

New Study Takes an Unprecedented Look at Being Black in Corporate America

Despite billions spent on diversity and inclusion, new research from the Center for Talent Innovation finds that black professionals face prejudice, a lack of support from managers, and a cycle of exclusion that keeps them from the C-suite

NEW YORK, December 9, 2019—Corporate America needs to awaken to the challenges faced by black professionals, according to a new study published today by nonprofit think tank the Center for Talent Innovation (CTI). In the workplace, black professionals are more likely to encounter prejudice and microaggressions than any other racial or ethnic group. They are less likely than their white counterparts to have access to senior leaders and to have support from their managers. Yet few white professionals see what their black colleagues are up against. Sixty-five percent of black professionals say that black employees have to work harder in order to advance, but only 16% of their white colleagues agree with that statement. Using a wealth of quantitative and qualitative data, featuring findings from a national survey, [Being Black in Corporate America: An Intersectional Exploration](#) delivers a multifaceted analysis, including solutions, for creating workplace cultures where black employees can do their best work and succeed.

“This report sounds the alarm that, despite many good intentions, companies are falling short of creating equitable workplaces for black employees,” says Pat Fili-Krushel, CEO of CTI. “We hope that business leaders will respond to these findings by making a serious assessment of their own workplaces and creating a comprehensive plan of action,” says Fili-Krushel. “We are especially concerned about the lack of awareness we discovered among white professionals. This report gives business leaders a path for moving forward.”

The study finds that black professionals are more likely than white professionals to be ambitious, and they are more likely to have strong professional networks. Despite these assets, black professionals hold only 3.2% of all executive or senior leadership roles and less than 1% of all Fortune 500 CEO positions. The report lays out the systemic racial prejudice in the workplace that underpins low representation at the top, with the following findings:

- Black professionals are nearly four times as likely as white professionals to say they have experienced racial prejudice at work (58% versus 15%). Regional differences are stark: 79% of black professionals in the Midwest say they have experienced racial prejudice at work, compared to 66% of black professionals in the West, 56% in the South, and 44% in the Northeast.
- 43% of black executives have had colleagues use racially insensitive language in their presence.
- Nearly 1 in 5 (19%) black professionals feel that someone of their race/ethnicity would never achieve a top position at their companies, compared to only 3% of white professionals who feel this way.
- Black women are less likely to have access to the same support and advocacy as white women. For instance, 35% of white women have individuals in their networks who have advocated for their ideas and skills, compared to 19% of black women.

“We can only create change and impact when we fully understand how systemic prejudice and microaggressions play out in our workplaces,” says Julia Taylor Kennedy, executive vice president at CTI. “Right now, it’s a lose-lose situation. Companies are missing out on amazing talent at the top of their organizations, and black professionals are not given the opportunity to fulfill their aspirations. This report delivers the facts and, in doing so, will spur conversations that move companies, and society, forward.”

Only 40% of all employees of all races think their companies have effective diversity and inclusion programs. Black full-time professionals are also more likely than white full-time professionals to say white women are the primary beneficiaries of diversity and inclusion efforts (29% versus 13%).

“Companies often use the phrase ‘diverse talent’ to describe underrepresented groups, but they need to understand the diversity within their diversity,” says Pooja Jain-Link, executive vice president at CTI. “Black professionals have a different experience in the workplace than professionals of other races. If companies want to truly engage and retain black talent, they need to be courageous and design targeted interventions that take these unique experiences into account. With this report, we are calling upon leaders to think big and start a new movement that reimagines diversity and inclusion in ways that have not been done before.”

In addition, the report finds that talented black professionals are much more likely than white professionals to plan to opt out of their corporate jobs to start entrepreneurial ventures. Black professionals who have worked at both large and small companies are also more likely to find an environment of trust, respect, and a sense of belonging at small companies, compared to large companies. Corporations that wish to retain black professionals should offer the same. The report delivers a roadmap that calls upon leaders to audit their workplaces, and to create conversations that awaken white employees to the workplace prejudice that their black colleagues face.

“Study after study has shown that black executives perform as well as or better than other executives but are not advanced to the highest levels,” says Skip Spriggs, president and CEO of The Executive Leadership Council, a research partner on the report. “The roadmap offered by CTI as a result of this study could make a difference because it is rooted in intentional, results-oriented actions designed to effect measurable, positive change.”

Methodology: The national survey was conducted online and over the phone in June 2019 among 3,736 respondents (1,398 men, 2,317 women, and 21 who identify as something else; 520 identify as Black, 1,783 as White, 549 as Hispanic, 674 as Asian, 135 as two or more races, and 75 as another race or ethnicity) between the ages of 21 and 65 currently employed full-time or self-employed in white-collar professions, with at least a bachelor’s degree. Data were weighted to be representative of the U.S. population on key demographics (age, sex, education, race/ethnicity, and census division). The base used for statistical testing was the effective base.

This survey was conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago under the auspices of CTI. NORC was responsible for data collection, while CTI conducted the analysis. The research also includes in-person focus groups and virtual focus groups with more than 150 participants; a qualitative questionnaire of nearly 200 participants; and one-on-one interviews with more than 40 people.

Research Partner: The Executive Leadership Council. **Research Sponsors:** Danaher, Interpublic Group, Johnson & Johnson, KPMG, Morgan Stanley, Pfizer, Unilever, The Walt Disney Company.

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About the Center for Talent Innovation: The Center for Talent Innovation (CTI) is a nonprofit think tank dedicated to helping leaders design diverse and inclusive workplaces where every person belongs. Founded in 2004, CTI has produced dozens of research reports and hundreds of best practices on cutting edge topics. CTI’s work is regularly cited by elite media, such as the *New York Times*, *Harvard Business Review*, and the *Washington Post*. Its Task Force and consulting practice serve multinational corporations that impact millions of employees globally. For more information, visit www.coqual.org.

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