



# How Modern Leadership Inspires Greater Inclusion

7 Strategies for strengthening DEI in a changing workplace



**During the pandemic, 90% of executives responded that diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) remained a moderate, very important, or top priority. But the same percentage reported challenges in executing their DEI strategies. In the end, only one in six diverse employees felt more supported during the crisis. But why is that the case?**

There are reasons why organizations are failing to create more inclusive workplaces. One of them is that traditional leadership practices no longer work. CEOs and HR leaders can start to move the

inclusion needle more rapidly through modern leadership practices. Read on for key learnings from original research by the O.C. Tanner Institute and modern leadership strategies for success.

---

## Why traditional leadership falls short

Before the pandemic, traditional leadership was already failing. Employees had overwhelmingly rejected old-school leadership practices such as gatekeeping and micro-managing. This forced organizations to rethink and reshape the way they lead. Alternatively, organizations opted for modern leadership practices that feature more productive aspects such as employee mentoring and coaching.

Our research shows that when leaders coach, develop, and connect their employees, they can thrive in ways that drive personal and organizational success. Part of building a culture where employees thrive is building an inclusive organization where all employees feel welcome.

But it's not just about feeling accepted. Better inclusion also leads to better business results.

**Studies show that organizations with inclusive and diverse cultures consistently deliver better results. But during recent times, these initiatives have fallen short.<sup>2</sup>**

Last year, only 44% of employees said their company's diversity and inclusion efforts felt sincere.<sup>3</sup> This statistic is not surprising since most diversity initiatives originated from government regulations and risk mitigation.

"D&I has been viewed as a compliance issue, simply checking a box," says Daniel Patterson of O.C. Tanner Institute. "The impact of these failing initiatives is really clear." Following are

some statistics of two diverse groups that demonstrate the need for greater inclusion:

### **WOMEN EMPLOYEES ARE:<sup>3</sup>**

- **34% less likely to feel a strong sense of opportunity than men**
- **23% less likely to feel they receive enough income to meet their needs**
- **31% less likely to report they have received recognition in the past month**

### **EMPLOYEES WITH A DISABILITY ARE:<sup>4</sup>**

- **28% less likely to feel they belong at their organization**
- **41% less likely to feel appreciated**

Because past D&I efforts have proven ineffective in building truly inclusive cultures, organizations must re-envision how they think about diversity and inclusion.

**When leaders employ a modern leadership approach, employees are 11x more likely to feel included.<sup>3</sup>**

---

## The impact of modern leadership on inclusion

The drive to greater inclusion starts with modern leaders who understand that all employees are not the same. They differ in many areas such as race, age, nationality, ethnicity, gender identity, political views, and physical disability. But what are the specific strategies proven to bolster inclusion? Here's what the research shows.

---

## 7 DEI strategies for building a more inclusive workplace

### 1. Connect employees to purpose, accomplishment, and one another.

Connection is the core of modern leadership best practices for good reason. Helping your people feel connected in these three ways improves workplace culture, employee work output, and most importantly, promotes greater feelings of inclusion and belonging.

Leaders connecting employees to purpose, accomplishment, and one another leads to:<sup>3</sup>

- 11x greater odds of having an inclusive culture
- 10x greater odds of having a thriving culture
- 7.5x greater odds of easily adapting to change
- 6x greater odds of having leaders with a global perspective

### 2. Build inclusive leadership development into the culture.

Modern leaders naturally connect with their employees because they mentor, coach, and advocate for career development and growth rather than gatekeep and micromanage. They tend to see their employees as individuals, understand the challenges their people face, and build inclusive teams where members build strong connections that reduce feelings of isolation and odds of fragmentation.<sup>5</sup>

But it's not enough for leaders alone to reach out and make connections. Leaders should encourage employees at every level of the company to connect with their coworkers. They should talk about diversity and inclusion.

Managers should regularly provide training and leadership development opportunities.

