

METHODOLOGY

USING WORKER VOICE TOOLS TO ASSESS RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN WORKERS AND THEIR MANAGERS

Shift

THE METHOD

Using technology-enabled worker voice tools to ask workers and community questions about the nature of their relationships with managers at factories, farms, mines and plantations.

This note focuses on one dimension of how technology-enabled worker voice tools can be used: to gather qualitative data about the nature of relationships between managers and workers or communities at factories, farms, mines and plantations. This is achieved by asking workers and community members relationship-based questions.

Worker Voice Tools – technology enabled communication channels for workers – are increasingly being used by companies as part of responsible supply chain management. Worker voice tools use mobile phone technology to ask workers about their experience at the workplace, such as in relation to wages, health and safety and discrimination. Depending on the tool, surveys can be conducted in person, via phone call, SMS, Interactive Voice Response (using pre-recorded messages and dial pad for submitting simple responses) or via smart phone applications. They can be deployed on a regular basis, for example yearly, or once-off. At the same time, these tools offer various benefits to buyers and employment sites ranging from monitoring compliance with codes, to assessing business outcomes such as worker retention, to being a way to receive and track workers' grievances.

USE THIS METHOD TO



QUANTIFY and MAKE SENSE of often subtle, sometimes unexplored, workplace dynamics that might impede or enable the achievement of positive human rights outcomes.



IDENTIFY manager or supervisor behaviors that may be undermining responsible workplace programs.



EXPLORE relationships between workers' experiences in the workplace and traditional business performance metrics, such as productivity, absenteeism and turnover.

WORKER VOICE TECHNOLOGY

TOOLS: BENEFITS AND RISKS

Mobile technology has increased the potential to reach a large number of workers in short periods of time. This has primarily been the



case in geographies where mobile phones, either smart phones or simple phones, have become ubiquitous and in sectors where worker turnover does not have an impact on response rate.

Technology also allows greater inclusivity of workers in terms of language. Surveys can be easily translated into multiple languages, facilitating workers' participation in their preferred language. Similarly, technology can allow workers to respond to surveys more discreetly than to in-person questionnaires or interviews, which can reduce risks of retaliation and increase honesty in answering the questions. Furthermore, surveys can be conducted more frequently and in different locations in parallel, allowing companies to track changes over time and across a range of sites or locations.

However, when using technology to gather insights, companies need to consider potential risk to workers' data privacy and of displacing traditional means of engaging workers, including trade unions. A good guide on how to engage workers in a respectful way is [Worker Engagement Supported by Technology \(WEST\) Principles](#). The principles were formulated in collaboration with mobile technology providers, worker representatives, experts and civil society organizations, and aim to maximize the value of worker voice tools for all parties, in particular workers. They address a number of issues including how to build trust with workers, facilitate uptake and ownership, manage security and risks and collaborate and share learnings.

“Technology can be used to understand and improve the frequency and quality of engagement between management and workers, but it should never undermine these relationships. Our tools should be used carefully to supplement human interaction and conversation, not replace it. And it is critical that business leaders act on what they learn in a transparent way. When they do not, data collection from workers can become purely extractive instead of generative of new ways of working.”

BRYANT EGGETT, MICROBENEFITS

I. ASKING RELATIONSHIP-FOCUSED QUESTIONS

Surveys in worker voice tools usually consist of 10-20 questions or statements, and can incorporate questions about workers' relationships with their managers, colleagues or others. Questions or statements can be framed to elucidate the perspectives and experiences of workers about any number of features of relationships such as respect at work, empathy, experiences of harassment, discrimination, feelings of trust and communication. It is also possible to ask about how individuals perceive that their colleagues are treated, which can offer insight into wider norms of behavior that might be prevalent in a given workplace.

The table on the following page provides examples.



ULULA

Are you or anyone else you are working with, treated differently because of nationality, age, gender or religion?

Does your manager or supervisor listen when you are talking about something that is worrying you?

Do you feel that your employer listens and responds to grievances that you or your colleagues may have?

