

Creating a DEIB Culture:

The Skills Every Employee Needs

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About RedThread



Sure, we're experts in performance, people analytics, learning, and DEIB—and we're well-versed in the technologies that support them. But we're also truth-seekers and storytellers in an industry often short on substance, and too full of @#\$%. Our mission (indeed, our very reason for existing) is to cut through the noise and amplify what's good. We look for the connections (or red threads) between people, data, and ideas—even among seemingly unrelated concepts. The result is high-quality, unbiased, transformative foresight that helps you build a stronger business.

To learn more, reach out to us at hello@redthreadresearch.com or visit www.redthreadresearch.com.



Key Findings



- 1. Top DEIB orgs perform better.** Orgs that score high on RedThread's DEIB (diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging¹) Index are more likely to see positive individual employee and organizational outcomes, such as being:
 - 2x more likely to give their employer a positive Net Promoter Score® (NPS)
 - 45% more likely to have high intent to stay
 - 2x more likely to work at businesses that have met their goals for the last 3 years
 - 81% more likely to indicate high customer satisfaction
- 2. Action-taking skills are essential for top DEIB orgs.** Though their specific roles and skills differ, senior leaders, managers, and individuals at top DEIB orgs put a significant emphasis on action-taking skills, such as assertiveness, challenging the status quo, and calculated risk-taking.
- 3. Passive skills are necessary, but not sufficient.** While passive skills—such as listening, self-awareness, and empathy—are important, they're not enough for an org to excel at DEIB. In fact, when passive skills alone are perceived as important, there's a negative correlation with being a top DEIB org. Conversely, when passive skills augment action-taking skills, orgs are more likely to be a top DEIB org.
- 4. At top DEIB orgs, 2 skills are especially important for all employee populations.** Our research has identified calculated risk-taking and nonverbal communication as the 2 skills that are critical for employees at all levels within the org.



5. **At top DEIB orgs, different employee populations need to focus on different skills sets:**

a. **Senior leaders:**

- **Pushing for change.** Challenging the status quo, assertiveness, and mental flexibility
- **Using actions that speak louder than words.** Nonverbal communication, and rapport-building
- **Being socially savvy.** Persuasion and calculated risk-taking

b. **Managers:**

- **Being open to new ideas.** Envisioning a different future and curiosity
- **Driving and monitoring change.** Challenging the status quo, grit, and negotiation
- **Navigating social complexity.** Persuasion, influence, calculated risk-taking, and nonverbal communication

c. **Individuals:**

- **Putting skin in the game.** Authenticity and courage
- **Genuinely influencing others.** Calculated risk-taking, nonverbal communication, and ability to empower people
- **Helping design a new future.** Envisioning a different future, pattern recognition, managing ambiguity, and data literacy



Skills for DEIB: Why a New Take Is Needed



Corporate leaders are focusing on diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) like never before. The twin pandemics of the last 18 months—the COVID-19 pandemic and the social justice pandemic—have heightened leaders' awareness of the extent to which diverse populations have different experiences in the workplace and marketplace. For example, during the pandemic, the employment rates of women — and especially women of color — declined at much more significant rates than those of men. Unfortunately, they, still have not fully recovered, with women's employment rates still being approximately 2 percentage points below what they were before the pandemic, as of August 2021.²

As a result of this experience, the expectations of 3 important stakeholders have changed (see Figure 1):

- **Customers.** Consumers now expect orgs to get their DEIB house in order. For example, 80% of consumers want brands to help solve society's problems and 64% want companies to set an example of diversity within their orgs.³
- **Employees.** Likewise, employees also expect their employers to do more. According to the Edelman Trust Barometer, in 2021, 50% of employees said it's more important than last year that an employer have a diverse, representative workforce.⁴ Further, 41% want employers to have ethics and values.⁵
- **Investors.** In November 2020, the SEC began requiring public companies to disclose material information about their human capital practices, including their DEIB metrics.⁶ Since then, the disclosures have been murky at best and the SEC is talking about revisiting their requirements. Further, given the link between DEIB and improved business outcomes, investors are more interested than ever in DEIB metrics. For example, 65% of investment professionals in the Americas region cited client / investor demands as the second biggest motivator for considering environmental, social, and corporate governance (ESG) factors in their investment analysis in 2020, as compared with 45% in 2017.⁷



The recent pandemics have heightened leaders' awareness of the extent to which diverse populations have a different experience in the workplace and marketplace.



Figure 1: Shifts in Expectations



80%
consumers want brands to help solve society's problems



41%
employees want employers to have ethics and values



65%
investment professionals cite investor demands as the second biggest motivator for considering ESG factors in their investment analysis



64%
consumers want companies to set an example of diversity within their orgs



81%
employees believe employers should reiterate zero tolerance for discrimination and harassment



67%
CFA Institute members take "social"—out of the 3 ESG areas—into account in their investment decisions



71%
consumers trust employers to do what's right on systemic racism and racial injustice*



50%
employees say it's more important than last year that an employer have a diverse, representative workforce

**But this is only true for small businesses, as medium-size business and corporations are not trusted.*

Source: IBM, What employees expect in 2021, 2021; Weber Shandwick, 2020; Edelman Trust Barometer, 2021 & 2020; CFA Institute 2020.

A significant increase in focus on DEIB stems from this change in expectations and we can see orgs making marked investments in DEIB. For example, as of August 2021, job postings for "Director of Diversity & Inclusion" were 76% higher than those 12 months ago.⁸ Further, the DEIB tech market has grown tremendously at a 59% CAGR (compound annual growth rate) over the last 2 years, according to our calculations.⁹

However, it's not as though focusing on DEIB is new: We've been focused on DEIB for decades, due to legal requirements (such as Equal Employment Opportunity Commission—EEOC in the US). And yet orgs still aren't as diverse, equitable, and inclusive as they should be. Clearly, if you judge by critical outcomes such as representation levels, then the efforts of leaders to increase DEIB haven't worked well enough.

For example, it's generally known that DEIB training doesn't work, as shown by recent research and field studies which find no effect of



diversity training on women’s careers or that of other underrepresented populations.¹⁰ Further, there’s been little if any research that shows a connection between employee resource groups (ERGs)—where many orgs spend the majority of their DEIB budget—and changes in representation rates.

We know that diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging matter—but enabling them is hard. For those of us who care about DEIB, this is deeply concerning. We have this incredible opportunity to focus on DEIB—and yet we lack clarity on which investments will actually move the needle to create more diverse, equitable, and inclusive orgs.

Enter Skills

As a result of this situation, our team has recently spent a lot of time trying to understand novel opportunities on which orgs can focus their DEIB efforts.¹¹ During one such conversation, we discussed how skills can connect to DEIB:

“No one has clearly identified the skills required to create an inclusive workforce and workplace. There’s a lot of research on leadership behaviors, but not skills. Skills are so important because they can be taught, learned, developed, and measured.”