**“If you don’t make sure that your supervisors, your managers, and your front-line team are all talking diversity and inclusion...you’re going to run into problems every time.”**

—LEAH LOBATO, DIRECTOR OF THE GOVERNOR’S COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND BUSINESS RELATIONS, UTAH

### 3. Make inclusion part of your employee recognition program.

When you choose a robust employee recognition program, you can avoid excluding any groups of people from being recognized. With Culture Cloud Recognition from O.C. Tanner, you can create recognition moments that ensure that all employees are included and rewarded for great work.

For example, when you initiate a Group Deposits campaign, you can send points to all employees equally, without regard to race, religion, gender identity, age, or income. Plus, real-time dashboards and weekly reporting on user activity means you can verify that departments and teams are using other program features, like the sending eCards, in an equitable manner.

### 4. Build inclusion into everyday employee experiences.

While it's true that we need to make our hiring efforts more inclusive and more diverse, inclusion isn't meant to be isolated and limited to specific events like hiring or onboarding.

Danny Guillory, Head of Global D&I at Autodesk, says leaders should “determine the moments of truth in the workplace where any individual can impact diversity and inclusion.”

What’s another way to make inclusion part of everyday experiences? A powerful intersectionality concept discussed in The Opportunity Agenda suggests that we “allow individuals to tell their stories. They may effectively become thought leaders for diversity in your organization.”<sup>6</sup>

Leah Lobato, with the Utah State Office of Rehabilitation, notes that disability often gets left out of the D&I conversation.<sup>7</sup> Leaders should ensure that this group is not overlooked when planning any type of employee experiences that might limit participation.

## **5. Consider employees’ unique personalities and traits.**

Modern leaders recognize that employees have multi-dimensional identities that defy a single, traditional category. Most employees belong to multiple categories. They should feel free to talk about their unique experience without worrying that others might not have those same experiences.

Lauren Helper of San Francisco Business Times says that “intersectionality is a recognition that each part of a person’s multifaceted identity—race, ethnicity, gender, and other traits—has a dramatic influence on the way they interact with employers and other institutions.”<sup>7</sup>

**“We forget that we have our own perspectives of how the world works around us. Others are going to have their own experiences based on their experience and we shouldn’t try to disprove that.”**

—OMAR RINEY, SENIOR RECRUITER AT TECH.CO



## 6. Encourage connection and communication to help employees feel included.

Regular communication with employees is key. One way to do this is to hold regular one-to-ones. Frequent one-to-one conversations help leaders better understand what employees are working on and how they're feeling, plus they provide time for appreciation, mentorship, and connection. When employees feel leaders make time for them, they are **7x more likely to have an above-average connection with their leader.**<sup>5</sup>

James Jackson III, Supplier Diversity Program Manager at Zions Bancorporation, says It's important to listen to your diversity employees.

When modern leaders ask employees about their experiences, employees are **2x more likely to feel their organization is inclusive.**<sup>2</sup>

## 7. Recognize and celebrate the diversity of your employees.

Inclusion celebrates the intersection of different backgrounds, genders, races, abilities, sexual orientations, and other attributes. It allows organizations to discover new possibilities that only emerge when the perspectives, skills, and talents of many unique people are represented, respected, and integrated.<sup>3</sup>

**“When we listen and celebrate what is both common and different, we become a wiser, more inclusive, and better organization.”**

—PAT WADORS, CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER, PROCURE

### SOURCES:

1. [Diverse employees are struggling the most during COVID-19](#), McKinsey & Company
2. [Achieving Inclusive Cultures with Modern Leaders](#), O.C. Tanner webinar
3. [2021 Global Culture Report](#), O.C. Tanner Institute
4. July 2020 Omnibus Survey, O.C. Tanner Institute
5. [2022 Global Culture Report](#), O.C. Tanner Institute
6. [Ten Tips for Putting Intersectionality into Practice](#), The Opportunity Agenda, 2017
7. [Rethinking Diversity and Inclusion at Work](#), O.C. Tanner webinar