Would you say that in general you have a positive working relationship with your supervisor?

I feel appreciated at work.

I would recommend my company to friends and family as a good place to work.

MICROBENEFITS

My immediate supervisor cares about me as a person.

I can efficiently raise my concerns when I have a question or problem.

I received feedback from the factory management when I raised concerns.

This factory welcomes suggestions from workers.

SEDEX WORKER WELLBEING ASSESSMENT

Are you and your colleagues treated fairly by management?

How do you feel about your relationship with your supervisor?

Do you feel that management takes your concerns and complaints seriously?

Is your workplace free from threatening or abusive behavior?

II. CONSTRUCTING SURVEY QUESTIONS TO GET TO METRICS

Most companies are well versed in translating qualitative survey responses into metrics. It is common practice in consumer research and in employee satisfaction surveys. The analysis of data from workers in global supply chains can apply similar methods.

In practice, questions or statements are often closed-ended, i.e. have a predetermined set of possible answers. This minimizes the time commitment and effort necessary from workers to participate in a survey. Closed-ended questions also enable companies to keep surveys uniform, increasing consistency and comparability of data. Even though closed questions can limit the depth of collected information, in many instances they are sufficient to identify surface dynamics in relationships, which can be subsequently explored further through additional engagement with workers.

Likert Scale Questions

Responding to questions about relationships at workplace can make workers feel uneasy. By careful phrasing of the questions (or statements) and responses, surveys can encourage accurate answers while taking into consideration the sensitive nature of the enquiry. Rather than choosing between



“yes,” “maybe,” “no” to answer the question: “Are you treated fairly by management?”, Likert Scale can offer a range of answer options from either end of the yes-no spectrum. For example, a five-point Likert Scale, in which respondents are asked to choose from five options: “strongly agree,” “agree,” “neither agree nor disagree,” “disagree” or “strongly disagree,” can help workers to express their level of agreement to a statement: “I feel appreciated at work” without being forced to take an absolute stance.

Using Net Promoter Score Analysis

Some worker voice tool providers have begun to use a Net Promoter Score (NPS) approach in the design of their surveys. The NPS methodology was originally designed to measure customer satisfaction. Using employee net promoter score (i.e. “On a scale from 0-10, how likely are you to recommend this organization to your family or friends?”) is useful to get an overall sense of worker engagement and satisfaction. It enables practitioners to get a perspective on the share of “promoters” (scoring 9-10) of a particular organization as a good place to work – vs. the share of “neutrals” (scoring 7-8) and the “detractors” (scoring 0-6). The approach offers a simple way to gauge workers’ engagement and can be applied to other important outcomes (e.g. intention to stay).

“Nike is deeply committed to enabling all people who make our products to be respected and valued, and a key unlock in enabling a resilient supply chain is through engaging workers. As the industry evolves, it is essential that our suppliers are empowered with the right tools and capabilities to build relationships with their employees and understand their experiences. We will continue to grow alongside our suppliers in this journey and invest in those partners that understand the individual and business value of investing in their people.”

MARINE GRAHAM, VICE PRESIDENT, SUSTAINABLE MANUFACTURING AND SOURCING

NIKE WORKER ENGAGEMENT AND WELLBEING SURVEY

GETTING TO SCALE IN MEASURING WORKER WELLBEING AND RELATIONSHIPS

Nike developed the Worker Engagement and Wellbeing (EWB) survey to stimulate greater engagement between factory management and workers while gaining valuable insight into workers’ experience on the production floor. Over the years, the survey has been deployed in 64 factories in 13 countries employing more than 385,000 workers. After initial piloting and field-testing, Nike has refined the survey to 16 content statements that are answered using a seven-point Likert Scale. Six of the content statements are focused on the relationship between workers and their supervisors and managers.

- Great effort is made to get the opinions of employees in this factory.
- When I face a challenge at work my supervisor does not help me resolve it.
- My supervisor shows they care about me.
- At work, I am treated with fairness and respect.
- I am comfortable making suggestions on improvements in the factory.
- I regularly see different members from management on the production floor.

