



ZENGER | FOLKMAN

Practicing Inclusion

by Joe Folkman



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Most people who drive an automobile know that there are blind spots in which another car can be dangerously close but where you, as the driver, cannot see them. In the world of interpersonal relations, a blind spot describes a behavior or attitude you possess that other people clearly see in you—of which you're not aware. In other words, a blind spot is an

unconscious bias. We submit that people have a widespread blind spot regarding diversity and inclusiveness. That is not to say that everyone has this condition. But it appears that about half of us seriously underestimate or overestimate our behavior in this arena.

The vast majority of leaders believe that they do an excellent job in building a climate of

trust and openness to the different thoughts, styles, and backgrounds of others. They think they respect people regardless of their ethnicity, race, gender, age, cultural background, or sexual orientation. Often, others do not agree and feel their unconscious bias. To examine this difference in perception, Zenger Folkman gathered 360-degree assessments from 1,825 senior leaders. Each leader was measured on the extent to which they valued diversity and inclusion. Leaders were evaluated on behaviors

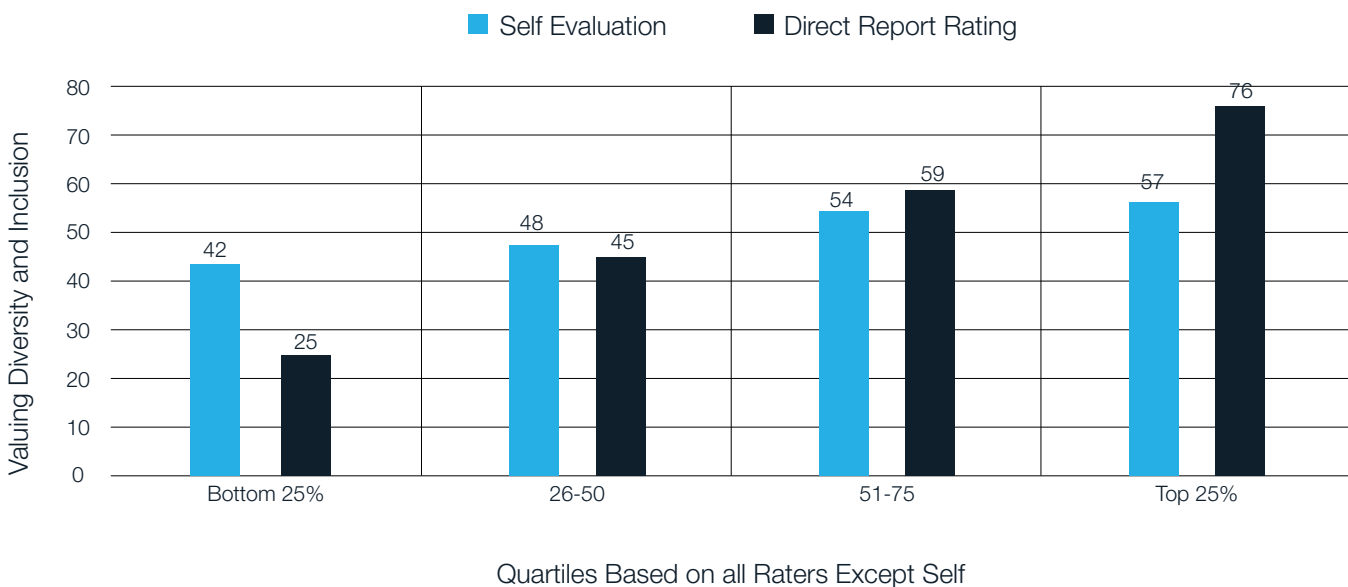
such as creating a climate of trust and openness with different people and actively soliciting alternative perspectives. Results from valuing diversity and inclusion were then broken into quartiles based on all respondents' assessments, excluding the leader's self-assessment. The graph below shows the results comparing self-assessment ratings to ratings by direct reports. Those leaders rated by others to be at the bottom quartile rated themselves at the 42nd percentile on average. In other words, they rated themselves slightly below

average. Those rated by others in the top quartile ranked themselves slightly lower at the 57th percentile. Note that the Direct Report assessments followed the quartile ratings precisely.