—Janice Burns, Chief People Officer, Degreed

We thought her idea sounded intriguing—and this study was born.

One reason we’re so interested in exploring this topic: Skills represent a “common denominator” in identifying what people need to do to be successful at their jobs. Yet the concept hasn’t been applied to what people should do to make their orgs successful at DEIB.

This comment reverberated through our interviews: The vast majority of orgs haven’t identified the skills necessary to develop broader DEIB competencies or capabilities (for example, identifying the skills required to demonstrate inclusive leadership). Further, even when orgs have identified leadership skills relevant to DEIB (e.g., persuasion or influence), it’s rare that they’ve articulated how to apply those skills in a DEIB context. Finally, even if people have made the connection between skills and DEIB, there’s precious little data to back up the claims for which skills matter most.¹²

Diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging matter—but enabling them is hard.



But Which Skills Matter?

If you assume that skills matter to DEIB, then you have to answer the questions:

- Which skills actually matter?
- And for whom?

From our interviews, it quickly became apparent that a person's level in the org's hierarchy is very important for determining which skills matter. However, no one has really known which skills are important in the first place, let alone for different levels within the org.

So, you may be starting to understand why we're so excited to do this research: A big opportunity exists to use quantitative and qualitative research to answer a lot of critical, unanswered questions.

Yet, all good research needs parameters to answer a few questions and so, for this study, we want to understand the following:

- What skills contribute to DEIB, specifically in fostering diversity, enabling people to feel included, and building a culture of belonging in the workplace?
- How those skills might vary, depending on factors such as an employee's level, role, diversity characteristics, etc.?
- What can orgs do to develop and leverage these skills, including specific approaches and modalities?

To answer these questions, we embarked on an exhaustive 6-month study: This has involved a literature review of more than 60 articles, conversations with more than 100 people, and a comprehensive survey of more than 1,000 people—only half of whom are in HR. Through our survey, we created a DEIB Index that measures how diverse, equitable, and inclusive an org is (according to the respondent) and then determines the most important skills that correlate with that Index (see "Appendix" for full methodology details).

The results (see "Key Findings") reinforce other research which shows that, when orgs have a strong DEIB culture, they're more likely to perform

A person's level in the org's hierarchy is very important for determining which skills matter.



well on business outcomes. Our findings also show that specific skills for specific audiences have a statistically significant relationship with better DEIB outcomes.

We hope that this research serves as a source of inspiration for new approaches to drive DEIB in your org. At a minimum, we believe it can serve as a foundation for reassessing your existing hiring and development efforts. Specifically, our findings can help you refocus on the skills expected of individuals, managers, and senior leaders at your org, as well as how those skills can be deployed to support DEIB. We think there's great possibility in better leveraging orgs' current focus on skills to also drive DEIB—and this report shows you where to start.

Skills vs. Behavior vs. Competencies vs. ...

When we began this study, a point of regular discussion was whether something was a skill, a behavior, a competency, or something else. We ended up leveraging our study, *Skills vs. Competencies: What's the Deal?*¹³ to make decisions on if we classified something as a skill. In that study, we clarified that skills are granular, are what an employee does (vs. how a job is done), a learned ability, and can be transferred within and across orgs. We used this framework for classification.

That said, in the study, we also mentioned the distinction between skills and competencies is usually only for HR—other business leaders don't tend to care that much what something is called. Given all this, as you read our report on DEIB and skills, if your org uses a term different than "skill" to define the most granular level of capability for employees—then insert that word in your head as you read. The point is to move away from complex groupings of behaviors to the most basic level of capability to identify exactly what employees should do to create a culture of DEIB.

When orgs have a strong DEIB culture, they're more likely to perform well on business outcomes.



The Business Case for DEIB (If You Need One)

You likely already know there's a relationship between DEIB and business outcomes. But in case you need 1 more piece of research that makes this case, here it is.

For this research, we created a DEIB Index (see Figure 2) to measure DEIB in respondents' orgs. This index is comprised of 2 types of measures—the extent to which people:

- Feel they belong, are respected, included, and valued
- Think their org provides equitable opportunities and embraces diversity

In short, this is the outcome variable that we expect to be influenced by things like leaders effectively using skills which encourage DEIB.

Figure 2: RedThread's DEIB Index



Source: RedThread Research, 2021.



We tested to see if a relationship exists between a respondent who rated their org as high on the DEIB Index, and their org's performance on individual and organizational outcomes. The specific outcomes we tested are listed in Figure 3.

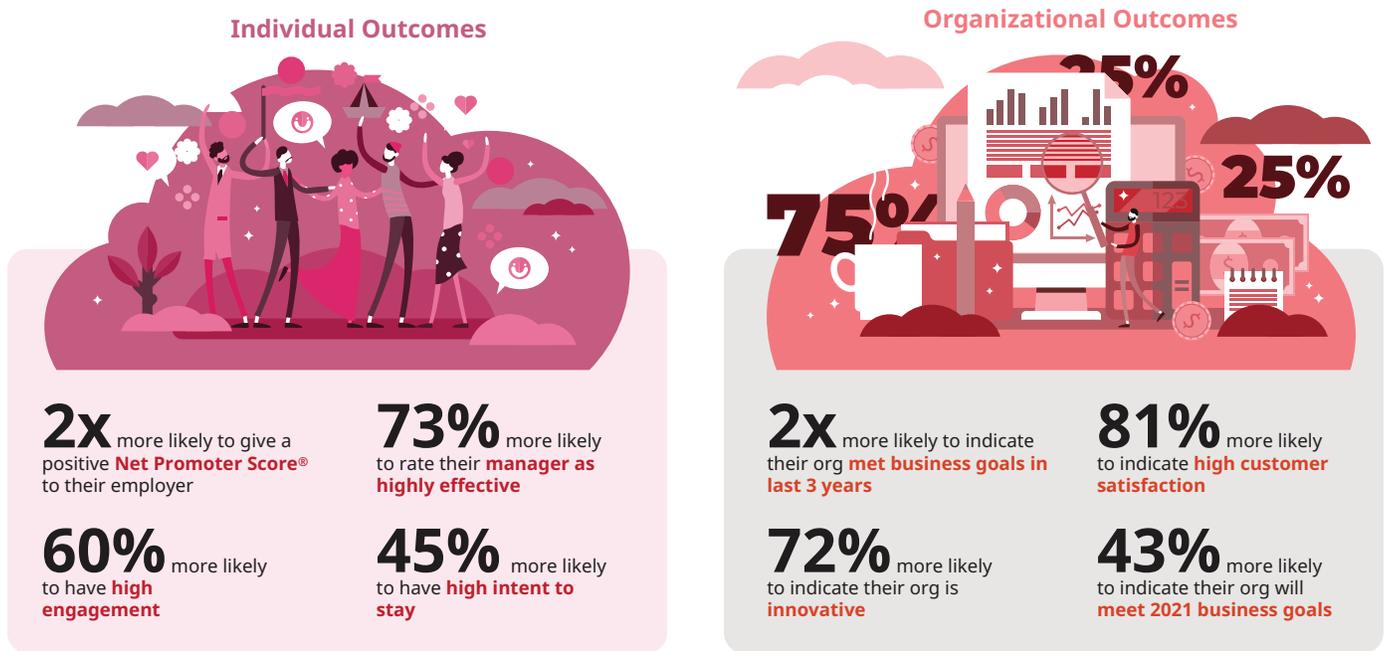
Figure 3: Individual & Organizational Outcomes Assessed in This Research



Source: RedThread Research, 2021.

