

The Study on White Men Leading Through Diversity & Inclusion

The first research to analyze and improve the effectiveness of white men as they integrate diversity and inclusion into their leadership work

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The only executive development company in
the world focused on equipping
white men and their diverse colleagues
to grow the business through
global diversity and inclusion.

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WHITE MEN'S
LEADERSHIP STUDY

The Results Report,
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Study's findings
and recommendations,
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Solving Four Challenges

A decade ago, ‘Diversity’ began to evolve into ‘Diversity and Inclusion’. Now an unforeseen inclusion question rises: what about the white guys? In response, The Study on White Men Leading Through Diversity & Inclusion provides the first research. This analysis focuses on white male leaders in order to diagnose and solve four organizational challenges:

Leadership Development – Globally, 32 million white men hold leadership positions, with six million in the United States. White men possess more than 40% of the leadership jobs in most companies, and that percentage increases dramatically by leadership level. The position power and leadership skills that white men possess need to align with the value that diversity and inclusion delivers.

Engagement ROI – White male leaders are less engaged with diversity and inclusion (D&I) than their diverse colleagues. As such, they represent a significantly underperforming asset in every company’s global D&I investment portfolio. White male engagement amplifies the return on investing in diversity and inclusion.

Strategy Success – No business strategy, including global diversity and inclusion, can deliver optimal results when a significant portion of those with position power disconnect from that strategy. A successful D&I strategy includes white male leaders, positioning the organization to improve performance and grow the brand.

Merit vs. the Diversity Imperative – Progress is stifled by the perceived tension between the qualifications of diverse employees and the organizational commitment to diversity. Savvy leaders do not ignore or exaggerate dimensions of diversity; they lead with *due regard* for the way diversity operates in their relationships and sphere of influence. This is one way all leaders build trust.

These persistent D&I problems sap the potent contribution of global diversity and inclusion. This research diagnoses the challenges, and identifies emerging solutions.

The courageous stakeholders in this Study believe that inclusion means everyone’s in, even the white guys.

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The Research

The Study was led by principal Chuck Shelton, managing director of **Greatheart Leader Labs**, and consultant Dr. David Thomas, Dean of the McDonough School of Business at Georgetown University. 670 leaders from participating companies completed a 94-question online survey in 2012.

- ☞ The response rate was 74%.
- ☞ 58% of respondents were White Men;
42% were in the All Others category
(i.e. respondents who are not white and male).
- ☞ Respondents were 73% male, 27% female.
- ☞ 76% of respondents were white, and 24% were people of color.

Across the generations, respondents can be categorized as 1% Traditional (born in 1945 or before), 38% Boomer (born from 1946 – 1964), 50% Gen X (born from 1965 – 1979), and 11% Millennial (born in 1980 or after).

Respondents submitted their answers from seven nations, and half of all respondents indicated that more than 40% of their direct reports differ from them in nationality.



Findings

#1 The conversation about diversity and inclusion with white male leaders requires care and focus.

When the words ‘white men’ are used, things can get complicated.

There are safety concerns.

- ☞ White male leaders tend to keep their heads down on diversity, so they may be cautious upon receiving the invitation to take more responsibility for integrating diversity and inclusion into their daily leadership work.
- ☞ Leaders who are not white and male (the All Others category in this research) may quietly doubt that white male inclusion will open doors for them. An executive of color wondered if her feedback would “just increase the power white men have.”

So each employee needs to feel the company’s care for them, throughout this adventure in learning.

There are definitional issues. People want to know:

- ☞ ***What are we talking about?*** The use of the words ‘white men’ operates in a larger social narrative. Responses to including white male leaders range from “it’s racist to even talk about it” to “obviously white men are included in diversity and inclusion” to “they are already in charge; now we’re investing our limited resources in them?”.
- ☞ ***Why is the organization talking about white guys?*** People need to understand the case for why the organization now intentionally seeks to include white male leaders, and all white men, in diversity and inclusion.
- ☞ ***What results do we seek through this learning?*** Stakeholders must see the linkage to behaviors (for the work to be real and useful) and to outcomes (to justify the time and resources required to succeed).

