

Engaging White Men As D&I Champions and Allies

Today, many corporate diversity and inclusion (D&I) initiatives struggle to include white men. While many best practice organizations are now focused on engaging white male allies, in many other organizations the perception of diversity initiatives as primarily addressing inequities faced by women, people of color, and other marginalized groups has unintentionally excluded white men. This has distanced them from authentically buying into the practices of D&I, an unfortunate consequence considering white males hold positions of power as majority and hierarchical decision-makers and are often an influential employee group in driving real change.

In the landmark *White Men's Leadership Study*, white male respondents identified 'exclusion' as the primary challenge they faced when attempting to incorporate D&I aspects into company goals and initiatives. In addition, 70 percent of white male respondents and 60 percent of women and minority leaders were not clear whether diversity initiatives are intended to include white men.

stereotypes, deeply rooted belief systems, and an overall lack of cultural competency. In addition, many companies don't have a clear view of the role white males play in the D&I effort, or targeted strategies to engage them. Because of this disconnect, there are few if any clear or explicit opportunities for white men to serve on D&I councils and committees, or to get involved in the work of employee resource groups.

D&I programs have by nature been designed to address the inequities and bias experienced by marginalized groups. For example, when issues related to gender, race, age, religion, disability, or sexual orientation are on the table, attention turns to representation, pay equity, and ensuring equal opportunities for promotion and advancement. Inclusion strategies are formed around the unique barriers and challenges marginalized groups face, and often result in specialized programs and policies, affinity-oriented employee resource groups, tailored learning and development opportunities, and focused hiring and HR management practices.

An unintended outcome of framing D&I in these very focused ways is that the dominant employee group, white males, are often left out of the equation and therefore significantly less engaged in D&I efforts than their underrepresented colleagues. Whether they have been intentionally or unintentionally excluded, many white males just don't see how D&I is about them.

Multiple factors contribute to distancing white men from the D&I effort. These can include underlying bias and

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No business strategy can deliver real results if individuals in positions of power are disconnected from that strategy. And while white male support and championship of the D&I enterprise at the leadership level is critical, it's not enough. White males in mid-level positions of management and supervision also have a profound impact on corporate culture and play a significant role in ensuring equity in the workforce.

Barriers to Engagement

To engage white males in the D&I effort, companies must identify and mitigate the barriers that distance them from the effort in the first place. Barriers can range from fear, to ambiguity, to passive resistance, to not knowing where or how to get involved. In addition, white males are often hesitant to get involved because of underlying biases and stereotypes, or because they lack cultural competency and fear saying or doing the wrong thing.

Because many white men don't understand where they fit in the diversity equation, they can also perceive D&I efforts as a 'zero sum game' in which they stand to lose opportunities for advancement to other members of the workforce.

A study by the [University of California at Santa Barbara](#) found that diversity programs made white men feel threatened; many white male participants further expressed concerns that diversity initiatives would undermine their role and accomplishments, and diminish the opportunities that were available to them.

When it comes down to it, many white males share the same basic perceptions and concerns when it comes to D&I initiatives:

- ➔ I want to be involved but don't know how to get involved.
- ➔ What if I say or do the wrong thing?
- ➔ What's in it for me? Seems like a win for diversity is a loss for me.
- ➔ Things are working fine, this is just more work. I do what I need to do.

Engaging white males starts with an open and honest dialogue to address these perceptions. Through these dialogues, companies can engage white males in identifying the barriers to engagement and discussing the “undiscussables” or “taboo” topics that aren't often addressed. A tool to help facilitate conversations on some of the more challenging topics is the **“Fishbowl: Engaging White Males,”** provided at the end of this document.

D&I programs must also take proactive steps to communicate how the organization and all its members, including white males, stand to gain by a diverse workforce. This means communicating the career advantage for white males who ‘lean in’ to the D&I effort: as a leader, when they diversify their teams, they achieve better results; when they create inclusive environments, employee loyalty and discretionary effort rises – these gains in turn lead to greater visibility and rewards for the team leader, the team, and the organization overall.