We then looked to see if there was a statistically significant relationship between them—and, as expected—it exists. As you can see in Figure 4, we noticed a particularly strong relationship between individuals' NPS scores for their org (likelihood they'd recommend a colleague to work at their org) and their org's ability to meet their business goals in the last 3 years. We also found statistically significant relationships between high scores on the DEIB Index and employees' perceptions of managerial effectiveness, as well as their self-ratings of engagement and intent to stay.

Figure 4: Individual & Organizational Outcomes for High DEIB Index Orgs



Source: RedThread Research, 2021.

Given that we see the expected relationship between the DEIB Index and these outcomes, let's now turn to figuring out which skills have a relationship with the DEIB Index.

Finding the Right Skills for DEIB



One of the first things we did in starting this research was to ask people,

What do you think are the most important skills to create a culture of DEIB?

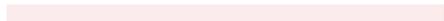
We thought we'd get a nice, tidy list in response. Oh, how naïve we were! Instead, what we got was *chaos*—a complete lack of clarity on what mattered.

It turns out that a lot of factors influence the skills needed for DEIB—and 1 of the biggest is the individual's level in the org. Once we started asking about how skills might vary for specific levels—individuals, managers, and senior leaders—we started to get clearer, logical consistency on which skills mattered. But, we still needed more clarity.

We, therefore, moved on from qualitative to quantitative research. Via a survey, we asked 1,044 employees of all levels from a wide range of industries (see "Appendix" for details) what the most important skills are—for individuals, managers, and senior leaders—to create a culture of DEIB. We then identified the skills that respondents selected as important and which correlated with high responses on the DEIB Index. This is where we finally uncovered a set of skills that made sense, given what we've learned from the literature and interviews.

One methodological note (it's the only one we'll bore you with here—see the "Appendix" if you want all the gory details):

While we asked respondents both about the importance and effectiveness of skills, it turns out that, if respondents indicated a skill was important, then it's because they saw their manager or senior leader performing the skill well. As a result, they rated their manager



One of the biggest factors that influences the skills needed for DEIB is the individual's level in the org.



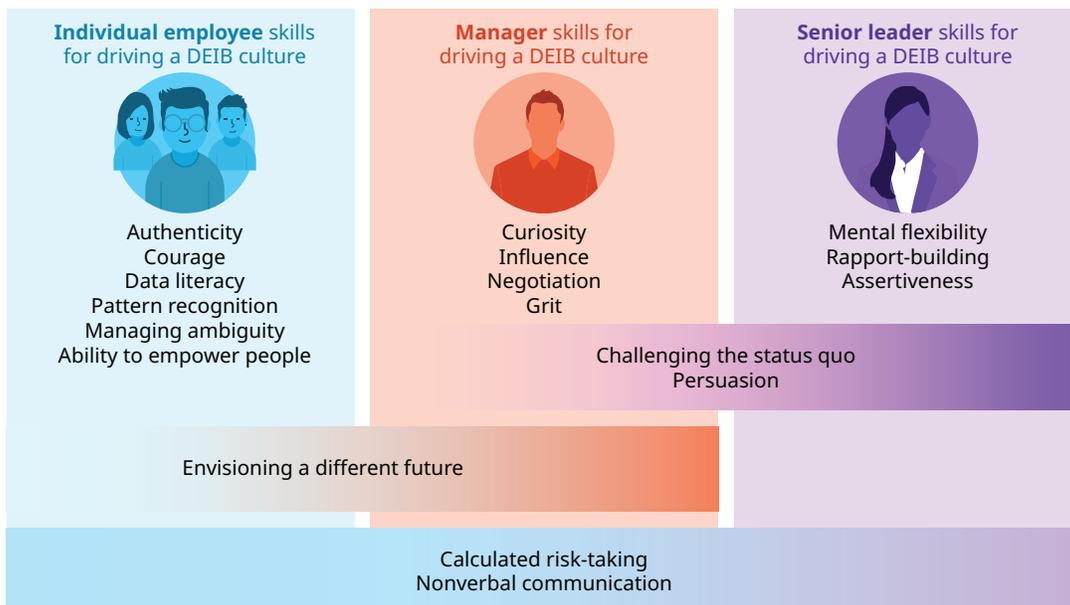
or senior leader a 4 or 5—resulting in almost no variability in the effectiveness data.

We, therefore, were forced to rely on importance data—which is effectively synonymous with effectiveness data—for our analysis. Due to data structure, we had to use correlation—not regression—for our analysis. As we all know, correlation is not causation. However, correlation does tell us which specific skills are uniquely important in high-rated DEIB Index orgs, which is the overall objective of this research.

The Skills That Matter Most

The skills we’ve identified as most critical are those that correlate with a respondent scoring their org as high on the DEIB Index. We’ve detailed them in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Skills for a DEIB Culture—By Employee Level*



*It's critical to note that skills not listed in Figure 5 could also be present in high-performing orgs. Those skills didn't make it to the list because we found they had no statistical relationship with high DEIB Index performance. This doesn't mean they should be ignored, just that they were not the most critical, according to our analysis. For a full list of skills frequencies, by top 25% vs. bottom 25% on the DEIB Index, see the "Appendix."

Source: RedThread Research, 2021.

As you take a high-level look at these skills, the most important thing to note is that nearly half of them are action-taking skills (see Figure 6). The other skills are primarily related to either analyzing and understanding a situation, or managing social dynamics. The only 2 skills not covered by these 3 buckets are authenticity and grit—very individualized skills that are part of how people show up and which can influence the other 3 categories.