Leading the ‘white guy conversation’ requires focused definition and purpose.

White male leadership development must address safety concerns and definitional issues.



Findings

#2 When asked to rate the D&I effectiveness of white male leaders in general in their company on twelve key competencies:

- ☞ White Men responded with a 45% positive effectiveness rating.
- ☞ All Others responded with a 21% positive effectiveness rating.

Analysis of the data identifies a clear Effectiveness Gap (or e-gap), which measures the difference between responses from White Men and All Others.

The format for these questions was as follows: *When it comes to (each competency), white male leaders in your company generally are ...* The options included ‘Not very effective’, ‘Moderately effective’, ‘Quite effective’, and ‘Extremely effective’.

The e-gap is the percentage difference between White Men and All Others on the lower scale ratings - ‘Not very effective’ and ‘Moderately effective’.

The four competencies with the largest e-gaps were:

LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES	EFFECTIVENESS GAP AVERAGE %
Coaching to improve the performance of diverse employees	33
Building strong, diverse teams	36
Promoting diverse talent on merit	36
Including diverse voices in decision making	40

The e-gap identifies important disagreements between the way All Others view the D&I effectiveness of white male leaders, and how white men themselves tend to see white male leaders in general. There is a strong consensus that white male leaders have a lot of room for improvement, even though the amount of improvement needed is perceived differently.

The average e-gap per competency among participating companies ranged from 16 to 44 percentage points. So the e-gap metric serves as a sobering yet useful baseline.

There's a strong consensus that white male leaders have a lot of room for improvement.



Findings

#3 The leadership effectiveness gap counts.

The e-gap counts because it is a meaningful measure – 55% of White Men and 79% of All Other respondents offered a negative effectiveness rating for white men leading through diversity and inclusion on key competencies in their companies. Further research needs to quantify the price a company and a leader pays for such a gap, and the value – in sales, cost savings, productivity, retention, innovation, etc. – that will be produced by decreasing this gap.

The e-gap also counts in the sense that it matters to the daily decisions white men make about integrating diversity and inclusion into their leadership. This research suggests that white male leaders self-marginalize when they fail to find their self-interest in diversity and inclusion, missing the career advantage and business results. They risk their influence when they habitually ignore an inescapable human reality: diverse colleagues generally perceive white men as white men, whether or not the white guys see that being white and male could be important.

Such perceptions among diverse employees influence how they follow; savvy white male leaders learn to account for that reality in how they lead. One respondent, a woman, offered this: “White guys need to understand how they are perceived, and as they demonstrate their learning, it will change our perception.”

Perhaps the most practical value of the e-gap is the invitation it issues to white male leaders: now may be a good time to transform your leadership, by taking into proper account how your race and gender can impact your effectiveness.

The e-gap is an invitation to white male leaders: now may be a good time to transform your leadership.



Findings

#4 The way forward on white male inclusion calls for conversations of candor in relationships of respect.

Saying the words ‘white men’ is often like improv theater – you never know what might happen next. High-performing conversations require two key skills:

Invest in respect.

One of the most heartening data points in this research: almost 80% of all respondents offered a positive effectiveness rating on the ability of white male leaders to *show respect for diverse co-workers*. This skill at honoring and esteeming the character and contribution of others powerfully serves white men, as they learn to lead more effectively among diverse colleagues and customers. Another encouraging response: 79% of white men indicated that they are ‘Usually’ or ‘Almost always’ *comfortable talking about diversity and inclusion issues with my colleagues*.

Commit to candor.

In contrast, when asked: *When it comes to saying just what needs to be said (candor) among diverse co-workers, white male leaders in your company generally are ...*, only 36% of white male respondents answered ‘Quite effective’ or ‘Extremely effective’. Throughout this Study, some white men have sought to avoid straight talk with deflective comments around the inherent bias of focusing on white men, or the irrelevancy of gender and race (particularly from people in the Millennial generation), or arguments about equivalency (“you could never ask these questions about black women”). We need to recognize deflections, and respond to such viewpoints through honest, straightforward dialogue.