By engaging with a large number of workers through annual surveys, Nike and suppliers can: learn how workers’ experience on the production floor impact workers’ lives; spot correlations between worker engagement and stronger factory performance, such as improved product quality, production agility and reduced turnover; and see trends across its supply chain while identifying areas for improvement.



III. VISUALIZING RELATIONSHIP DATA

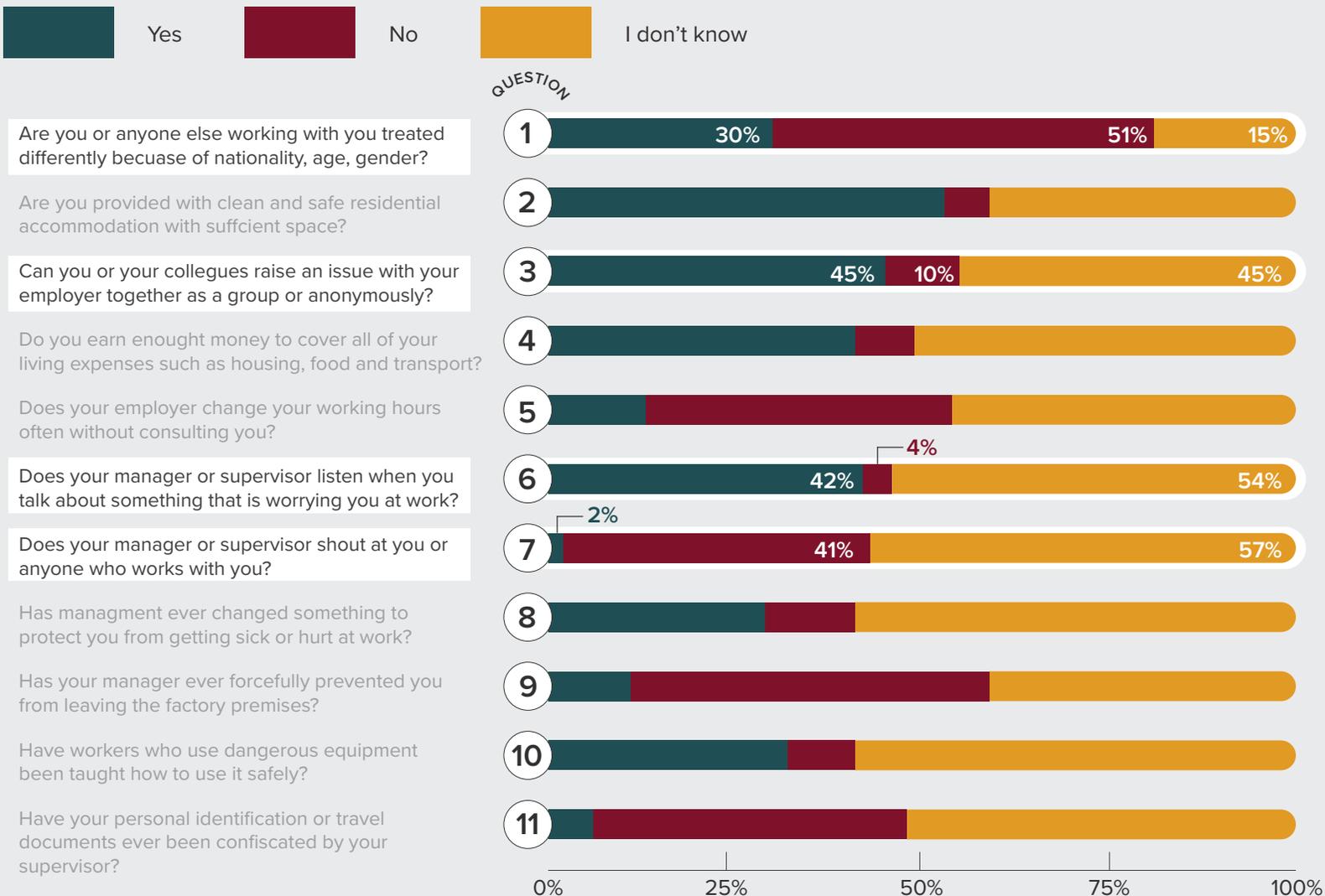
A key benefit of technology-enabled worker voice tools is that they can translate input from workers into visualized data in close to real time. This allows companies to grasp high-level performance trends as well as interrogate data sets to deepen learning and inform action. The tools to visualize and analyze relationship-focused questions are not distinct from those applied to data about other workplace issues and dynamics such as wages, health and safety and skills building. This section simply shows examples of how platforms are able to isolate assessment of the quality of relationships.

