel able to ask questions, raise concerns, share ideas, and admit mistakes without fear of humiliation or unfair consequences. It is a foundation for learning, innovation, and healthy communication.

Employees who lack psychological safety may remain quiet even when they have useful ideas or concerns. They may avoid asking for clarification, decline visibility, or suppress feedback. Over time, this reduces engagement and weakens team performance.

Managers shape psychological safety through their responses. A manager who listens carefully, responds respectfully, and treats mistakes as learning opportunities creates more openness. A manager who dismisses concerns or punishes questions creates silence.

Diverse employees may be especially cautious when raising concerns if they worry about being labelled difficult or ungrateful. Employers should create clear, respectful pathways for discussion and ensure that feedback does not depend only on confidence or seniority.

Psychological safety does not mean avoiding accountability. It means employees can participate honestly while still being expected to meet professional standards.

Psychological safety is built through repeated responses. Employees watch what happens when someone asks a question, challenges an idea, makes a mistake, or raises a concern. These moments teach the team what is safe.

Leaders should model the behaviour they want to see. Admitting when they do not have an answer, inviting different views, and responding calmly to disagreement can strengthen trust across the team.

When psychological safety is weak, employees may comply outwardly while withholding useful ideas and concerns. This can reduce innovation, learning, and risk identification.

Reflection Questions

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Section 3: Recognition and Appreciation

Recognition helps employees feel seen and valued. It also reinforces the behaviours, effort, and contributions the organization wants to encourage.

Recognition should be fair, specific, and connected to meaningful contribution. Generic praise has limited effect. Employees benefit more when managers identify what was done well, why it mattered, and how it supported the team or organization.

Employers should review whether recognition is distributed fairly. Some employees receive visibility because they are more vocal, have more access to leaders, or work on higher-profile tasks. Others may contribute quietly but consistently without being acknowledged.

Diverse employees may be overlooked when recognition depends on informal advocacy or narrow definitions of leadership. Managers should actively notice different forms of contribution, including relationship-building, problem-solving, mentoring, client service, and operational reliability.

A healthy recognition culture improves belonging because employees understand that their work is noticed. Recognition should be timely, sincere, and accessible across levels and roles.

Recognition should include both visible achievements and behind-the-scenes contributions. Employees who stabilize operations, support colleagues, or solve problems quietly may be overlooked if recognition focuses only on public wins.

Managers should be encouraged to ask who has contributed to outcomes before praise is given. This helps prevent credit from flowing only to the person who presents the work or has the strongest relationship with leadership.

Fair recognition supports retention because employees want to know that their effort is seen and that their contributions have value.

Recognition Board

Leadership
Person 1

Initiative
Person 2

Collaboration
Person 3

Reflection Questions

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Section 4: Building Team Connection

Team connection affects engagement because employees often experience the organization through their immediate team. A strong team environment helps employees build trust, share information, and feel supported in their work.

Connection should not depend only on informal social activities. Not every employee can attend after-hours events or participate in the same ways. Employers should create inclusive ways for employees to connect through work itself, such as collaborative projects, team check-ins, peer learning, and shared problem-solving.

Newer employees and skilled immigrants may need support building workplace relationships because they may not have existing networks inside the organization. Managers can help by making introductions, explaining team routines, and encouraging inclusive meeting practices.

Team connection also requires attention to exclusion. Employees may feel disconnected when conversations consistently happen without them, when ideas are ignored, or when information is shared informally with only certain people.

Employers can strengthen connection by building predictable team rhythms, encouraging respectful collaboration, and ensuring employees have access to the relationships and information needed to succeed.

Connection should be designed into work routines. Team check-ins, peer learning, shared planning, and project debriefs can create meaningful connection without depending on after-hours social availability.

Employers should be mindful of employees who work remotely, have caregiving responsibilities, are new to Canada, or are still building local networks. These employees may need intentional opportunities to connect during work time.

A connected team shares information more effectively, notices when someone needs support, and is more likely to retain employees through difficult periods.

Team Connection Methods

Formal	Informal
Team Check-Ins	Peer Learning
Shared Planning	Conversations
Project Debrief	Community

Reflection Questions

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Section 5: Supporting Diverse Voices

Supporting diverse voices means creating conditions where employees with different perspectives can contribute meaningfully. It requires more than inviting participation. Employers must also ensure those contributions are heard, considered, and respected.

