Overcoming the "Stuck State"

August 2022

Shirley Engelmeier
Taylor Vernstrom

Same Challenge: Overcoming the "Stuck State"

With the murder of George Floyd in 2020, there was a global awakening and a renewed emphasis on the importance of Inclusion and Diversity. In fact, nearly overnight the language changed from Inclusion and Diversity to DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion). Despite the renewed focus and language change, organizations of all sizes and across industry are still struggling with how to change the makeup of their work forces.

The problem exists whether you are in North America, EMEA, APAC or South America. There is a dominant group that has historically led organizations. This group tends to replicate itself. While this white paper focuses on US data, the stuck state trend in reflected across the globe.

Organizations around the country have been focusing on diversity and inclusion for a long time—for years, for decades. And yet, many organizations despite their best intentions, concerted efforts, and significant investments in people and programs are not achieving the results they desire. They may make some progress but, inevitably, see that progress stop, even backslide.[1]

We call the position these companies often find themselves in the "stuck state." Much of InclusionINC's work revolves around examining the barriers, biases and informal systems that allow the stuck state to continue. Throughout this document you will find research that demonstrates the "stuck state" as well as best practices for overcoming the roadblocks and achieving sustainable progress.

Good Intentions ≠ Results

Corporate America has been spinning its wheels for decades, attempting to influence change by focusing on the numbers, and it hasn't worked. The same is true whether you're in healthcare, government or a non-profit. Frequently when we work with our clients, there is a sense of shame as to why more progress hasn't been made. It's not that organizations don't *want* to be inclusive and leverage the talent their workforce possesses. It's not that they aren't changing tactics to attract new diverse talent to fill the void. It's not that they don't understand that inclusion will drive better business results. And it's not that they haven't been *trying* to create and nurture and

---

[1] *Inclusion: Still the Competitive Business Advantage,* Shirley Engelmeier, 2020

inclusive culture. But, even with great intentionality, they are experiencing a stuck state in acquiring and moving key talent throughout the organization.

The Broken Rung

Not the Glass Ceiling

I n a 2019 WSJ article, the concept of the glass ceiling was shattered. It was replaced with the idea that there is a broken rung on the ladder. That broken rung isn't later in a woman's career, but rather at the first opportunity for a promotion.
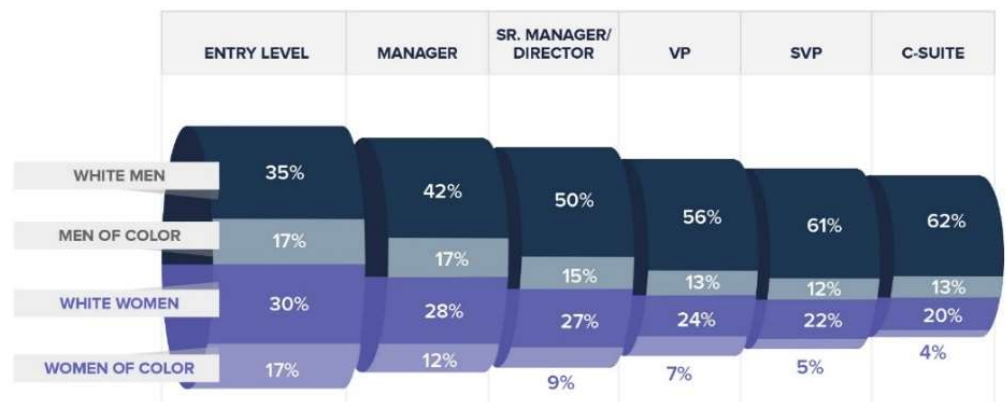

Image from WSJ.com

The article (based on McKinsey/Lean In data) explained that, although men and women enter the workforce in fairly equal numbers, men begin to outnumber women at the first step into management roles. Those management roles are key steps in the ladder to senior leadership positions.