EXAMPLE ONE: Composite Relationship Score. As part of the dashboard that factories and their customers can see, Microbenefits can include a “Supervisor and Colleague Relationship” Score. This is often visualized alongside other composite categories – such as Working Conditions and Well-Being” and “Sense of Value” – enabling the user to compare them.

EXAMPLE TWO: Simple Question-by-Question Results. The diagram below is from Ulula’s platform and shows responses to 11 questions (the highlighted questions are focused on worker relationships with managers and supervisors).

SURVEY RESPONSES AGREGATED

Source: based on original provided by Ulula



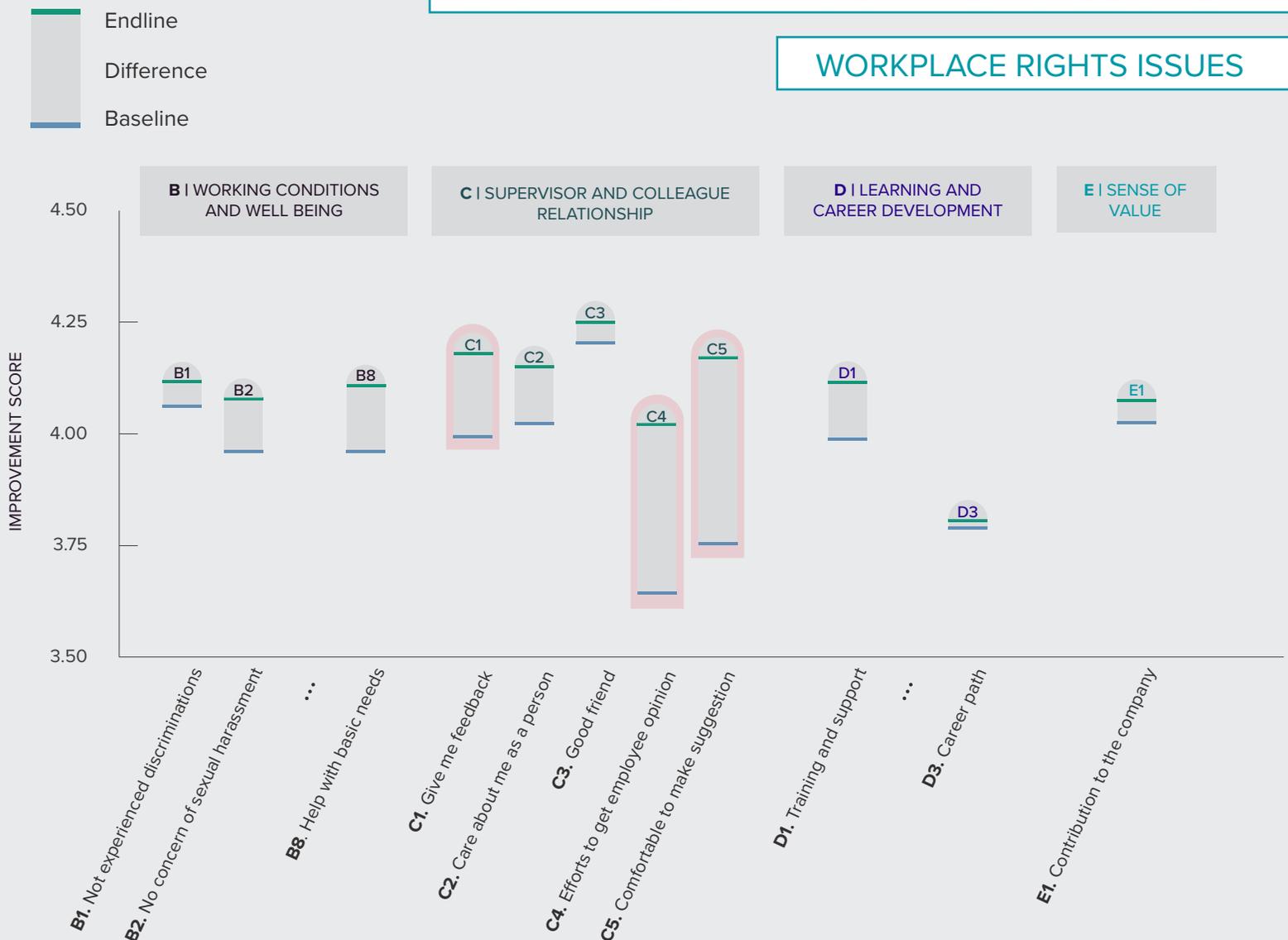
“Worker engagement technology offers a practical set of tools to address the need for more resilient workplaces in the post pandemic age, the demand for more robust ESG data and the emergence of mandatory human rights due diligence. Technology provides a systemic and inclusive approach to listening to workers. More open and worker-centric governance models to access the data and use it to improve relationships and drive change in the workplace is critical to realize the full potential of such technologies.”