Some employees may hesitate to speak in meetings because they are still learning workplace norms, because they have been interrupted before, or because they are unsure whether disagreement is welcome. Managers should create multiple ways for employees to contribute, including written input, smaller discussions, and follow-up conversations.

Diverse voices can improve decision-making by challenging assumptions, identifying risks, and expanding how problems are understood. However, employees should not be expected to speak for an entire group or carry the burden of educating colleagues.

Employers can support voice by setting meeting norms, inviting input intentionally, crediting ideas fairly, and responding respectfully to disagreement. Leaders should model curiosity and avoid defensiveness when employees raise concerns.

When employees see that their input can influence decisions, belonging becomes more tangible. Voice is one of the clearest signals that employees are not only present, but included.

Supporting voice requires attention to meeting design. Managers can share agendas in advance, invite written input, pause for reflection, and follow up with employees who may not speak easily in large groups.

Employees should also see that input matters. If ideas are invited but never considered, employees may stop contributing. Leaders should explain what was accepted, what was not, and why.

Voice is closely connected to belonging. Employees who can contribute honestly are more likely to feel that they are part of the organization's future.

Participation Methods

- Speaking
- Written Input
- Follow-Up Comments
- Shared Decisions

Reflection Questions

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Chapter Takeaway

Engagement and belonging are built through daily experiences of respect, voice, recognition, and connection.

Performance Management and Feedback

CIIS Research Insight

The CIIS 2024 report points to systemic barriers, bias, and limited employer resources as ongoing concerns. These concerns do not end after hiring. They can also appear in feedback, evaluation, and promotion decisions if employers do not use clear standards and consistent documentation.

Section 1: Fair Performance Evaluation

Fair performance evaluation begins with clear expectations. Employees should understand what success looks like, how performance will be assessed, and how feedback will be provided. Without this clarity, evaluations can become subjective and inconsistent.

Performance standards should be connected to the role, not to personal style. An employee should not be rated lower because they communicate differently, approach tasks differently, or require clarification, unless those behaviours directly affect job outcomes and have been addressed fairly.

Managers should evaluate evidence. This includes work quality, outcomes, reliability, collaboration, problem-solving, client service, and role-specific competencies. Evaluation should not depend on who is most visible, most confident, or most similar to the manager.

Employees also need opportunities to understand concerns before formal review. A performance review should rarely be the first time an employee hears about a major issue. Ongoing feedback creates fairness and gives employees a chance to improve.

Fair evaluation supports retention because employees are more likely to stay when standards feel clear and applied consistently. It also supports growth by showing employees where to focus their development.

Evaluation criteria should be reviewed before the performance cycle begins. Employees should know how success will be assessed, and managers should be able to explain how ratings or conclusions were reached.

Employers should be cautious when using broad categories such as communication, leadership, or professionalism. These categories should be defined with examples so they do not become containers for bias.

A fair evaluation process also gives employees a chance to share context, achievements, and obstacles. Performance should be reviewed as a conversation, not only as a verdict.

Performance Evaluation Framework

- Expectations
- Feedback
- Evidence
- Development Actions

Reflection Questions

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Section 2: Reducing Bias in Feedback

Feedback can be influenced by bias when managers describe similar behaviours differently depending on the employee. One employee may be described as assertive while another is described as difficult. One employee may be praised for confidence while another is criticized for the same level of directness.

Bias can also appear when feedback focuses on personality rather than behaviour. Comments such as “not a good fit,” “needs more polish,” or “lacks presence” are difficult to act on unless they are clearly connected to specific workplace expectations.

Effective feedback should be specific, observable, and tied to role requirements. It should identify what happened, why it matters, and what should change or continue. This makes feedback more useful and easier to apply.

Managers should also be aware of cultural and communication differences. A quieter employee may still be engaged. A more formal employee may still be collaborative. A direct employee may not be disrespectful. Feedback should be based on workplace impact, not style preference.

Vague Feedback	Detailed Feedback
"You need to be more confident."	**"Your analysis in the last report was strong. In the review meeting, try sharing your reasoning, it would help the team."**
"You're not a team player."	**"I've noticed you haven't responded to two collaboration requests from the design team this month."**

Organizations can reduce bias by training managers, reviewing feedback language, and encouraging calibration conversations where appropriate. These practices help ensure that feedback supports development rather than reinforcing assumptions.

Feedback calibration can be helpful when multiple managers evaluate employees. Reviewing feedback language across teams can reveal whether some employees are receiving less specific, less supportive, or more personality-based feedback than others.