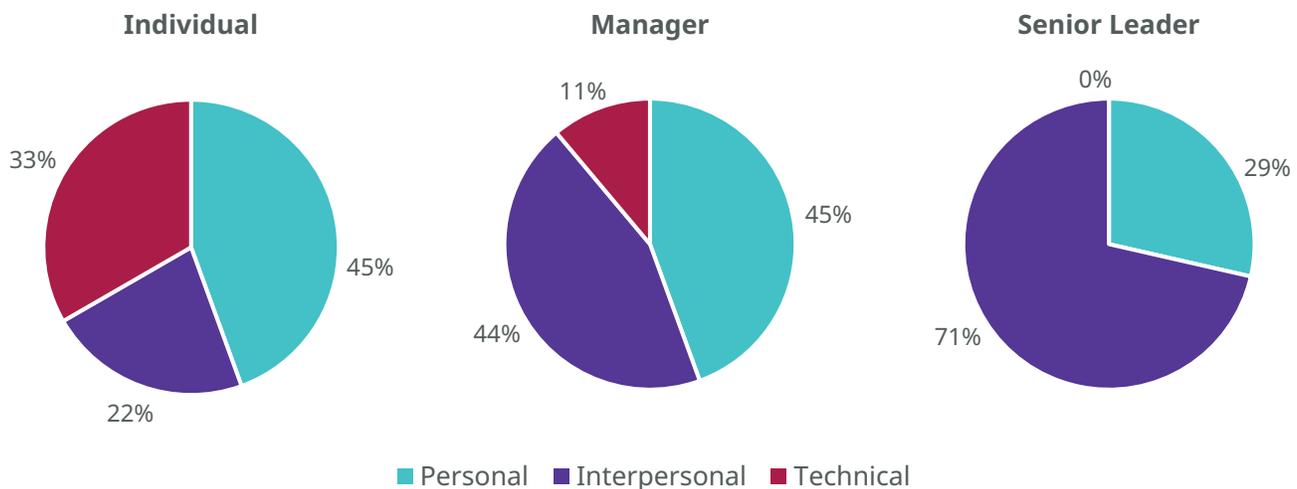
Figure 6: Skills for DEIB—By Skill Grouping

		SKILLS		
GROUPING TYPE	Action-taking	Analyzing / understanding others	Managing social dynamics	
Personal	Courage	Curiosity	Calculated risk-taking	
	Envisioning a different future	Mental flexibility		
Interpersonal	Ability to empower people		Nonverbal communication	
	Assertiveness		Rapport-building	
			Influence	
Technical	Managing ambiguity	Pattern recognition		
	Negotiation	Data literacy		

Source: RedThread Research, 2021.

Another important note is how the skills evolve with seniority in the organization (see Figure 7). As you would expect, the percentage of technical skills declines with seniority, while the percentage of interpersonal skills increases—most notably taking up 71% of the skills set of senior leaders. This reflects the significant interpersonal work required by senior leaders to drive cultures of DEIB.

Figure 7: Changes in Skills Types—By Level



Source: RedThread Research, 2021.

Overall, though, Figure 7 underscores the importance of understanding the skills required of different levels within the org and how those change. Given this, the next section provides more detail on these skills by level, as that's where we can really start to see a story about the reality and opportunities of different employees to drive DEIB.

Senior Leaders: Setting the Bar

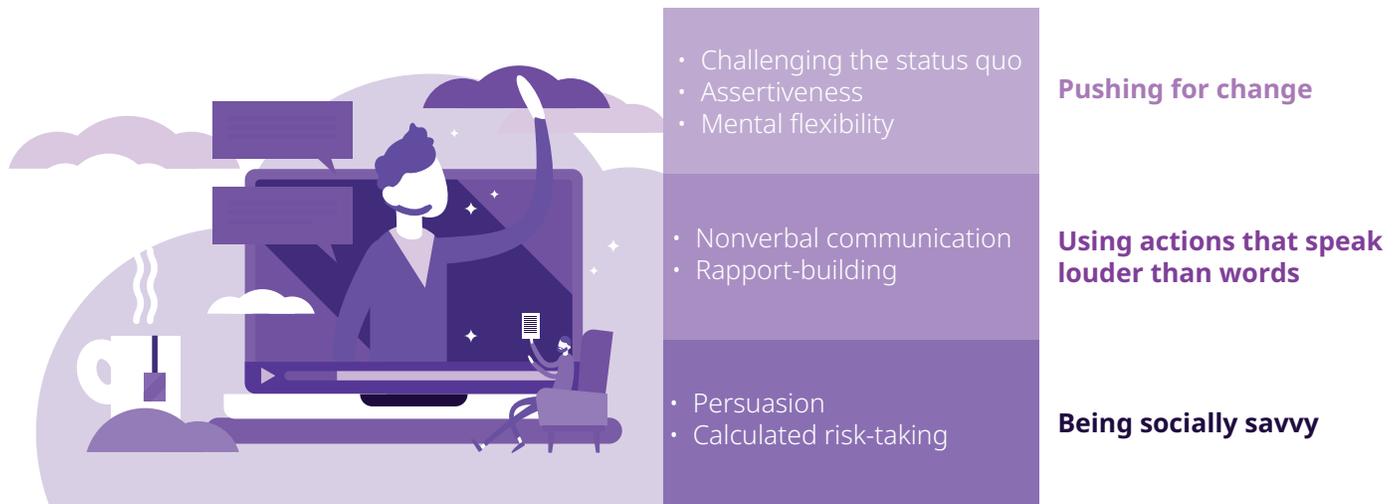
We consistently heard in our interviews that senior leaders are responsible for setting the bar for DEIB. Yet, the question we had was: The bar for what? Empathy and listening? Humility and authenticity? For something else?

It turns out the answer is—for driving action at-scale. The skills most important for senior leaders at high DEIB orgs are ones that let them fulfill their ability and obligation to effect change in their orgs. Specifically, senior leaders at high DEIB orgs leverage skills that enable them to (see Figure 8):

1. **Push for change** by challenging the status quo, being assertive, and showing mental flexibility
2. **Use actions to speak louder than words** via nonverbal communication and rapport-building
3. **Be socially savvy** as demonstrated by calculated risk-taking and persuasion skills

Senior leaders are responsible for driving action on DEIB at-scale.

Figure 8: Senior Leader Skills—By Theme



Source: RedThread Research, 2021.

This particular combination of skills is especially powerful: It reflects how senior leaders must be able to understand perspectives that are different from their own (mental flexibility), and then be willing to question the status quo with confidence and assertiveness. They need to project their commitment to this work in their actions—not just their words—via nonverbal communication and rapport-building. Finally, senior leaders have to know when and how to push for change via persuasion and calculated risk-taking.

“When it comes to leaders, flexible thinking and being okay with not being always right is critical. They need to be able to shift perspectives and have the skillset to not only think with and navigate different perspectives, but also ask for different perspectives.”