This broken rung early in the ladder will continue to perpetuate a shortage of women in leadership positions.[2]

REPRESENTATION IN THE CORPORATE PIPELINE BY GENDER AND RACE[7]

% of employees by level at the start of 2021

■ MEN ■ WOMEN

	ENTRY LEVEL	MANAGER	SR. MANAGER/ DIRECTOR	VP	SVP	C-SUITE
WHITE MEN	35%	42%	50%	56%	61%	62%
MEN OF COLOR	17%	17%	15%	13%	12%	13%
WHITE WOMEN	30%	28%	27%	24%	22%	20%
WOMEN OF COLOR	17%	12%	9%	7%	5%	4%

1 Due to rounding, representation by race and gender may sum to 101 percent or 99 percent within some levels. 2 This represents percentage point change. 3 The small numbers at the executive level, combined with this study's methodology, which takes the average of companies, means that findings at the executive level are more sensitive to individual company variation.

McKinsey&Company   LEAN IN

In the 2021 McKinsey Lean In data that above, you'll see that white men's gain from entry level to manager (7%) is directly at the loss of both white women and women of color (7% combined). Those initial gains increase even more significantly throughout

[2] *Where Women Fall Behind at Work: The First Step Into Management,* Wall Street Journal, October 15th, 2019

their journey to the C-suite, as men of color also demonstrate a decline in numbers represented at senior manager/director levels and beyond.

The Women in the Workplace Study began in 2015 and is the most robust data source available for progress of women in the workplace. It is representative of 423 participating organizations employing 12 million people and more than 65,000 people surveyed on their workplace experiences as well as in-depth interviews.

McKinsey and Lean In found that women move up the career ladder in smaller numbers than men at every stage but lose the most ground early. The study of 423 companies found that while many companies see the value in having more women in senior leadership positions, the biggest obstacle women face is at their first step to manager. Rather than a "glass ceiling," women are, in fact, facing broken rungs at the bottom of their ladder to senior leadership.

Over the six years since McKinsey Lean In has been doing this study, not much has changed for women. See the data comparison from 2016 to 2021.
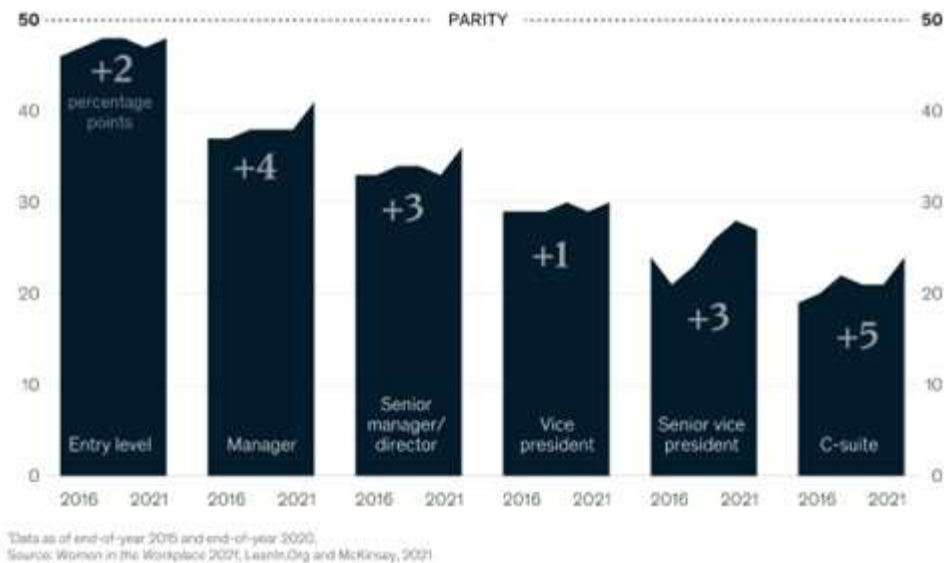
Data shown in change of total percentage points (referenced as "PP")

The same is true for people of color and ethnic diversity at the top leadership levels. In 2021, people of color accounted for just 17% of SVP level and C-Suite positions.[3] The biggest hit is on women of color across the board starting at 17% in entry level positions to a diminished 4% at CEO level. Compare this with white men who start at entry level of 35% to 62% at CEO level!

With the level of focus and attention given in many organizations, how can this still be the case?