Findings

#5 Conflict accompanies diversity and exclusion, so expect conflict as part of white male engagement.

Diversity involves differences in traits and experiences and choices, and differences of opinion.

Every ‘diverse’ person knows what exclusion feels like from the inside out – it hurts, and not being included evokes deep feelings that can fester, leak out, or blow up.

So it would be wise to expect that conflict will sometimes accompany straight-up conversations about closing the effectiveness gap facing white male leaders and their diverse colleagues. White men have their own feelings – one respondent offered this: “I feel like we, as white men, are the forgotten group in the company, when it comes to diversity and inclusion.” Exclusion is a powerful demotivator.

When asked to rate the effectiveness of white male leaders in their company *when it comes to equipping all employees to resolve diversity-related conflict*, only 20% of All Others answered ‘Quite effective’ or ‘Extremely effective’. White men responded to the same question with a 42% positive rating. Sadly, we have come to accept this significant organizational risk: low-performing conflict coinciding with low expectations for conflict resolution.

People in the organization watch with laser-like intensity when conflict comes up. Conflict tests our values and our plans, and it provides crucial information to followers about the trustworthiness of their leaders. When conflict is effectively resolved, relationships strengthen and results get back on track.

Since diversity-related conflict is inevitable, and the business reasons for focusing on white male leaders are compelling, it makes sense to upgrade every leader’s skill in conflict resolution. One outcome: well-resolved conflict grows trust.

This is a significant organizational risk: inevitable conflict coinciding with low expectations for conflict resolution.



Other Highlights

The Challenges White Male Leaders Face

One of the intriguing questions in the Study asked:
When white men in your company find it challenging to lead effectively through diversity and inclusion, their difficulty is due to: (mark all that apply)

	AGGREGATE %	
	WHITE MEN	ALL OTHERS
Exclusion: For a lot of white guys, it's not clear that diversity includes white men	68	59
Unclear Results: White male leaders in your company tend not to be clear about how diversity and inclusion deliver valuable results	40	57
Unclear Career Advantage: Many white men aren't sure how a commitment to diversity and inclusion helps their career success	36	58
Personal Experience: Many white male leaders don't have enough direct and positive experience with diverse people to lead confidently through diversity and inclusion	29	54
Being Too Busy: White male leaders are already too busy, and diversity and inclusion seems like a distraction	23	43
Lack Of Support: The company has not focused on equipping them, as white men, to lead through diversity and inclusion	22	34
Divisiveness: For many white male leaders, diversity often seems to divide people rather than bring them together	22	25
It Seems Win-Lose: Diversity seems to be a win-lose situation, and white men don't want to lose	15	21



Note that the perception of ‘Exclusion’ is by far the most important challenge. Explicitly including white men in D&I is essential, through programming and disciplined messaging.

The next two biggest challenges were ‘Unclear Results’ and ‘Unclear Career Advantage’. These speak directly to a shared concern for ‘how is D&I for me?’ and ‘what does D&I deliver to the company?’.

It is intriguing to note that one of the most commonly stated points of white male resistance to diversity and inclusion – the presumed zero sum reality of ‘It Seems Win-Lose’ – is the lowest rated challenge. The common wisdom needs to be tested.

It is also worth observing that All Other respondents rated three white male challenges much higher than the white men did themselves: ‘Being Too Busy’ (20 point gap), an ‘Unclear Career Advantage’ (22 point gap), and ‘Personal Experience’ (25 point gap). These matters will be productive areas of inquiry during a company’s listening group process.

Finally, it is important to recognize that All Others tended to rate the challenges that white men face as more difficult than did white men themselves. Perhaps they are more familiar with these challenges. This difference reinforces the invitation to white male leaders implicit in the e-gap: now may be a good time to transform your leadership, by taking into proper account how your race and gender can impact your effectiveness.