—Custom Program Director, A public research university

Interestingly, this focus on action-taking skills is especially reinforced when we analyze the data by respondent level (i.e., asking senior leaders what they feel are important skills for senior leaders). When senior leaders indicate that self-awareness is important, there’s actually a negative correlation with the DEIB Index. This reinforces the point that creating a

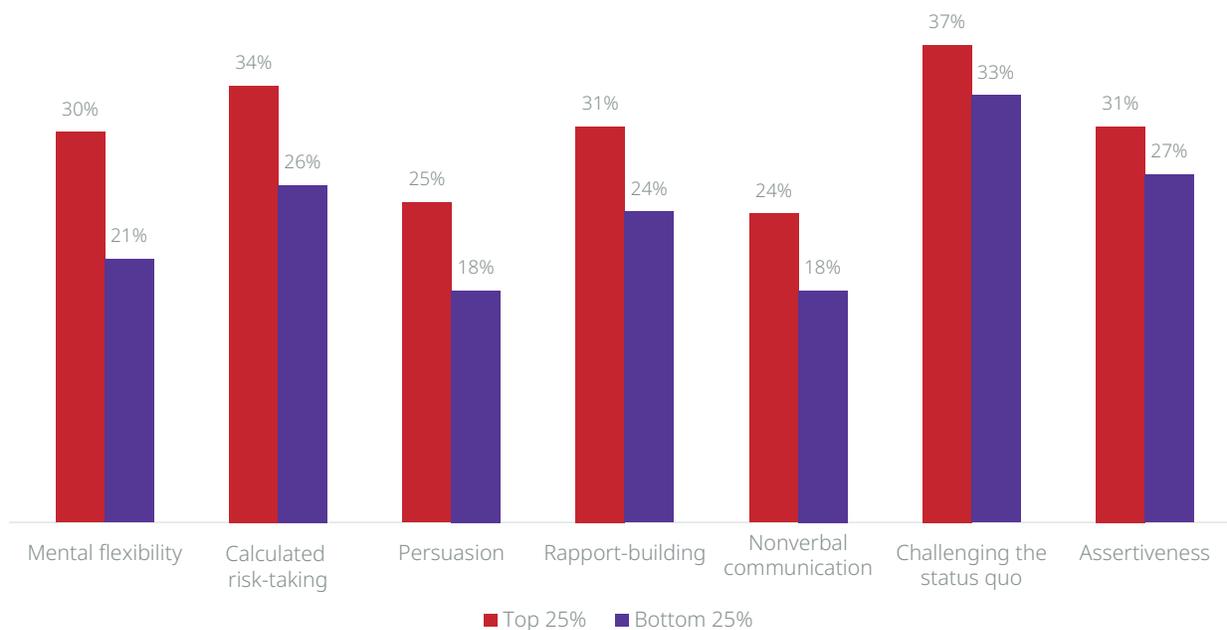
strong DEIB org isn't about passivity—it's about action, especially at the senior-leader level.

“Senior leaders have to be willing to make the tough decisions around doing things differently. Especially when it comes to systemic issues, you must be willing to dismantle some of the systems that are in place and rebuild them in order for things to get better. To do things differently and do what's right for the organization requires taking a risk. Senior leaders really need to be able to make the commitment to make those tough decisions.”

—Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer, A large not-for-profit organization

Senior leaders at orgs high on the DEIB Index leverage the skills in Figure 8 much more often than those at the bottom of the Index (see Figure 9). Specifically, we see skills such as mental flexibility and calculated risk-taking (a delta of 10% and 8%, respectively) as especially critical.

Figure 9: Frequencies of Positively Correlated Senior Leader Skills—Top vs. Bottom Quartile on the DEIB Index



Source: RedThread Research, 2021.

The importance of doing all these things together has been reinforced in our interviews, as shown in the following examples.

Real-World Threads: Appropriately challenging the status quo through the principle of proportionality

A U.S.-based tech company wanted to certify that leadership promotes the company culture, including a focus on DEIB, through their daily actions and reinforcement, and so the founder, David Blake, introduced a principle called proportionality. In general, the principle is used as a logical method to assist in discerning the correct balance between the severity of the nature of an act and the corrective measure applied in response to it.¹⁴ For the tech company, the principle served as a guide for leaders to ensure big issues receive a big reaction while small issues are responded to in small ways.

By getting the leadership to collectively believe in that principle, the company has been able to essentially create a self-monitoring organization, in which items—such as microaggressions or issues related to DEIB—aren't allowed to slide and are dealt with proportionately. For example, often people may be tempted to ignore a small comment, which doesn't adhere to DEIB values, or overreact to it in another situation. But a commitment to the principle of proportionality ensures that it receives an appropriate response.

As David Blake put it,

“While there have been times when we failed to live up to our aspirations, but I'd say for the most part, the organization has mostly done a good job of policing the culture, making good on the principle, and making it real.”



Real-World Threads: Teaching and Practicing Courageous Conversations for Senior Leaders



At a global manufacturing company, controlling emotions during tense situations and projecting a calm exterior during stressful conversations is an important skill to have, particularly for senior leaders. The company's Inclusive Leadership Behaviors program helps leaders prepare for courageous conversations by practicing and developing skills that enable them to respond thoughtfully in situations that can be emotionally charged.

Specifically, the company uses virtual reality to simulate scenarios where senior leaders are asked to participate in a promotion discussion of an employee with two of their peers. The scenario consists of one of the peer's presenting data about the employee while the other peer exhibits microaggressions during the conversation. The scenario requires the senior leader to react and respond to the situation in a calm and respectful manner.

Even though these are practice scenarios, leaders report that the emotions they feel during the conversations are realistic. These virtual reality scenarios help leaders develop skills to deal with such situations in real life as they are able to connect learning with their emotions.

In the course of our analysis, we also identified senior leader skills which showed an inverse relationship with the DEIB index—meaning that, if respondents indicate these skills are important, then they rate their org lower on the DEIB index.