D&I efforts are not intended to take away roles, but to create parity and opportunity for ALL employees to succeed. The data is in: a workforce that embraces differences and reflects the population it serves does pay off. Fortune 100 and Fortune 500 companies have consistently seen higher returns in retention, innovation, productivity, and profit through their investments in D&I. When white men understand that D&I means them too, and recognize that removing the barriers to employee utilization, innovation, productivity, and loyalty is in everyone's best interest, they are more likely to buy-in and support the D&I effort.

Tackling Issues Related to Bias & Privilege

Success in today's global marketplace and diverse work environment requires cultural competency and the ability to work effectively with others. Leaders with cultural competency understand their own biases, embrace multiple cultural frameworks, and can successfully navigate through cultural differences. However, developing and sustaining cultural competencies in the workforce is a serious undertaking, particularly in today's global

“More than 1,000 men at PwC have participated in a White Men & Diversity session.

One of the explicit goals of the workshop is to explore our blindspots, the unconscious assumptions we all have that influence behavior and can lead to incorrect conclusions. Through these discussions, we found that many white men believe talking about diversity is inherently divisive and that we should all aim to be colorblind in the workplace. While this approach is rooted in a concern for fairness, it unintentionally negates the experiences of our Asian, Black, Hispanic and female colleagues who don't want their identity to be ignored. This blind spot also prevents us from having candid conversations and leveraging the diverse talent on our teams.”

Robert Moritz
[PwC Global Chairperson](#)

environment where perceptions of diversity are still emerging and evolving in dramatic ways.

Developing cultural competencies in white males is complicated, and doesn't just focus on understanding and embracing cultural differences. Building these competencies in white men involves introspection and a willingness to take on highly charged issues related to bias and privilege. These issues are often deeply rooted in an individual's personal belief system, and therefore uncomfortable to discuss and very difficult to dislodge.

Aspects of privilege continue to provide advantage to some groups that are often unavailable to other groups; some are so woven into the mainstream that those who have them cannot see them. Take the US workforce: today, women on average earn less than men performing the same work. Although women hold more BA and advanced degrees than males in their age group, white males dominate corporate boards and leadership positions by a wide margin. Consider that women represent more than [46 percent](#) of the US labor force and 87 percent of consumer buying decisions, yet they represent only [4 percent](#) of CEOs and hold only 16 percent

“Even though ‘privilege’ is one of the biggest obstacles

that has kept women and people of color from rising through the corporate ranks, white men rarely examine it, or even acknowledge that it exists. That’s not because white men are bad people, but because it is hard for a fish to take an objective look at the water it has been swimming in.”

Bill Proudman

[White Men as Full Diversity Partners](#)

of board seats in Fortune 500 companies. These statistics help quantify the impact of societal systems that favor some groups over others. In this example, privilege is afforded to males simply because of their gender.

A [study by Catalyst](#) found that many white men were unaware of the notion of white privilege before engaging in group discussions about inequality.

Perceptions related to ‘white male culture’ are tied to other concepts such as unconscious bias, implicit bias and affinity bias, stereotypes, and explicit discrimination. Recognizing and understanding advantages conferred by privilege can be uncomfortable and requires understanding and confronting biases and cultural preferences, and learning how to leverage a position of privilege constructively.

Confronting issues related to bias and privilege must start with building self-awareness and helping white males recognize that certain privileges have been granted to them because of their gender, race, religion, education, socio-economic status, and/or family upbringing.

Progressive and proactive companies offer white males voluntary opportunities to participate in external workshops, institutes, or other educational programming specifically focused on the intricacies and nuances associated with white male privilege. The goal is to provide a safe space and forum for self-reflection and examining deeply held values and beliefs related to privilege, masculinity, racism, oppression, and intercultural differences that continue to fuel and perpetuate inequities in the workplace.

Many of the opportunities available in the marketplace today offer high impact experiential activities and provide participants with techniques, methodologies, and skills they can take back to the job. Opportunities such as this are intended to dismantle aspects of privilege by encouraging frank and

open discussion to help white men understand the advantages societal systems have afforded them over other groups.