[3] *Women in the Workplace 2021,* McKinsey & LeanIN, September 2021

We believe that leadership's unconscious biases are continuing to create barriers to progress in their organizations. Here are two of the most frequent statements InclusionINC hears that interfere with making real progress:

1. We can't find qualified talent.
2. They are not ready yet.

Barrier 1 - We can't find qualified talent

Let's explore the first one briefly. The barrier to finding qualified talent may be in your selection criteria. For example, if you require 10 years experience in the industry, you are more than likely going to replicate your current demographic makeup and limit new entrants to your workforce. Rather, we suggest you look at the criteria required for the job now and in the next 5 years. A few examples are: 1) High technical competence, 2) Critical thinking skills, or 3) Adaptive to changing situations.

We might simply pose the question, *"Where are you looking that you can't find qualified talent in 2022?"*

Barrier 2 - They aren't ready yet

Quite simply, if the talent isn't ready, what do you need to do as the leader to get them ready? It is your responsibility as a leader to prepare talent for the next opportunity! Who are you mentoring informally? Who is receiving coaching and feedback from you? Who is being nominated for leadership development programs? It's critical that you examine who you are developing with intentionality and whose potential is going unrecognized. Consider why you are making those development decisions.

Barrier 3 - Maybe it's actually bias

"There's no qualified talent" and "They aren't ready yet" may be what's said. However, what may be behind these comments is affinity bias. A very simple explanation of affinity bias is favoring those that are similar to us. Bias has us looking through our own filter when making our decisions.

Sometimes these individual biases compounded over time can become systemic barriers in the organization. Systemic bias comes from processes and programs that benefit and provide opportunities to a certain group while creating barriers for others.

A Story of Systemic Bias
The NFL

A well-known organization falling short on its well-intentioned diversity and inclusion efforts is the NFL. Even though 70% of NFL players are Black, as the 2021/2022 season closed there were only two Black head coaches and three coaches of color. Again, how can this be? The NFL probably has the greatest talent pipeline of black men in any organization.

The top avenue for selecting NFL head coaches is the pool of offensive coaches. However, with 32 teams in the NFL only two offensive coordinators and ten defensive coordinators are Black.

In thinking about the first item mentioned above, "We can't find qualified talent" – that's clearly not the case for the NFL. The NFL does have extraordinary Super Bowl winning offensive coordinator talent; they just don't get hired to the head coaching positions.

Let's look at Brian Bieniemy offensive coordinator for the Kansas City Chiefs - Super Bowl Winner 2019.

- **Bieniemy has been interviewed 14 times since 2019.**
- **0-for-14 trying to get a head-coaching job.**
- **Teams MUST have a diverse slate.**
- **However, they have zero accountability to hire diverse head coaches.**

Graphic: Trevor Irmler, @trevorjamesisland/theGrio

Bieniemy is one of two black offensive coordinators in the NFL. The other is Bryan Leftwich, the offensive coordinator for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and another Super Bowl winner! He also isn't a head coach as of yet. It defies logic! As we consider the second barrier statement above, "They aren't ready yet" an additional piece of information needs to be added. **When black coaches actually get to the head coaching job, they perform better! Yes, that is correct.**

The biggest point in the chart that follows is that black coaches outperform their white peers significantly in all categories with the exception of a .02 in regular season wins. They are better performers!

BLACK HEAD COACHES		WHITE HEAD COACHES
.503	WINNING % - REGULAR SEASON	.505
.396	PLAYOFF APPEARANCE RATE	.356
7.75	WINS PER SEASON	7.71
53.6	AGE WHEN HIRED	48.9
23	PRIOR NFL COACHING EXPERIENCE	13
4.52	AVERAGE TENURE IN YEARS	5.68

When the Grio looked strictly at the numbers, we finally understood the NFL's confounding lack of Black head coaches. The only logical answer is racism. **Article by Michael Harriot 2/11/2022**

And here is where affinity bias begins to have a huge impact. Black head coaches have to have an average of 10 years more NFL experience than their white peers before going into the job. They are hired an average of 5 years older. Is it that white owners are simply more comfortable with white coaches?

Barrier 4 - Accountability

A fourth barrier InclusionINC wants added to the list is, "Why is no one accountable for the change?" Forbes may have said it best in the title of a January 2021 article; "NFL Teams Egregiously Passing on Black Head Coaches Shows Rooney Rule Can't Change Biases".

Specifically, in the case of the NFL, you never have to actually hire a person of color. The only requirement for accountability is to ensure there is a person of color on interview slate. This is from the Rooney rule in 2003.