This relationship is fascinating! Many of these skills are those that we hear are critical to DEIB and include:

- Approachability
- Ability to empower people
- Empathy
- Problem-solving

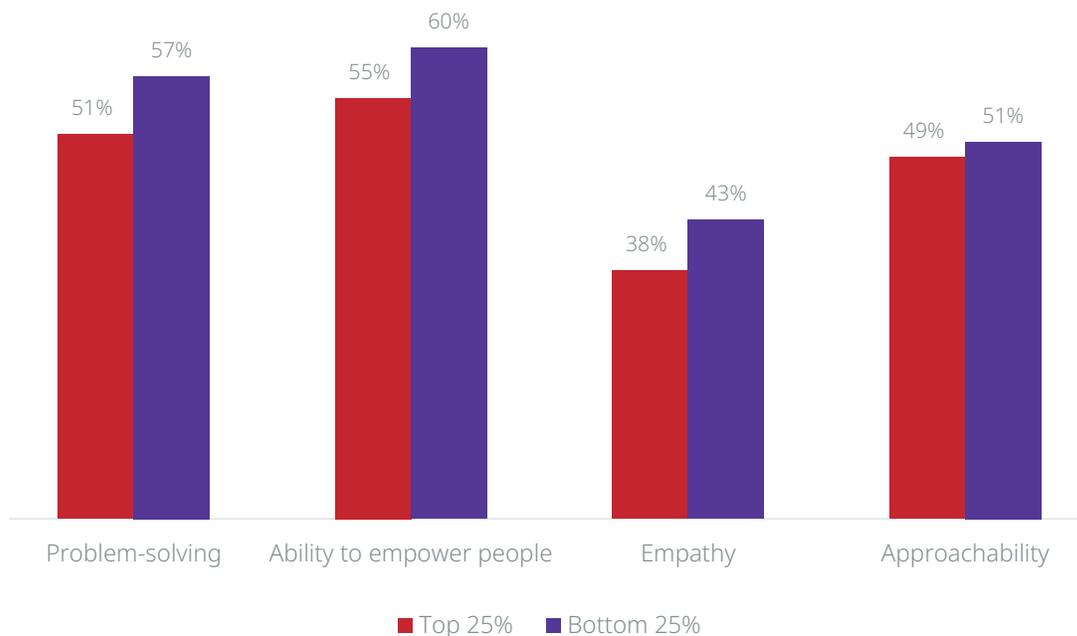


You might be really surprised by this finding—we were—until we looked deeper. We learned that those orgs in the bottom quartile only prioritized these skills: They didn't prioritize action-taking skills, such as calculated risk-taking and assertiveness. Those orgs in the top quartile prioritized both the action-taking skills and these more passive skills (see Figure 10).

Passive skills (such as empathy) are great but, without action to drive change at-scale, they're not enough.

The key takeaway here is this: Passive skills alone, without action skills, don't drive a culture of DEIB.

Figure 10: Frequencies of Negatively Correlated Senior Leader Skills—Top vs. Bottom Quartile on the DEIB Index



Source: RedThread Research, 2021.

How This Varies

One of our primary questions for this research is about the factors that can influence the skills needed to drive DEIB. For that reason, we also looked at all of these data by a range of subgroups. It's important to note: We did analyze these data by org size and industry, but didn't see statistically significant differences. These 3 subgroups revealed the most interesting statistically significant insights for senior leader skills:

- Function: HR vs. non-HR
- Diversity characteristics: Race / ethnicity
- Diversity characteristics: Gender

HR VS. NON-HR

One of the biggest surprises of the study came from looking at senior leader skills data by HR vs. non-HR. For HR leaders, the only skill that correlated with high performance on the DEIB Index is negotiation—none of the other 6 skills showed up. This demonstrates that HR leaders, given their perspective, may overemphasize the importance of the social savvy aspect of the senior leader role. By contrast, the skills selected by non-HR leaders are more about driving changes—assertiveness, challenging the status quo, calculated risk-taking, and mental flexibility.

For HR leaders, the only skill that correlated with high performance on the DEIB Index is negotiation—none of the other 6 skills showed up.

DIVERSITY CHARACTERISTICS: RACE / ETHNICITY

When we analyzed the data by respondents' race / ethnicity (specifically Black, Hispanic, and white, as those were the only groups with large enough sample sizes), we found much greater alignment on items that negatively correlated with the DEIB Index than those with a positive relationship.

As you can see in Figure 11, many items having a negative relationship with the DEIB Index are passive skills—such as approachability, empathy, and stress management. Yes, there are some more active skills—such as advocacy and ability to empower people—in this list, too. However, our interpretation is that a negative relationship exists because these aren't appropriate senior leader-level actions. For example, it's great to advocate—but exactly to whom will a senior leader advocate? Themselves? And empowering others is tablestakes for a senior leader. If that's a senior leader's priority, then they're not taking responsibility for driving action themselves.



Figure 11: Items Positively & Negatively Correlated with the DEIB Index—By Race / Ethnicity

SKILLS	RACE / ETHNICITY		
	Black	Hispanic	White
Ability to empower people	▼	▼	
Advocacy	▼		
Approachability	▼	▼	▼
Calculated risk-taking			▲
Creativity			▲
Empathy			▼
Envisioning a different future	▼		
Negotiation		▲	
Respect		▼	
Stress management			▼
Systemic thinking			▼

*Black arrows equate to positively correlated items, while red arrows equate to negatively correlated items.

Source: RedThread Research, 2021.

DIVERSITY CHARACTERISTICS: GENDER

Our analysis of the data by gender (male and female only, as we didn't have enough sample size to include other genders) revealed an intriguing difference between women and men: For women respondents, there's a relationship between data literacy skills for senior leaders and the DEIB Index. We interpret this to mean that, when senior leaders require a data-driven approach (and have the skills themselves to require it) in DEIB

efforts, it results in clearly articulated downstream changes which may especially impact women.

There are 3 other items that, when rated as important by women (but not by men), negatively correlate with the DEIB Index—empathy, problem-solving, and stress management. Again, our interpretation of this analysis is these skills are not sufficiently oriented toward driving change, especially for a senior leader audience.

Managers: Where the Rubber Meets the Road

Frequently during our interviews, we heard that managers are where DEIB efforts flourish or fail. Yet, managers *could* do so many things. Which skills *should* they use to create and support a culture of DEIB?

“Middle management, or the ‘magic middle,’ is the connective tissue that can help translate the vision and the tone of the executive leadership team to their people, and help them derive meaning in the work and find connection to the company’s DEIB values”

—Marci Paino, Senior Director, Enterprise People, Strategy, Development and Culture Team, Western Digital

The answer lies in Figure 12: These skills underscore how managers must have open minds, yet drive change gracefully. Specifically, the important skills for managers at high DEIB orgs are:

- 1. Be open to new ideas** by being curious and willing to envision a different future
- 2. Drive and monitor change** by challenging the status quo, demonstrating grit in following through, and engaging in calculated risk-taking
- 3. Navigate social complexity** by using negotiation, persuasion, and influence skills, while also deploying effective nonverbal communication



Figure 12: Manager Skills—By Theme



Source: RedThread Research, 2021.

The concept of being open to new ideas is one of the most important distinctions between managers and senior leaders. It's assumed senior leaders set the broader vision for DEIB—but it's at the manager level that this vision becomes a reality. To make that happen, managers need to leverage their curiosity to be open to and understand different perspectives, and then to envision a different version of the future for their teams and themselves.