Managers should ask themselves whether the feedback would sound the same if the employee had a different background, accent, gender, age, or communication style. This simple reflection can catch avoidable bias.

Good feedback supports action. If an employee cannot understand what to continue, stop, or change, the feedback needs to be clarified.

Reflection Questions

What does this section reveal about our current workplace practices?

Where might employees experience barriers, uncertainty, or limited access?

What is one practical improvement we can implement in the next 60 to 90 days?

Constructive conversations help managers address concerns while preserving dignity and trust. They are especially important when performance, communication, workload, or behaviour needs improvement.

A constructive conversation should begin with clarity. The manager should explain the concern using specific examples, connect it to role expectations, and invite the employee's perspective. The goal is to understand the issue and agree on a practical path forward.

Managers should avoid surprising employees with vague criticism or using labels. Instead of saying an employee lacks initiative, the manager should describe the expected behaviour, the observed gap, and what support or change is needed.

Employees should have room to explain context. A performance issue may be connected to unclear instructions, competing priorities, lack of training, workload, or personal circumstances. Listening helps managers respond appropriately while maintaining standards.

Constructive conversations are strongest when they end with next steps. This may include training, clearer expectations, follow-up dates, adjusted priorities, or documented improvement goals.

Managers should prepare for constructive conversations by separating facts from interpretations. Facts describe what happened. Interpretations describe what the manager thinks it means. Both may be useful, but they should not be confused.

The employee’s perspective should be invited early enough to shape the discussion. A manager may discover that the issue is connected to unclear instructions, competing priorities, or a need for accommodation or training.

A respectful conversation can still be direct. Clarity and kindness are not opposites. Employees benefit when expectations are stated plainly and support is discussed realistically.

Reflection Questions

What does this section reveal about our current workplace practices?

Where might employees experience barriers, uncertainty, or limited access?

What is one practical improvement we can implement in the next 60 to 90 days?

Section 4: Supporting Employee Growth

Performance management should support growth, not only correction. Employees need feedback on strengths as well as gaps. They also need opportunities to build skills, apply learning, and receive coaching.

Growth support is especially important for employees who bring strong experience but are still learning local workplace expectations or organizational systems. These employees may not need capability remediation. They may need context, coaching, and access to opportunity.

Managers can support growth by identifying development goals, assigning appropriate stretch work, encouraging training, and connecting employees with mentors or internal resources. These steps demonstrate investment in the employee's future.

Support should be practical and time-bound. A development goal should include what the employee will work on, what support will be provided, and when progress will be reviewed. Without follow-up, development plans lose credibility.

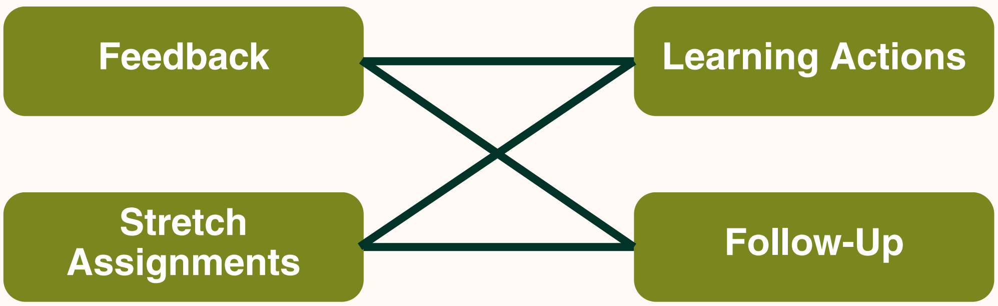
Employees are more likely to remain engaged when they see that feedback leads to growth opportunities rather than only evaluation. This makes performance management part of the retention strategy.

Growth support should be linked to both employee goals and organizational needs. This ensures development is meaningful and useful, rather than a generic training list that may not lead anywhere.

Managers can support growth through small opportunities, not only major promotions. Leading a meeting, shadowing a senior colleague, presenting work, or joining a project can build confidence and visibility.

Employers should review whether development support is reaching employees equitably. If only the most visible employees receive growth opportunities, retention problems may develop quietly.

Growth Plan



Reflection Questions

What does this section reveal about our current workplace practices?

Where might employees experience barriers, uncertainty, or limited access?

What is one practical improvement we can implement in the next 60 to 90 days?