ANTOINE HEUTY, ULULA

EXAMPLE THREE: Showing relationship data alongside other workplace rights issues. The graph below shows various aspects of workers’ experience, including their relationships with supervisors and colleagues. The factory in South East Asia used the MicroBenefit’s worker voice tool to drive higher worker engagement levels over 24 months.

SHOWING RELATIONSHIP DATA ALONGSIDE OTHER

WORKPLACE RIGHTS ISSUES



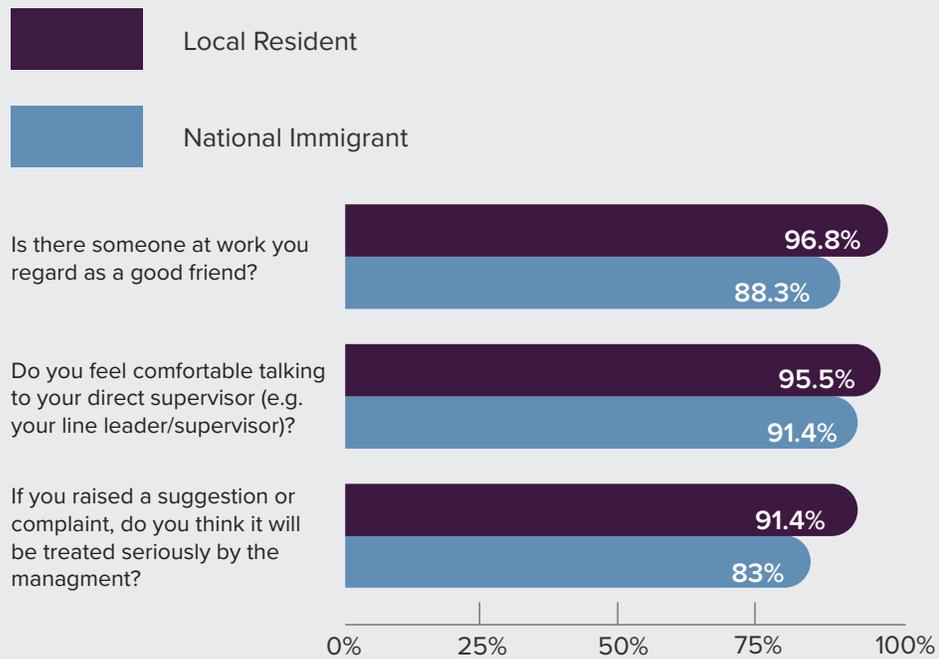
Source: based on original provided by Microbenefits



DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

EXAMPLE FOUR:

Demographic Analysis. Disaggregating data by gender, ethnicity or years of experience can uncover if there are any differences in the way different groups of workers are treated. For example in the graph to the right, responses from a survey conducted by Ulula in a factory in China, show variations in responses based on workers' migration status. In particular, the survey showed that workers from other parts of the country had a less positive experience of workplace relationships than their local counterparts.