This graph makes a significant point. While self-ratings of the middle groups are close to direct reports, those in the bottom and top quartile are vastly different. The problem is that leaders, in general, think they are doing okay at valuing diversity and practicing inclusion. The harsh reality is, some are very inadequate, and others are excellent. Both are unaware of

Zenger Folkman Study on Diversity and Inclusion Reveals Common Blindspot

A group of 1,825 senior leaders were evaluated on behaviors such as creating a climate of trust with different people and actively soliciting alternative perspectives. Leaders who were in the bottom quartile of effectiveness in this skill significantly overrated their effectiveness, and those at the top underrated their effectiveness. Leaders' self-perceptions of their ability to value diversity and inclusion are not always aligned with the perception of others.



how others see them and the inadequate group is unaware of the role unconscious bias plays in their interactions with others. (We feel the direct reports are the best group to assess the true capability of valuing diversity and inclusion in their leaders.) This study strongly points out the benefit of leaders receiving 360-degree evaluations from others because those most in need of improvement are unaware that, unconsciously, their bias influences how they lead. It should also be noted that the most talented group is also unaware of its leadership capabilities.

What Can Leaders Do to Improve?

Often, after receiving data that a leader is not very effective at valuing diversity and practicing inclusion, they will generate an improvement plan that includes something like, "I need to be nicer to others." While that is a good start, a plan like this is often ineffective because it lacks specificity. After collecting data from several thousand leaders, we were able to identify five specific behaviors that enabled leaders to demonstrate that they valued diversity and inclusion.

1. Improving Cooperation and Teamwork.

Every employee knows when they are part of a team or when they're on the outside. Improvement starts with quickly resolving conflicts in a productive way. Too often, leaders attempt to resolve a conflict by encouraging team members to work things out on their own, but issues are rarely resolved this way; instead, both parties give up. Leaders need to help resolve conflicts between team members. Leaders also need to encourage cooperation among all team members and make sure that everyone has the goal of bringing the team together.

2. Building Positive Relationships and Trust.

Those who trust their leader and other team members feel valued, but those who lack trust do not feel valued or included. Trust is built in three ways. First, trust comes from building positive relationships. We trust those we like and distrust those we do not like. Second, trust is encouraged through sharing

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and valuing the expertise of others. We trust those who solve problems and provide us with needed information. Make sure team members can share their knowledge and are recognized for their contributions. Third, trust is built through consistently keeping promises and honoring commitments.

3. Asking for Feedback and Willingness to Change.

Leaders who make a concerted effort to ask others for feedback and then work hard to change demonstrate that they value others and that others' perceptions are important.

4. Look for More Opportunities to Develop Others.

The best way to show that you value another person is by finding ways to help them develop. There are times when leaders have a person on their team that they know can do an assignment well, but by giving that assignment to another person, that person can learn a new skill. When people develop new skills, they feel valued and included.

5. Inspiring Others.

Leaders frequently feel the need to push hard for results, hold others accountable for their performance, and set high standards. Everyone knows

how to push others, but learning to pull, inspire, and motivate others changes the atmosphere in a team. It creates additional energy and excitement, but it also helps team members feel valued. It changes work from something I "have" to do to something I "want" to do.

Conclusion

Most leaders want to be perceived as someone who values diversity and includes others. Often our self-perception is inaccurate, but we know that leaders can dramatically improve. The five skills listed above can profoundly impact a leader's ability to value diversity and promote inclusion.

About Us

Zenger Folkman relentlessly seeks to rise above the inconsistent, and sometimes misleading, nature of popular leadership philosophies and beliefs brought on by opinion. The discipline of leadership and those who pursue it deserve better. Our most valuable asset is the expertise of combining hard data and statistical analysis with logical explanations and actionable application that help individual leaders thrive and organizations succeed.