[Privilege walks](#) are one type of experiential activity D&I educators deploy to highlight how individuals can either benefit by, or be marginalized by, systems in society. There are many iterations of privilege walks: some focus on a single issue, such as race, gender, or sexuality, and others span different areas of marginalization to help participants understand intersectionality. Activities like the privilege walk can help individuals recognize how power and privilege can impact lives, both in and out of the workplace.

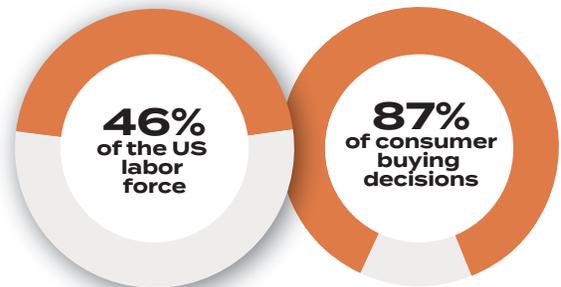
The purpose of these activities is not to assign blame for having more power or privilege, or for receiving more help in achieving goals, but to have an opportunity to recognize and understand the range of obstacles and benefits experienced in life.

A note of caution: experiential activities such as the privilege walk are high impact activities that require trust and safety for participants. Introducing activities like this without laying the necessary groundwork can unintentionally create resentments that can further inhibit sharing and openness.

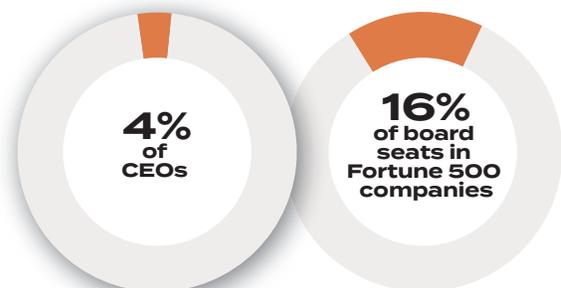
Establishing Accountability and Galvanizing White Males

Another factor impacting white male engagement relates to the link between D&I activities and compensation – or lack thereof. When D&I initiatives aren’t effectively tied to

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BUT ONLY...



Tips for Engaging White Men

- ✓ Emphasize inclusion, not just diversity
- ✓ Help build relationships across differences
- ✓ Select influential white male leaders to champion D&I efforts
- ✓ Include white males on the D&I committee and encourage an influential white man to chair it
- ✓ Educate white male employees about the D&I business imperative and ROI
- ✓ Help them become aware of unconscious biases and hidden inequities
- ✓ Get them involved; assign tasks and recognize participation
- ✓ Conduct white male focus groups or establish white male ally groups
- ✓ Tie compensation and incentives to D&I participation and outcomes
- ✓ Encourage ERG leaders to invite their managers to senior leader meetings

Source: [Diversity Journal](#); [Diversity Best Practices](#)

compensation, white males may resist getting involved because they perceive it will take time and focus away from their duties and they won't be recognized or rewarded for their efforts.

Successful diversity programs use metrics to directly link D&I activities to business strategy and outcomes. For example, metrics can be used to assess hiring practices, compare retention rates, and track innovation and productivity rates of different segments of the workforce across different business units. Progressive companies also audit talent development plans and talent management processes, and track and compare the career tracks, stretch assignments, client deals, and support resources offered to men versus women versus employees of color.

For white male leaders, becoming a D&I champion means challenging the status quo and examining decisions related to advancement. [Research](#) has shown that these decisions aren't usually based on merit alone, but also factor in cultural preferences and whether the candidate or employee fits within the decision-makers comfort zone. When white males in power positions gravitate toward and share opportunities with employees most like them, they unintentionally leave out employees that are different from them.

Bias can cause managers to develop more meaningful relationships with workers who have similar identities, interests, and backgrounds. Metrics related to bias might track who goes to client meetings; who gets the 'plum' work assignments; who is assigned to projects that lead to promotion; who has influential mentors and sponsors, or who has most frequent access to leaders. Tracking

this information can make hidden inequities visible. Companies can use the information to remove barriers and promote the D&I value proposition. The data resulting from those efforts are critical to engaging employees and communicating how D&I efforts improve the bottom-line and benefit everyone.