Section 5: Addressing Performance Challenges Fairly

Performance challenges should be addressed promptly, respectfully, and consistently. Avoiding difficult conversations can allow problems to grow, while handling them poorly can damage trust and increase legal or workplace risk.

Fairness requires that employees understand the concern, the expected standard, the support available, and the consequences if improvement does not occur. Managers should document key conversations and follow organizational policy.

Employers should also consider whether barriers are affecting performance. This may include unclear expectations, inadequate training, workload issues, communication misunderstandings, accessibility needs, or accommodation-related factors.

Addressing performance fairly does not mean lowering standards. It means applying standards consistently and ensuring employees have a reasonable opportunity to understand and meet them.

When performance processes are fair and well documented, they support both accountability and retention. Employees are more likely to trust a process that is clear, respectful, and grounded in evidence.

Fair performance support requires consistency. Employees in similar situations should receive similar clarity, support, and follow-up, while still allowing for individual context where appropriate.

Documentation should be timely and factual. It should capture expectations, examples, support offered, employee response, and next steps. Poor documentation can make even fair decisions difficult to explain later.

When employers address challenges early, respectfully, and clearly, they protect both the employee relationship and the organization’s standards.

Fair Performance Support Pathway

Concern → **Conversation** → **Support** → **Follow-Up** → **Documentation**

Reflection Questions

What does this section reveal about our current workplace practices?

Where might employees experience barriers, uncertainty, or limited access?

What is one practical improvement we can implement in the next 60 to 90 days?

Chapter Takeaway

Fair performance management supports both accountability and growth when expectations, feedback, and documentation are clear and consistent.

Chapter 5 Retention Strategy and Continuous Improvement

CIIS Research Insight

The CIIS 2024 research found that employer resources on retention, onboarding, mentorship, and workplace culture are needed. Respondents also noted that many organizations lack specific programs supporting Black immigrant women. This reinforces the need for employers to review retention systems, not only individual employee situations.

Section 1: Measuring Retention Outcomes

Retention measurement helps employers understand whether employees are staying, leaving, or disengaging in patterns that require attention. Without measurement, organizations may rely on assumptions or treat resignations as isolated events.

Useful measures may include turnover rate, voluntary exits, length of service, internal movement, promotion patterns, engagement trends, stay interview themes, and exit interview findings. Employers should choose measures that are realistic for their size and capacity.

For inclusion-focused retention, employers should also examine whether certain groups experience lower advancement, higher exit rates, or weaker engagement. This requires care, confidentiality, and responsible use of information, but it can reveal barriers that might otherwise remain hidden.

Measurement should lead to action. Data has limited value if leaders review it but do not change workplace practices. A useful retention review identifies patterns, assigns responsibility, and leads to practical improvement steps.

Employers can begin simply. Even a quarterly review of exits, stay conversation themes, and development access can help organizations understand retention more clearly.

Measurement should be proportionate. Smaller organizations do not need complex analytics to learn from retention patterns. A simple review of exits, tenure, stay interview themes, and development access can be enough to guide action.

Employers should look beyond the overall turnover number. A stable total rate may hide higher turnover in a specific team, role, demographic group, or employment stage.

Retention data should be handled carefully and confidentially. The purpose is to improve systems, not to label employees or make assumptions about groups.

Retention Dashboard

- Turnover
- Stay Interview Themes
- Advancements
- Engagement
- Action Items

Reflection Questions

What does this section reveal about our current workplace practices?

Where might employees experience barriers, uncertainty, or limited access?

What is one practical improvement we can implement in the next 60 to 90 days?

Section 2: Identifying Workplace Trends

Workplace trends help employers move beyond individual explanations. If several employees leave one team, decline advancement opportunities, or report similar concerns, the organization should look for patterns in management, workload, communication, or culture.

Trends may appear in exit interviews, engagement surveys, performance reviews, sick leave patterns, internal transfer requests, or informal feedback. The goal is not to overinterpret every data point, but to notice repeated signals that deserve attention.

For diverse employees, trends may include limited access to mentorship, lower visibility in advancement, repeated concerns about recognition, or discomfort raising issues. These patterns can point to workplace barriers rather than individual lack of initiative.

Employers should review trends with curiosity and discipline. Defensive reactions can prevent learning. A stronger approach asks what the organization can improve and what support managers need to address recurring issues.

Trend review should be tied to action planning. Once a pattern is identified, employers should decide what will be changed, who will lead it, and when progress will be reviewed.