Many critics of the NFL have brought up that this is simply a check-the-box for NFL team owners. They interview qualified black coaches (or more broadly coaches of color) simply to adhere to that guideline and then put the white coach they want in the position.

The year 2022 brought this squarely into focus. Brian Flores filed a case of racial discrimination in the NFL due to their lack of progress and accountability for change. He specifically named three teams who he had personally experienced his interview as a token one to fulfill a diverse slate. The three specific teams named in the lawsuit are the Dolphins, Broncos and Giants.

In his lawsuit, Flores says,

> "The NFL remains rife with racism, particularly when it comes to the hiring and retention of Black Head Coaches, Coordinators and General Managers. Over the years, the NFL and its 32-member organizations [the "Teams"] have been given every chance to do the right thing. Rules have been implemented, promises made — but nothing has changed. In fact, the racial discrimination has only been made worse by the NFL's disingenuous commitment to social equity."

The stats support his lawsuit and statements.

- Only two of the NFL's 32 teams (6%) employs a Black head coach.
- Only four of the NFL's 32 teams (12%) employ a Black offensive coordinator.
- Only 11 of the NFL's 32 teams (34%) employ a Black defensive coordinator.
- Only three of the NFL's 32 teams (9%) employ a Black quarterback coach.
- Only six of the NFL's 32 teams (19%) employ a Black general manager.

This is the result of nearly 20 years of focus!

Barrier 5 – Move past your Denial

The final barrier InclusionINC wants to lift up is, "Denial is not an appropriate response." The NFL sadly is very predictable denying anything that Flores says is true.
- In 2020, Roger Goodell had to respond after Black Players went viral about the murder of George Floyd. At that time, he gushed that, "Without Black players, there would be no National Football League."
- Fast forward to Brian Flores lawsuit. Denial set in really hard and fast. "Racism and any form of discrimination is against our values, and really something we will not tolerate," Goodell said.
- All three teams sued denied any wrong-doing. They stand behind their diversity efforts and are pleased with their hiring processes. Again, denial.

While the NFL may be flagrant in its lack of progress, the McKinsey Lean In data shows this happens across the board.

In Summary

It is possible to move beyond the "stuck state" to build an organization that is poised to leverage the unique skills, insights and input of their workforce through a truly inclusive culture. But it demands different approaches than what has been used in the past.

It demands a closer, and more critical, look at employees' journeys along the ladder to the highest levels of leadership. It demands strategic, and concerted, efforts to prepare employees—and particularly women and people of color—to move into higher level positions. And it demands a focus on developing leaders' ability to develop high potential talent, moving beyond awareness of unconscious bias to actually taking steps to remove that bias to build a culture of inclusion.

It wasn't just one thing that led us to this "stuck state" and it is not just one thing that will help us push past it. Making real progress on diversity at every career stage will require intentionality and a strategic approach.

1. Good intentions and goals have not been translated into sound strategies to achieve those goals. An intentional focus and strategic approach are needed to achieve the progress these organizations are striving toward.

2. Leaders may have used faulty approaches to identifying potential. Relying on intuition, past experience and current performance as indicators of potential has led to a seemingly smaller pool of "qualified candidates" to develop.[4]

3. Unconscious bias training has been conducted with a "dip and done" approach that simply does not work. The leaders who are responsible for developing diverse talent are not being properly equipped with the skills and knowledge they need to effectively do so.

4. Leaders have been allowed to default to "they are just not ready." Not enough organizations are asking "why aren't they ready? What steps did you take to get them ready?"

5. A multi-tiered development approach should include direct feedback, identification of skills needed, development and education opportunities, stretch assignments and creating visibility to leadership.

6. Denial is not acceptable.

7. Accountability is missing for preparing talent in the pipeline. This preparation includes both those who get the special projects and development assignments

---

[4] *To get diversity right, get potential right*, Egon Zehnder, January 2017

as well as those who get promoted. Accountability is missing even when talent is ready and highly performing.

8. Lastly, and possibly most importantly, senior leaders need to be equipped with the skills and tools required to effectively develop this high potential talent. This begins with exploring their unconscious biases.