Julie Sweet, CEO of Accenture, provided this advice at Working Mothers NAFE Top Companies for Women Event, **"As employees advance higher in organizations, let's face it, executives hire and promote the people they trust. Trust to do the job, trust to have their backs. Trust is built off relationships. Allies will work to build that trust."**

Summary: Engaging White Male Champions

The changing demographics of the global labor force and increased competition for new talent create a compelling case for D&I. However, to make real and lasting change, D&I initiatives must be treated and led with the same attention and level of importance as any other business imperative. Real change doesn't happen unless influential leaders are fully engaged and on board with D&I values and goals. In many companies, this means engaging white males, who as organizational leaders are often the primary decision-makers behind workforce planning and development.

The best way to capitalize on the power and influence white males hold is to provide them a meaningful role and purpose in the diversity enterprise. However, in many companies today, diversity initiatives are perceived

Pitfalls to Avoid

- ✓ Equating diversity with representation: diversity doesn't simply mean hiring greater numbers of women, people of color, or members of other marginalized groups
- ✓ Exclusively focusing on changing or "fixing" white men, and forgetting or ignoring that white women and people of color have their own work to do in creating partnerships with white men
- ✓ Using mandatory, large-scale, one-size-fits-all training as a one-time fix
- ✓ Not getting senior leadership buy-in and involvement
- ✓ Relegating the responsibility and ownership of D&I to one group, such as HR or a diversity council
- ✓ Positioning the D&I effort as one leader's mission and passion; to do so risks abandoning those efforts if that person leaves
- ✓ Placing the job of mentoring, educating and leading D&I efforts solely on women and people of color

Source: [SHRM](#)

Cardinal Health recently named its chairman and CEO (a white man) to lead its diversity council. The company made the CEO of its largest business segment, another white man, executive sponsor of its Women's Initiative Network. The company says this isn't about women or diverse talent needing help from white men to be successful, it's about getting white men involved in a cultural shift and building awareness of how unconscious biases and beliefs influence behavior and culture.

More than 100 male leaders participate in the organization's Partners Leading Change (PLC) program. Each participant committed to working on projects that would contribute to building an inclusive culture and prepare more women for leadership positions. Projects include a gender compensation study; job rotation to prepare high-performing women for management, and a sponsorship program for women and employees of color.

The PLC program helped to increase promotions for women from 33 percent to 55 percent in one year. The sponsorship project has also been successful. Every senior VP in the organization was asked to sponsor two individuals – one of who needed to be a female and/or a person of color. Sponsors provided feedback and direction to these individuals, and intervened to ensure their protégé was promoted and recognized. Today, protégés get assignments, promotions, and lateral moves at a significantly higher rate than others.

as solely being for women, people of color, or other marginalized groups. As a result, straight white males are not authentically engaged in D&I efforts.

Converting white males from passive bystanders into champions of change and diversity allies is complicated. Unfortunately, factors related to bias, privilege, and lack of organizational support continue to perpetuate workforce inequities and create intentional and unintentional barriers that discourage white male engagement.

D&I efforts must take proactive, intentional steps to identify and remove these barriers. White men can make strong contributions as D&I champions and allies, but first they need to understand where they fit in the D&I process. Effectively engaging white males in diversity initiatives

requires that white male voices and perspectives are heard, understood, and included.

White males can also take their own proactive steps to get involved in the D&I effort. This can be as straightforward as becoming an ally to an employee resource group, or volunteering to be a sponsor or mentor to a woman, employee of color, or another marginalized member of the workforce.

Today there are many white men who are waiting on the sidelines simply because they aren't sure whether they should participate in the diversity effort, and if they should participate, how they should go about getting involved. When white males understand D&I means them too, they are more likely to participate; many are simply waiting to be invited in.



About Diversity Best Practices

Diversity Best Practices, a division of Working Mother Media, is the preeminent membership organization for diversity thought leaders to share best practices and develop innovation solutions for culture change. Through research, benchmarking, publications, and events, Diversity Best Practices provides members with valuable strategies, resources, and information on how to create, implement, grow, and measure first-in-class diversity programs.