Managers then need to turn this into reality. While senior leaders also use nonverbal communication and persuasion in social interactions, managers must leverage their influence and negotiation skills, since they're not in a position to force change to happen. They're in the middle of the org: Thus, managers are both creating and subject to the social and cultural norms and complex social relationships.

“A manager’s ability to influence is a core piece of skill for DEIB. Relatability is a huge component of DEIB and so managers have to work a little bit harder and think a little bit more clearly about what influence means and, how they can influence someone who thinks completely different than them, comes from a different place than them, or doesn’t look like them. It requires a skill to be able to influence that person.”

—Rob Lauber, CEO / Founder of XLO Global & Former Chief Learning Officer, McDonald’s

In addition, managers must drive and monitor change. Again, like senior leaders, this requires questioning the status quo and calculated risk-taking, but it also requires something specific—grit. This skill enables managers to persist, especially in the face of difficulty and conflict. Grit is so important—it's often that deep, unwavering commitment to DEIB that drives change.

Finally, it's worth noting that, when we cut the data by respondent level (i.e., middle managers identifying important skills for managers), we see 2 other items come up as important for managers—patience and managing ambiguity. These 2 skills speak to the many competing priorities that managers must successfully manage when it comes to DEIB.

Managers at orgs high on the DEIB Index leverage these skills much more often than those at the bottom (see Figure 13). The first 3 skills in the graphic show the essential element of navigating social complexity— influence, negotiation, and persuasion are all more prevalent at high DEIB orgs (by 12 percentage points) than at low DEIB orgs.

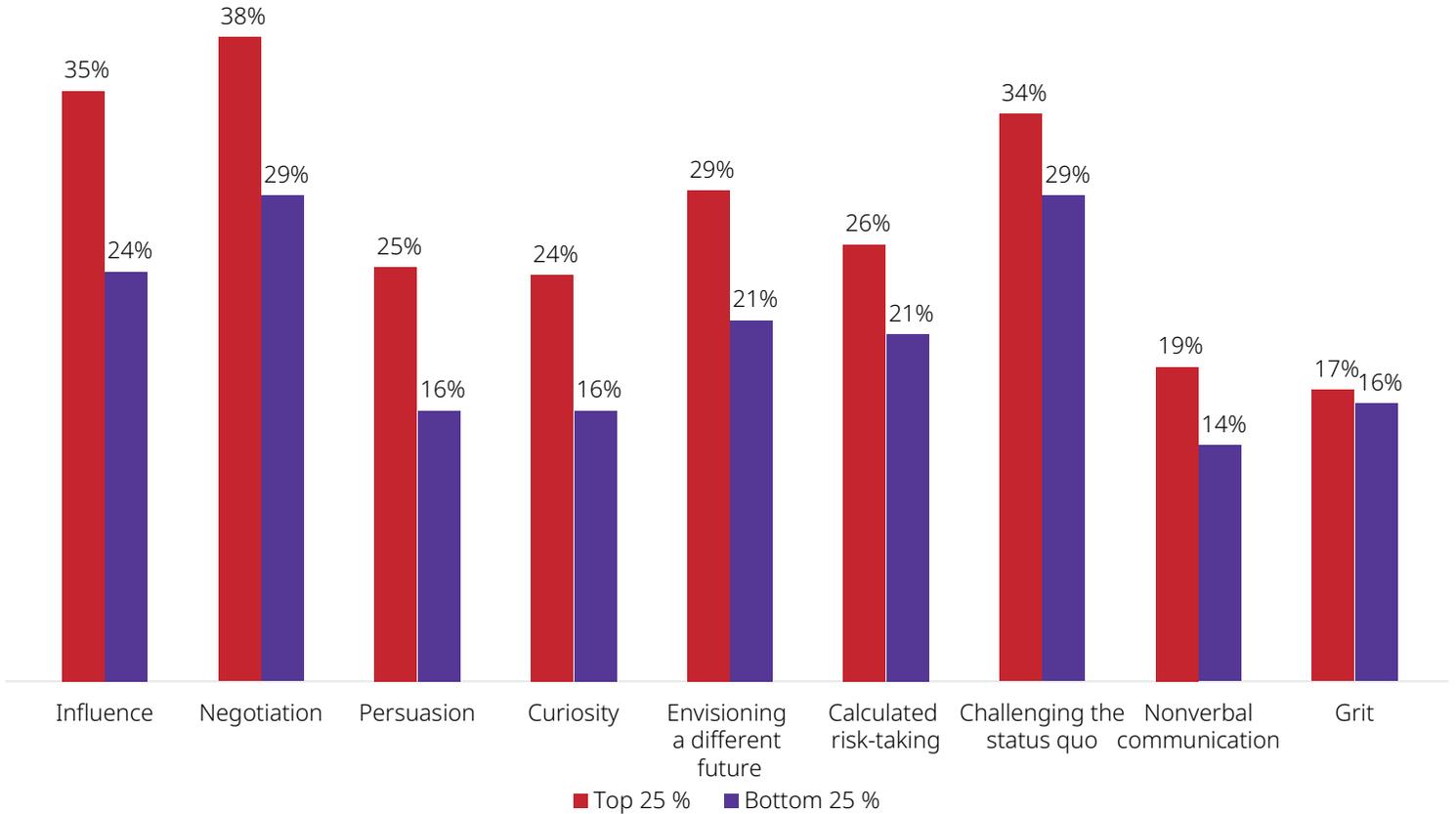
“Senior leaders tend to be more comfortable taking risks by bringing in different perspectives to their decision-making, and deciding what to push forward and what not to prioritize. Middle managers, however, are much less willing to take risks as they want to make sure that they're achieving their objectives. They'll keep that influence in decision-making to themselves versus broadening out the perspectives. Our people manager training program will focus on the middle managers to help them develop these skills.”

—Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer, A large not-for-profit organization

When we cut the data by respondent level, we see 2 other items come up as important for managers—patience and managing ambiguity.



Figure 13: Frequencies of Positively Correlated Manager Skills—Top vs. Bottom Quartile on the DEIB Index



Source: RedThread Research, 2021.

The importance of doing these things has been reinforced by our interviews. In the following example, a large tech company integrates DEIB skills into its manager development offerings.

Real-World Threads: Integrating belonging & learning at Airbnb

When it comes to identifying and developing skills for diversity and belonging (D&B), Airbnb has focused on its manager population. The company believes that, while DEIB should be integrated throughout the organization, it also needs dedicated attention, given a manager's role in a team member's experience of DEIB. The company, therefore, has integrated D&B fully into its core manager development program.