Trend analysis works best when it combines numbers with stories. Data may show where an issue exists, while employee feedback helps explain why it may be happening.

Employers should pay attention to repeated comments, even if they appear in different forms. Concerns about unclear advancement, lack of recognition, manager communication, or workload may point to a broader retention issue.

Once a trend is identified, leaders should decide whether it requires manager coaching, policy review, process redesign, or direct employee support.

Reflection Questions

What does this section reveal about our current workplace practices?

Where might employees experience barriers, uncertainty, or limited access?

What is one practical improvement we can implement in the next 60 to 90 days?

Employee feedback is one of the most useful sources of retention insight when it is collected respectfully and used responsibly. Employees need to believe that feedback will be heard, considered, and handled without negative consequences.

Feedback can be gathered through surveys, stay interviews, focus groups, manager check-ins, exit interviews, and informal conversations. The method matters less than whether the organization listens carefully and follows through.

Employers should avoid asking for feedback repeatedly without action. When employees do not see any response, trust declines. Even when every issue cannot be resolved immediately, organizations should communicate what was heard and what steps will be taken.

Feedback from diverse employees should not be dismissed as individual sensitivity or misunderstanding. It may reveal structural issues affecting belonging, opportunity, recognition, or manager practice.

A strong feedback process includes confidentiality where appropriate, clear themes, leadership review, and practical follow-up. This helps turn employee voice into workplace improvement.

Feedback should be treated as a relationship with employees, not a transaction. When employees take the risk of sharing concerns, employers should respond with care, transparency, and appropriate follow-up.

Organizations should communicate themes back to employees where possible. This helps employees see that their input was heard, even when every suggestion cannot be implemented immediately.

A mature feedback process also protects employees from retaliation or dismissal. Trust grows when employees see that speaking up leads to improvement rather than negative consequences.

Reflection Questions

What does this section reveal about our current workplace practices?

Where might employees experience barriers, uncertainty, or limited access?

What is one practical improvement we can implement in the next 60 to 90 days?

Retention improves when organizations turn insight into improved workplace practice. Common improvement areas include onboarding, manager communication, workload management, recognition, career development, promotion transparency, and feedback quality.

Improvement should be practical. Employers do not need to redesign everything at once. A team may begin with regular stay conversations, clearer development plans, better meeting practices, or a more consistent performance review process.

Managers need support to implement improvements. If leaders expect better retention but do not provide time, tools, or training, changes may remain inconsistent. Retention work should be built into normal management practice.

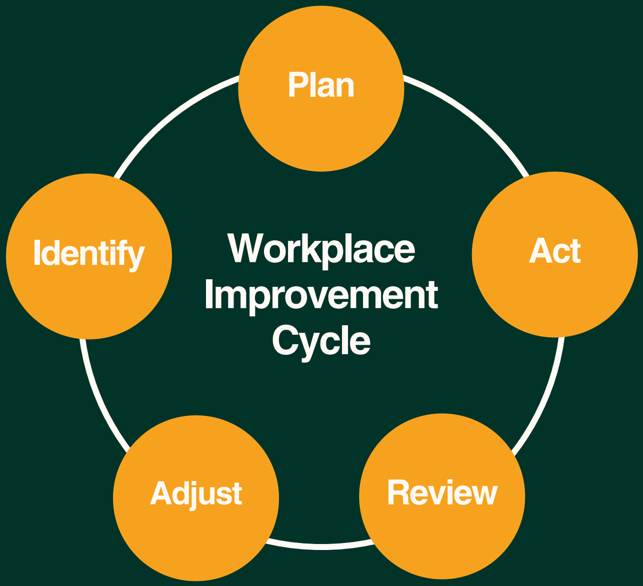
Employers should also consider whether workplace practices support different employee needs. Flexibility, mentorship, accessible communication, and clear expectations can improve retention for many employees, not only those who are new to Canada or from diverse backgrounds.

The strongest improvements are measured over time. Employers should review whether changes are making a difference and adjust where needed. Continuous improvement is more effective than one-time initiatives.

Improvement should be prioritized. If employers try to fix every issue at once, momentum may be lost. Choosing a small number of high-impact actions can create visible progress.

Leaders should ask whether workplace practices are clear enough for managers to apply consistently. A good intention can fail if managers do not know what to do differently on Monday morning.