The Diversity Best Practices team includes an impressive group of relationship managers, researchers, senior practitioners, consultants, council members, and committees from a wide range of cultural backgrounds and professional experience. Our research-based benchmarking content builds the knowledge, advisory services and tools needed to provide diversity solutions that meet the unique needs of our member companies.

To schedule an advisory call or for information about Diversity Best Practices membership, Diversitybestpractices.com, or (212) 219-7438.

Engaging White Males in Diversity Efforts

Fishbowl Conversation Guide

This guide was created as a conversation starter and designed to help organizations initiate difficult discussions around 'taboo' topics related to bias and privilege. When the necessary groundwork is done, facilitated discussions using questions like those provided below can neutralize bias and tear down barriers to equity in the workforce.

The tool is particularly effective in engaging white males, who often share the same basic concerns and questions when it comes to D&I participation:

- ➔ I want to be involved, but I'm not sure how to get involved
- ➔ I am fearful of repercussions: what if I say something wrong?
- ➔ Diversity is a zero-sum game, what's in it for me?
- ➔ Why do I need to be engaged?

We recommend this session be moderated by a skilled facilitator who has experience leading and managing difficult diversity conversations.

Sample Conversation Starters

The questions that follow are only provided as guidelines. A skilled facilitator should add or adjust their questions as the conversation develops.

- ➔ How often do you feel you are walking on eggshells when it comes to navigating diversity, specifically gender or race differences at work? Give a specific example. What's causing the 'walking on eggshells feeling'?
- ➔ What are conversations you don't think you can have candidly in a co-ed or mixed race setting in your organization? What are you most afraid of regarding having honest and open discussions on gender or race?
- ➔ What would need to happen for you to have those conversations candidly in a co-ed or mixed-race setting?
- ➔ White privilege or 'male privilege' is a concept of special access, advantages, or immunity granted or available to a particular person or group of people. How have you seen the notion of 'white privilege' or 'male privilege' play out in the workplace?
- ➔ In what ways have you seen the notion of 'privilege' go unnoticed in your organization?

- ➔ What is your reaction to these statements: "It is not an issue of privilege. I've worked hard for everything I've earned, and sacrificed so much to get where I am. It's not about privilege. Work hard and you'll get rewarded."
- ➔ React to this statement: "D&I is a code word for reverse discrimination. There's only a limited number of spots, so if we need more diversity at the table, then straight, white, males, you're out!"
- ➔ What were the earliest messages of masculinity or race you received growing up? How have those messages shaped how you perceive diversity and inclusion in the workplace? (e.g. "Man up! Boys don't cry." Or "Mom is home cooking while daddy earns a living.")
- ➔ Ask white males to comment on this statement: "I don't see what's in it for me as a white male. This effort is about everyone else."
- ➔ Ask second group: "What's in it for white males? What benefits do they get from championing D&I?"
- ➔ Ask second group: "What are some ways white males can engage in D&I efforts?"
- ➔ Ask second group: "What must happen for you to trust white males?"

Discussion Format

The format we recommend enables different perspectives to be shared and heard in a safe and confidential environment. It ensures an environment of safety and confidentiality that is critical to building trust and understanding.

ROUND 1: White males form a circle of chairs in the middle facing each other, with observers and listeners forming an outer circle around them. The facilitator conducts session by asking questions provided below. In Round 1, the role of the observers and listeners is simply that: to listen and observe.

ROUND 2: In this second round, observers and listeners can ask white males questions, for clarification purposes only, not as a forum for debate or offering opinions.

ROUND 3: In this round, participants switch places. White males move to the outer circle and become the observers and listeners. The facilitator asks the questions provided below of the inner circle. As in Round 1, the role of the observers and listeners is implicit: listen and observe.

ROUND 4: During this final round, there is open dialogue and discussion. The facilitator will prompt the discussion by asking open ended questions on salient learning points

Be sure to establish ground rules such as 'listen actively and with curiosity,' and 'leave judgement at the door.'

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Other Resources

Privilege Walk Lesson Plan. Peace Learner

White Men as Full Diversity Partners website: wmfdp.com

Fishbowl Exercise adapted from the Institute for Women's Leadership



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