Friendship

White male leaders in the three Top Tier (lower e-gap) companies, who indicated they have at least one close career confidante who is a person of color, were more than twice as likely to mentor, promote and sponsor employees of color. When peers of color build close friendships with white male managers, they open the pipeline for more diverse talent. And they enjoy the goodness of an intriguing friendship.



Overall Effectiveness Ratings for White Male Leaders

*Generally speaking,
leadership through
diversity and inclusion
by white men in
your company is:*

	AGGREGATE %	
	WHITE MEN	ALL OTHERS
Not very effective	5	22
Moderately effective	42	43
Quite effective	36	23
Extremely effective	11	8
Don't know	6	4

“White male leaders need to learn that truly promoting diversity and inclusion involves more than just saying you are committed to it . . . It involves listening, reaching out for diverse opinions, and speaking to those with diverse life experiences, and then applying that to workforce issues and business decisions.”



Recommendations

Companies will seize a competitive advantage for customers and talent when they equip all leaders – including their white men – to pursue the career advantages and business growth that diversity delivers. To that end, and grounded in this research, Greatheart recommends the following:

1. *Commit to white male leadership development as an integral thread in the enterprise D&I strategy.*

Fueled by the position power and leadership skills that white men possess, the global strategy for diversity and inclusion delivers a competitive advantage for customers and talent. The White Male Leadership Development strategy will emphasize readiness, innovation, and scaling. This strategy must be directed by a small, well-resourced, and integrity-driven strategy team. And then counterproductive debates – like the tension between meritocracy and diversity – will dissipate, and the culture will be healthier for it.

2. *Hone the business case and career advantage every day.*

Continually quantify financial results from the D&I capability, in terms of money made and money saved. Develop and market examples specific to your business and competition. Identify high-value qualitative measures – in, for example, retention, innovation, and productivity – and build compelling story lines that stick in the minds of all leaders. Support white men as they define their own self-interest in leading through diversity and inclusion. As one white male respondent indicated: “I do not react well to sticks, and would prefer to understand where the carrots are.” Rebrand diversity and inclusion via white male leadership development.



3. *Build out credible metrics and accountability.*

One white male respondent stated: “We need to figure out how to measure true diversity – the current measurements make a white male feel like the opportunities are going to continue shrinking.” Certainly headcounting in hiring and promotion will not disappear – they are meaningful measures of progress in the pipeline. But there are many additional metrics that demonstrate D&I’s value, such as:

- ☞ opening global markets
- ☞ multicultural product development, marketing and sales, and customer service
- ☞ cost savings from retaining top talent
- ☞ diversity and inclusion performance objectives with each leader
- ☞ diverse supplier spend

A more robust accountability system will improve the effectiveness of white male leaders on a key competency: *measuring the financial costs and benefits in diversity and inclusion*. Only 18% of white male respondents rated white male leaders in their companies to be ‘Quite’ or ‘Extremely effective’ with this skill.

4. *Acknowledge that we come from different places, as we move forward together.*

When it comes to white male inclusion, we are all learning to speak a new language. Perhaps an analogy can fuel our fluency. Let’s say there’s a new territory that globally effective leaders must learn to live in – the land of D&I Savvy. Every effective leader will learn how to integrate diversity and inclusion into their work with individuals and teams, with customers and business partners, and across the systems and culture of the company. White men tend to enter this land as *immigrants* by choice, or as *refugees* by force of circumstance. Leaders who are not white men are more likely *native* to their savvy with diversity and inclusion, having metabolized a lifetime of learning through the experience of their difference from the normativity of white men. Such a neutral analogy – native-born, immigrant, refugee – can make safe the conversations of candor and respect that will move us forward together.



5. *Evoke peer learning among white men.*

White guys learn some of what they most need to know alongside other white men. And they can hold white male peers accountable in ways no man or woman of color or white woman can. One white male respondent commented: “There are white male leaders in my company that D&I comes naturally to, and for others it’s a challenge. It would be good to have the successful leaders share their experience and learning with the others. It might help to demystify the issue. It may also reduce the perceived risks associated with fostering a culture of diversity and inclusion.” White guy peer power is vital.