Continuous improvement requires review. Employers should return to the same issue later and ask whether the change worked, what remains unresolved, and what should happen next.



Reflection Questions

What does this section reveal about our current workplace practices?

Where might employees experience barriers, uncertainty, or limited access?

What is one practical improvement we can implement in the next 60 to 90 days?

Section 5: Creating Long-Term Retention Strategies

A long-term retention strategy connects leadership accountability, manager capability, employee voice, career growth, inclusion, and workplace wellbeing. It gives employers a practical framework for keeping skilled employees engaged over time.

The strategy should identify the organization's main retention risks, the employee groups or roles most affected, the practices that need improvement, and the actions leaders will take. It should also include timelines and review points.

Long-term retention is especially important for diverse talent because hiring alone does not create inclusion or advancement. Employers must ensure that employees can succeed, grow, and influence the workplace after they enter it.

A good retention strategy is realistic. It should match the organization's size, resources, and maturity. Small employers can still create strong retention practices through clear communication, manager check-ins, fair development access, and respectful flexibility.

Long-Term Retention Strategy

- Leadership Accountability
- Manager Capability
- Employee Voice
- Career Growth
- Inclusion
- Workplace Wellbeing

Retention strategy should be revisited regularly. As the workforce changes, employers should continue learning from data, feedback, and employee experiences. This keeps retention active rather than reactive.

A long-term strategy should be owned by leadership, but it must be lived through managers. Managers translate retention priorities into daily experiences through communication, feedback, fairness, and support.

Employers should connect retention strategy to workforce planning. If the organization needs specialized skills, leadership diversity, or stronger internal pipelines, retention actions should support those goals.

The strategy should remain flexible. As employees, markets, and organizational priorities change, retention practices should be reviewed and adjusted rather than treated as a one-time plan.

Reflection Questions

What does this section reveal about our current workplace practices?

Where might employees experience barriers, uncertainty, or limited access?

What is one practical improvement we can implement in the next 60 to 90 days?

Chapter Takeaway

A retention strategy becomes effective when organizations measure outcomes, listen to employees, identify patterns, and act on what they learn.

Implementation Roadmap

Month 1: Review retention risk

Use the Retention Risk and Stay Conversation Guide to identify common reasons employees may disengage and to begin structured stay conversations.

Month 2: Strengthen career visibility

Use the Inclusive Career Development Planner to clarify development pathways, promotion readiness, and growth conversations.

Month 3: Review engagement and belonging

Use the Employee Engagement and Belonging Review Tool to identify whether employees feel connected, recognized, and able to contribute.

Month 4: Improve performance conversations

Use the Fair Performance and Feedback Guide to support consistent evaluation, feedback, and development conversations.

Month 5: Build the retention strategy

Use the Retention Strategy and Improvement Planner to connect feedback, metrics, trends, and action planning into a long-term approach.

Downloadable Tools Guide

1. Retention Risk and Stay Conversation Guide

*Use this tool with **Chapter 1: Understanding Retention Challenges***

It combines retention risk review, stay interview prompts, burnout indicators, and early warning signs into one practical guide.

2. Inclusive Career Development Planner

*Use this tool with **Chapter 2: Building Inclusive Career Development Pathways***

It combines career development planning, promotion readiness, leadership growth, and career conversation prompts into one practical planner.

3. Employee Engagement and Belonging Review Tool

*Use this tool with **Chapter 3: Employee Engagement and Belonging***

It combines engagement review, recognition planning, psychological safety prompts, and team inclusion questions into one employer resource.

4. Fair Performance and Feedback Guide

*Use this tool with **Chapter 4: Performance Management and Feedback***

It combines performance conversation guidance, feedback planning, bias reduction prompts, and performance review consistency checks into one tool.

5. Retention Strategy and Improvement Planner

*Use this tool with **Chapter 5: Retention Strategy and Continuous Improvement***

It combines retention metrics, workplace trend review, employee feedback planning, exit interview themes, and workplace improvement actions into one strategy tool.

Source Note

This toolkit is informed by CIIS's October 2024 report, A Report on Black Immigrant Employment Barriers in Canada. The report identified employer resource gaps, systemic barriers, retention support needs, mentorship and networking needs, workplace culture guidance needs, and the importance of employer accountability in supporting Black immigrant women in Canada's workforce.

This toolkit provides practical HR guidance and general workplace guidance. Employers should seek appropriate professional or legal advice for specific employment, accommodation, or human rights situations.