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What Do White Men Really Think About Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace?

New national study of US college-educated professional men delivers surprising findings.

NEW YORK, August 4, 2020—With social movements such as #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo shedding light on systemic injustices in society and at work, it might be easy to assume that the men who most benefit from existing systems (white men, predominantly) would stand in opposition to change. But that assumption is not necessarily correct. According to a new study from the [Center for Talent Innovation](#) (CTI), only a small fraction of “majority men” think workplace D&I efforts hold no importance. By contrast, 90% place some value on D&I, including 42% who believe it is very or extremely important to them at work. The report, *What Majority Men Really Think About Diversity and Inclusion (And How to Engage Them in It)*, reveals unvarnished attitudes and experiences of majority male professionals, and how organizations can activate them to create better workplaces for all.

“White cis straight men hold the majority of power in corporate America and in our society. If we want equitable workplaces, we need them to be involved and engaged in action,” says Lanaya Irvin, president at CTI. “This report gives us a roadmap on how to do it, and it comes at a critical moment when customers and employees are demanding an end to systemic racism and inclusive workplaces for all.”

The study, based on a nationally representative survey of 3,711 college-educated professionals, interviews, and focus groups, focuses on attitudes of majority men. Majority men are defined as white straight cis-gender (cis) men (95% of the group) and nonwhite straight cis men (5% of the group) who are in the majority race/ethnicity of most people around them at work. Based on respondents’ answers to the question “How important is D&I to you at work?,” majority men were categorized into three archetypes: **Detractors**, **Persuadables**, and **True Believers**. Detractors (10% of the sample), were those who said D&I was not at all important. Persuadables (48% of the sample) said D&I is “not very” or “somewhat” important. True Believers (42% of the sample) said D&I is very or extremely important—and were the most likely of the three groups to report being involved in D&I efforts.

“For years, D&I researchers have been examining every cohort of professional employees—except those who hold the most power,” says Julia Taylor Kennedy, executive vice president and primary researcher for this study. “If corporate D&I professionals want to have more impact, they should take a page from grassroots organizers by minimizing attention to the small percentage of men who are harsh critics, and instead nurture their base of support and the men who are persuadable. To do so, employers also need to reward and promote leaders who can build diverse, inclusive teams—showing this work is core to success at their organizations.”

The research finds that there are benefits to supporting D&I. True Believers tend to score higher on “belonging” at work compared to other majority men, which correlates with positive career outcomes such as engagement, loyalty, and willingness to recommend their companies as a good place to work. Detractors, on the other hand, tend to score lower on “belonging” at work than True Believers, which is

associated with higher likelihood of career stall. (CTI belonging scores were determined by how well employees feel seen, connected, supported, and proud to work at their organizations.)

Being a True Believer doesn't necessarily mean being active partner in D&I, however. The report points out that many of them could do a lot more to advance D&I at work. For example, fewer than half of True Believers have ever confronted behavior demeaning to women, people of color, or LGBTQ individuals. Most have never voluntarily attended an ERG meeting for employees with a different background than their own, or asked a colleague questions about an identity that is different from their own.

"It's great that True Believers think D&I is important, but by and large, majority men haven't gotten involved in D&I efforts in corporate America," says Pooja Jain-Link, executive vice president and secondary researcher for this study. "In interview after interview, we heard from majority men that they are eager to support D&I, but they don't know how. We need to seize this historic moment and give them the tools and education they need to build their ability and confidence to convert goodwill into action."

The report offers a roadmap and "next steps" for activating majority men, including:

- Making D&I a key component of each employee's work responsibilities.
- Tying compensation conversations, including bonuses, to diverse hiring, retention, and promotion.
- Building competence and confidence through education and leadership.
- Offer training for all majority men, including True Believers, on speaking up against bias in the moment, including against other majority men.
- Creating a workplace culture of "belonging" that includes majority men in D&I.

Methodology: The research consists of a survey; in-person focus groups and *Insights In-Depth*[®] sessions (a proprietary web-based tool used to conduct voice-facilitated virtual focus groups) with over five hundred participants; and one-on-one interviews with more than 40 people.

The national survey was conducted online and over the phone in February 2020 among 3,711 respondents (2,096 men, 1,593 women, 18 who identify as something else, and 4 who did not identify their gender). Respondents were between the ages of 21 and 65 and employed full time in white-collar professions, with at least a bachelor's degree. Data was weighted to be representative of the US 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 the Center for Talent Innovation, a nonprofit research organization. NORC was responsible for the data collection, while CTI conducted the analysis. In the charts, percentages may not always add up to 100 because of computer rounding or the acceptance of multiple responses from survey participants.

Research Advisors: Lynne Oldham, Chief People Officer, Zoom; Prof. John A. Powell, Haas Chancellor's Chair in Equity and Inclusion, Professor of Law, African American Studies, and Ethnic Studies, UC Berkeley; Michael Welp, Ph.D., Co-founder of White Men as Full Diversity Partners.

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About the Center for Talent Innovation: The Center for Talent Innovation 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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