Source: based on original provided by Ulula

EXAMPLE FIVE: Cross-

referencing with Business Performance Data. Because worker voice tool can be integrated into traditional, mainstream human resources systems (which collect data about worker turnover, retention and absenteeism), and because they can be interfaced with other internal systems, it is feasible to visualize and explore relationships between the quality of relationships and business performance data (such as productivity and quality).

CORRELATION: RETENTION & RESPECT



Source: based on original provided by Ulula



APPLYING WORKER VOICE TOOLS IN

COMPANY/COMMUNITY CONTEXTS

ANGLO AMERICAN: GAUGING COMMUNITY SENTIMENT IN REAL TIME

Technology-based voice tools are also used beyond the workplace to understand the broader impact of business on communities – particularly in agriculture, mining and other raw materials sectors. By way of example, Anglo American uses mobile-based community perception pulse surveys that ask participants to respond to five questions every month.

The surveys include questions specific to each location (such as questions about dust levels and noise) plus two questions that are included in all surveys: “Do you trust Anglo American?” and “Do you support it?”, enabling comparisons across locations. Ulula collects, analyzes and manages data for the company.

The response data is available to employees in close to real time via a user-friendly dashboard that lets them detect changes and react to identified risks in a timely manner. Easily comparable data across locations in Brazil, Chile, Peru and South Africa have been integrated in the corporate scorecard, which senior management reviews at quarterly meetings. Anglo also uses the data to communicate directly with communities – through face-to-face engagement and digital channels – to better understand and help resolve issues that surface in the surveys.

Source: Unlocking Data Innovation for Social License in Natural Resources, January 2020, IFC and BHP Foundation



This is one of five methodologies focusing on quality of relationships developed by Shift as part of the Valuing Respect project. To access other resources in this series, visit valuingrespect.org.

Shift thanks Antoine Heuty, CEO and funder of Ulula and Braynt Eggett, CEO at MicroBenefits for their input.

ABOUT SHIFT

Shift is the leading center of expertise on the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Shift’s global team of experts works across all continents and sectors to challenge assumptions, push boundaries and redefine corporate practice in order to build a world where business gets done with respect for people’s dignity. We are a non-profit, mission-driven organization headquartered in New York City.

 shiftproject.org

 [@shiftproject](https://twitter.com/shiftproject)

ABOUT VALUING RESPECT PROJECT

Valuing Respect Project is a global collaborative platform, led by Shift, to research and co-create better ways of evaluating business respect for human rights. Our aim is to develop tools and insights that can help both companies and their stakeholders focus their resources on actions that effectively improve outcomes for people. Valuing Respect is generously funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Finland, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Norges Bank Investment Management.

 valuingrespect.org



FURTHER INFORMATION

- [Microbenefits Website](#)
- [Ulula Website](#)
- [IFC Report](#)
- [Sedex website](#)

OTHER METHODOLOGIES IN THIS SERIES



Cultivating Voice in Relationships



Measuring Quality of Relationships Using ICM's Understanding Company-Community Relations Toolkit



SenseMaker™: Combining Stories, Numbers and Data Analytics



Using Experiments to Assess Behavior Change Interventions

In collaboration with business leaders, independent evaluation practitioners, worker voice innovators and non-governmental and advocacy organizations – Shift, through its Valuing Respect Project, captured five methodologies to measure a company's quality of relationships throughout their supply chains and operating contexts.

Each methodology profiles a different approach to gather, analyze and work with data to make tangible improvements in business practices and people's lives.