6. *Women and men of color and white women are crucial co-learners in this adventure.*

There are plenty of learning opportunities ahead for ‘diverse’ colleagues – those who are not white and male. One of the clearest data points comes from a question showing that almost 7 in 10 white male leaders confirm this challenge: *Exclusion – For a lot of white guys, it’s not clear that diversity includes white men.* When white men feel excluded, the integrity of diversity and inclusion is at risk. Diverse leaders must still attend to connection in relationships of collaboration, candor, and forgiveness.



7. *Educate white male leaders (and their diverse peers).*

- ☞ Focus on learning with white male leaders without spotlighting them. This means training that includes everyone. An array of learning resources and support will be useful.
- ☞ Since listening is the heart of inclusion, employers should train on D&I-infused listening skills, include employee ratings of their manager's listening skills in performance appraisals, and evaluate these ratings by dimensions of diversity.
- ☞ Focus the development of D&I leadership competencies on hiring, coaching, team development, and sponsoring (which includes mentoring, promoting, and advocacy).
- ☞ Conflict resolution training focused on diversity and inclusion issues is strongly recommended. That should be achievable: 77% of survey respondents affirmed the value of their organization's diversity and inclusion training.

8. *Scale the listening process and globalize the learning.*

Use of the White Men's Leadership Survey should be augmented with listening groups – composed of White Men, All Others, and mixed – along with executive interviews and advising. Demonstrate inclusion in every facet of the approach. From the outset, widen the conversation about white male inclusion to global operations and stakeholders, to consider the experience and limitations of white male leaders within and beyond the U.S. One international respondent said: “We certainly have our own opportunities and challenges with white male leaders, but they are by no means identical to what's going on in the States. “



The commitment to white male leadership development must focus on accountability for improved behavior and results.

Conclusion

Dr. King once said: “Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.” Diversity matters, and inclusion means everyone’s in, including white men who lead for a living.

Findings in this research build the case for conversations of care and candor, as we seek to engage and equip white men to integrate diversity and inclusion more effectively into their leadership work. And the commitment to white male leadership development must focus on accountability for improved behavior and results, with the expectation of conflict well-resolved.

Companies that commit to white male leadership development will learn to embed and scale their D&I strategies to resonate with all employees, and to grow customer/client relations and brand in the marketplace.

Why include white male leaders? To grow the enterprise through global diversity and inclusion, by fueling the position power and leadership skills that white men possess, through their self-interested engagement, via a common wisdom for the ways diversity and inclusion evoke strong relationships and results.

This is the leadership of constructive disruption, infused with boldness and humility, and leavened with listening.





Chuck Shelton

managing director

For twenty-five years, Chuck has honed a unique expertise in equipping white men in leadership jobs and their diverse colleagues to grow their business through global diversity and inclusion. This specialty led to the publication of his groundbreaking 2009 book, *Leadership 101 For White Men*.

Mr. Shelton has developed leaders through global D&I projects on strategy, culture, engagement, talent, learning, and sales at Microsoft, Comcast, Macy's, Turner Construction, Skanska Building USA, Key Bank, Safeco Insurance, and in more than fifty other organizations. He is the principal of the game-changing and continuing *Study on White Men Leading Through Diversity & Inclusion*. In 2012, corporate participants in this research included PwC, Alcoa, Intel, PepsiCo, Bank of America, Egon Zehnder, Exelon, Marsh & McLennan, and Wal-Mart Stores.

Mr. Shelton holds a master's degree in ethics from an evangelical graduate school, Fuller Theological Seminary, and a bachelor's degree in conflict studies from progressive Evergreen State College. He is certified to facilitate twelve leadership development programs. Since 1981, Chuck has spoken, consulted, coached and trained on leadership development and global diversity and inclusion internationally, through more than 290 presentations and projects.

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