
Leading In The Wake Of #MeToo And Black Lives Matter

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

How have #MeToo and social equity movements changed the workplace and leadership in the United States?

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Our research study was conducted from June to September of 2021, with focus groups of C-suite leaders conducted from June to August and a quantitative survey conducted in September.

In summary, our study shows that the social movements related to gender and racial and ethnic inclusion have had a significant impact on workplace attitudes and behaviors as well as how leaders are both perceived and acting. While a significant portion of respondents have not seen an impact from these movements directly, there is ample evidence that the workplace has changed in meaningful ways.

Below are some of the major headlines of our results, which are explored in greater detail in the full report.

Social movements including #MeToo and Black Lives Matter have changed leaders in meaningful ways. A significant number of leaders say these movements have changed their leadership attitude and behaviors. The open-ended comments and focus group data suggest that there is a heightened awareness of the need for gender and racial and ethnic equity and inclusion. The data also suggest that a smaller but significant group of leaders, men especially, believe that the impacts have led to greater cautiousness, and believe that these movements have made it more difficult to lead effectively. Overall, men in leadership are seen as slightly more empathic and inclusive as a result of these movements while also seen as less confident and more cautious. Women leaders are seen as more empathic and inclusive than men in leadership. One of the most interesting findings around leadership is that women leaders are now seen as charismatic, visionary, strategic and assertive to the same levels as men while also being seen as more empathic and inclusive.

Race is not a strong predictor of attitudes about how social movements have impacted the workplace. We were interested in exploring viewpoints across people of different races and ethnicities and found little variability in the reported views across racial groups. Women in particular showed very few differences when grouped by race, suggesting that women appear to hold very similar views and perceptions of how the workplace has changed following recent social movements. Men also hold fairly consistent views on these issues regardless of their race or ethnicity, although there was some variability on the importance of being allies to women, racialized and LGBTQIA people, and viewpoints on whether having different standards in order to address equity issues was the right thing to do when hiring or promoting.

Our study strongly suggests that men are significantly more engaged on issues of gender equity and inclusion as a result of these movements. Men at all levels in organizations strongly express a higher commitment to speak out on issues of equity and to challenge inappropriate behavior, such as sexist and misogynistic comments. Women show an even greater shift in their willingness to speak out about issues of equity and harassment. While both men and women perceive men to be more likely to speak out on these issues, our data suggest there is a gap between intention and behavior. While a large percentage of men and women say that men are more likely to be actively engaged in these issues than before these social movements, when asked if men are doing so on a day-to-day basis, agreement drops significantly. One of the interesting factors to consider is that some previous research has suggested that men believe that “while they, themselves, are not misogynistic, other men are.” That belief likely dampens men’s willingness to speak up and challenge other men. This study suggests that a clear majority of men want these behaviors to decrease which should help embolden men to speak up more.

In the United States, about 10 to 13% of men have had a very negative reaction to these social movements and hold a negative view on how they have impacted work and the workplace, even though our research suggests that these movements have had a generally positive effect on men’s likelihood to be engaged on gender and racial equity issues. From the survey and the open-ended comments, we would describe this as a backlash, in which men feel that these movements have created an environment that some men feel is toxic for them.

Commitment to allyship has grown significantly. One of issues we explored was the way these movements have changed how important leaders and team members believe it is to be allies for equity and inclusion for three key historically marginalized groups: women, racial and ethnic groups, and the LGBTQIA community. Our findings strongly suggest that these movements have greatly increased leaders' commitment to be allies for these groups among all demographic groups across gender, age, and seniority level. These trends are more pronounced for women than for men but are significant for all genders. Of the three groups we studied, commitment to gender and racial allyship is about equal and is slightly less for the LGBTQIA community. Having said that a good deal of this difference is explained by older men rating allyship to this group as less important to them than other demographic groups.

Most men don't feel strongly disadvantaged by programs to accelerate the hiring and promotion of historically underrepresented groups. One of the things we sought to explore was whether men feel disadvantaged by programs aimed at aiding other groups that have had less historic opportunity. We discovered that only about one in ten men strongly feel this way. This suggests that men recognize the need for more diversity and accept that this will impact their personal opportunities. Less senior men and less educated men are significantly more likely to feel disadvantaged than those in higher positions and at higher levels of education.

All the four major generations in the workplace agree that millennials are most engaged and aware on issues of gender and racial and ethnic inclusion. Baby boomers, Gen X, millennials, and Gen Z also agree that baby boomers are the least engaged and aware generation on these issues. Having said that, our study suggests that there are very few significant differences between the generations in terms of attitudes and behaviors on issues of gender and racial equity and inclusion. The exception to this is that baby boomer men are more hesitant following these social movements and that baby boomers and Gen Xers are less likely than their younger counterparts to express a strong commitment to allyship for LGBTQIA communities. However, these are differences in magnitude more so than direction. In other words, all generations have shifted towards a stronger commitment to allyship, inclusion and equity. As such, many of the perceived differences between generations are not supported by the data.

Efforts to create a more equitable and inclusive workplace are pervasive across organizations and generally these efforts are perceived positively in terms of their impact. In our research, we discovered that almost eight in ten workplaces have formal efforts to foster greater inclusion and diversity. We specifically measured six activities: employee resource groups, diversity training, unconscious bias training, pay equity efforts, diversity quotas and team-building efforts. We found that except for diversity quotas, there is a uniform belief that these efforts have had a positive impact on the workplace. Support for quotas is much stronger among women than among men but even among women respondents, there is far less support than for other initiatives. One of the most interesting findings is that efforts focused on building relationships and understanding between diverse groups (team-building and employee resource groups) were seen as more effective than unconscious bias and diversity training. These findings were even more pronounced for men and suggest that inclusion efforts that focus on building understanding between groups may be most effective especially with men. This suggests that efforts to build awareness rather than focus on how the majority group needs to change may be more effective at driving change.

Political affiliation is strongly associated with response to these movements. On almost every single question, there was a statistically significant and meaningful difference between the responses of Republicans, Democrats and independents, specifically in regard to their views of these movements and their impact on the workplace as well as their impressions of how the workplace has changed. On every question, independents scored between Republicans and Democrats. However, in many cases, these were differences in magnitude more than in direction.

#MeToo and social movements have impacted mentorship and sponsorship across genders, mostly in a positive direction. Both our survey and focus group data strongly suggest that the desire to mentor and sponsor people of other genders has increased as a result of these movements, while also showing that men in leadership have an increased hesitancy in terms of relationships with women reports. While a plethora of men and women leaders report a greater desire and likelihood to mentor or sponsor people of other genders, a significant number of men are less likely to do so following these movements.

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