InclusionINC's Holistic Approach to Making Real Progress

InclusionINC believes that to make real progress, a holistic strategic approach is critical. This approach needs to include deep work with senior leaders to create awareness of bias and build inclusive leadership skills, an enterprise-wide learning approach to cascade skills building to all levels of the organization, and a deep analysis of system barriers in the organization.

Deep Work with Senior Leaders
It is critical to link awareness of unconscious bias with the practical skills building needed for leaders to create a culture of inclusion in their organizations and to effectively develop high-potential diverse talent. "The journey to becoming an inclusive leader and organization occurs along a continuum that requires self-assessment, honest assessment and a commitment toward change."[5] InclusionINC approaches this work with an immersive experience through our IL360 and Executive Development Program. The success of this program comes from a combination of methodologies.

1. The Inclusive Leader 360 Assessment measures a leader's demonstration of 48 inclusive leader competencies and reveals disparities in responses given by white men and women, people of color and different generations.
2. One-on-one executive coaching allows for a tailored journey for each leader. InclusionINC Executive Coaches give direct feedback about the leaders' biases, strengths and what they need to work on. This allows each leader to create their own unique action plan.
3. Facilitated group dialogue sessions allow leaders to begin to be aware of their own gaps in understanding ("know that they don't know"). Leaders typically begin the process thinking that they have everything figured out. Through deep group exploration and direct conversations, leaders begin to have breakthroughs and realize the intentional work that is needed to create a culture of inclusion.
4. Reflection time and assigned readings are given in-between group dialogue sessions. This allows leaders to truly process what they have learned and come

---

[5] *Becoming an Inclusive Leader: How to Navigate the 21st Century Global Workforce*, Shirley Engelmeier 2014

to the next session prepared to have the hard conversations that will create profound change in their organizations.

5. In addition to their personal action plans, an organizational action plan is developed by the leader groups to identify what the group is committing to and how they will hold each other accountable.

Cascading Skills Building

In order for an organization to truly push past the stuck state and create a culture of inclusion the work cannot stop with the senior leaders. InclusionINC's Conscious Inclusion programs are designed to drive skills building from mid-level leaders to the front lines and are focused on validated inclusion behaviors, inclusive practices and intervention skills.

Conscious Inclusion programs bring the learner on a journey of multiple learning touchpoints that can be customized to different levels of the organization. The learners journey may include live facilitated group sessions, individual reflection assignments, e-learning modules, and/or self-directed team activities.

Identifying Systemic Barriers

InclusionINC's unique current state analysis framework brings a comprehensive and systematic approach to creating a culture of inclusion within an organization. The framework integrates the work of both operational and talent leaders to drive sustainable culture change.

InclusionINC utilizes multiple methods to collect data that will inform a holistic inclusion and diversity strategy.

- Leadership Interviews – Gauging leadership buy-in and alignment
- Targeted Focus Groups – Ensuring underrepresented voices are heard
- Web-Based Survey – Assessing the current culture of inclusion in the organization
- Process Intake – rating current policies, procedures, and programs against 52 best practices

The information gathered through these intake methods informs the strategic roadmap that InclusionINC recommends for the organization. All roadmaps include a defined current state, desired future state, barriers to overcome and specific strategic approaches to reach the desired future state.

To learn more about InclusionINC's IL360 & Executive Development Program visit our website at www.inclusion-inc.com or call us at 612-339-2202.

Further Readings

Shirley Engelmeier. **Inclusion: Still the Competitive Business Advantage.** 2020
www.amazon.com/Inclusion-STILL-Competitive-Business-Advantage

Forbes, Terrence Moore. Roger Goodell NFL's $63.9 Million Messenger of Nothingness Regarding Black Head Coaches. February, 2022

NYTMIES.com. **Only Three N.F.L. Head Coaches Are Black. 'It's Embarrassing.'** December 31, 2019

Wall Street Journal. **Where Women Fall Behind at Work: The First Step into Management**. October 15th, 2019

McKinsey & LeanIN. **Women in the Workplace 2021**. September 2021

Shirley Engelmeier. **Becoming an Inclusive Leader: How to Navigate the 21st Century**

Global Workforce. 2014 https://www.amazon.com/Becoming-Inclusive-Leader-Navigate-Workforce