The program is comprised of 6 competencies that include:

- D&B
- Growth
- Clarity
- Accountability
- Empowerment
- Sustainability

While D&B is called out specifically as a competency in the program, it's also ingrained into the other competencies, such that D&B is both a vertical and a horizontal in the learning experience. It elevates D&B skills that allow managers to be open to new ideas, drive change, and navigate social complexity. For instance, managers learn to:

- Build diverse teams and get to know people, which can open them to new ideas
- Lean into sensitive conversations and sensitive topics, which can help navigate social complexity
- Provide opportunities to have equitable impact in terms of allocation of work and opportunities on the team, which can enable them to drive change within the org by empowering individuals

Similar to our analysis of senior leaders, we also identified manager skills having an inverse relationship with the DEIB Index: This means that, if respondents indicate these skills are important, then they rate their org lower on the DEIB Index. Again, the key to understanding this analysis is this: These skills alone aren't sufficient to create a culture of DEIB—the action-taking skills previously mentioned (e.g., influence, negotiation, persuasion, etc.) must also be present.

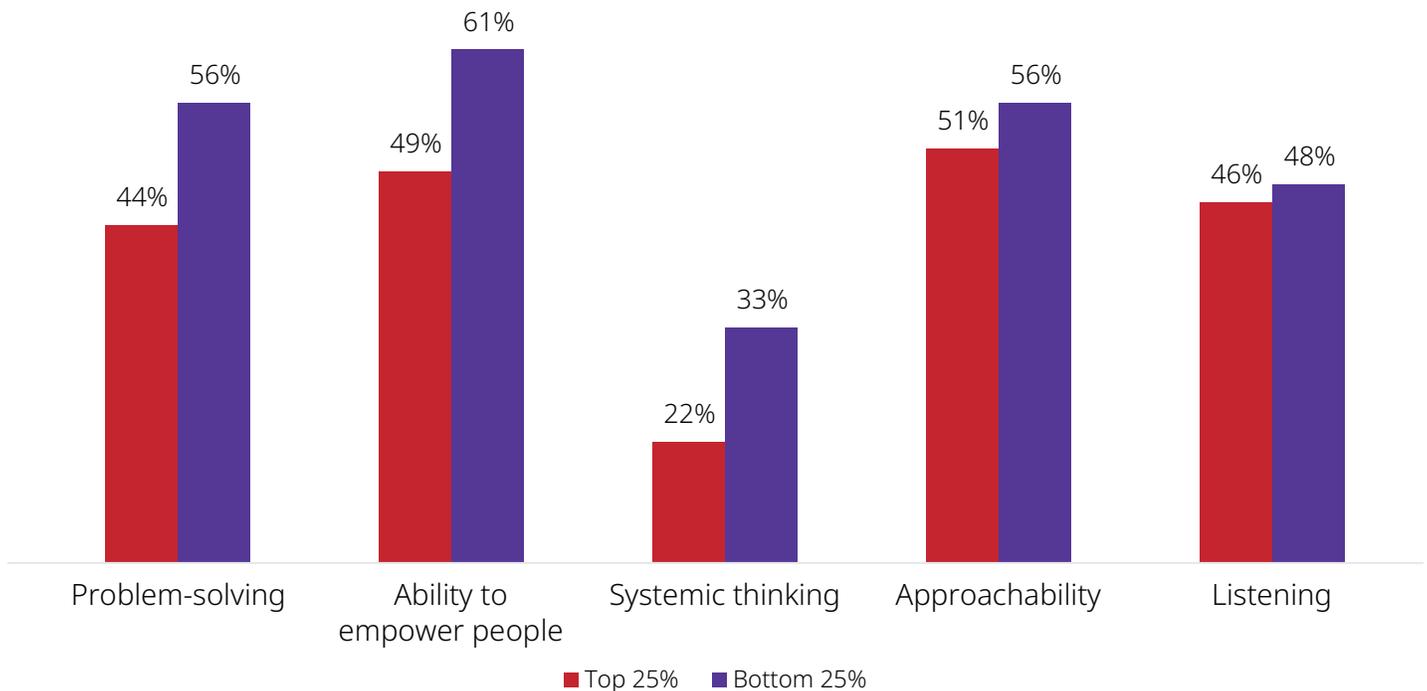


The specific negatively correlated skills for managers are, interestingly, very similar to those for senior leaders and include:

- Problem-solving
- Ability to empower people
- Systemic thinking
- Approachability
- Listening

Once again, as you see in Figure 14, these skills are important at about half of high DEIB orgs—but they're complemented with the other action-taking skills we just reiterated.

Figure 14: Frequencies of Negatively Correlated Manager Skills—Top vs. Bottom Quartile on the DEIB Index



Source: RedThread Research, 2021.



How This Varies

When we analyzed manager skills by various subgroups, we found the most interesting distinctions in these 3:

- Function: HR vs. non-HR
- Diversity characteristics: Race / ethnicity and gender
- Diversity characteristics: Gender

HR VS. NON-HR

Non-HR leaders called out just 1—all important—skill that HR leaders didn't—data literacy. Given how important data is to DEIB efforts (read our research on [DEIB analytics](#) if you want to know more), this is a critical skill to add to the list. The fact that HR leaders don't identify it as important is probably more a reflection of the need for many HR leaders to improve their own data literacy than a commentary on its necessity.

Data literacy is a critical skill to create a DEIB culture that was called out by non-HR leaders.

DIVERSITY CHARACTERISTICS: RACE / ETHNICITY

When we analyzed the data by race / ethnicity characteristics, we noted that, for Black respondents, a positive relationship exists between manager initiative-taking and the DEIB Index. For this population, it appears that seeing their manager take action on specific efforts is especially important.

Another item especially caught our attention: When Black and Hispanic respondents indicated vulnerability to be an important manager characteristic, their org's DEIB rating was lower. To reiterate our theme of this paper, this insight is not saying that vulnerability isn't important—it's showing that vulnerability alone is not enough.

DIVERSITY CHARACTERISTICS: GENDER

Our analysis by gender revealed 2 additional skills that, when indicated as important by women, correlate with higher performance on the DEIB Index—optimism and attention to detail. For the former point, we assume this is a more public version of grit (identified as critical in the broader data set)—as it's through optimism that things get better and people are encouraged to push through difficult times.



For the latter point, our interviews and literature review reveal that often women, in particular, feel microaggressions and other items which undermine DEIB happen in the details of worklife—meaning they're not immediately obvious. We believe this is the reason for this positive relationship between attention to detail and the DEIB Index.

Conversely, we see a lot of negatively correlated skills for women respondents. Specifically, when women select the following items as important manager skills, their orgs perform poorly on the DEIB Index:

- Advocacy
- Objectivity
- Respect
- Self-awareness
- Self-regulation
- Stress management

Again, our interpretation is when women see these skills as important in their orgs, it's because that's what they see as being done well. This means they're not seeing the action-taking skills demonstrated in their orgs.

Individuals: Genuinely Showing Up for What's Possible

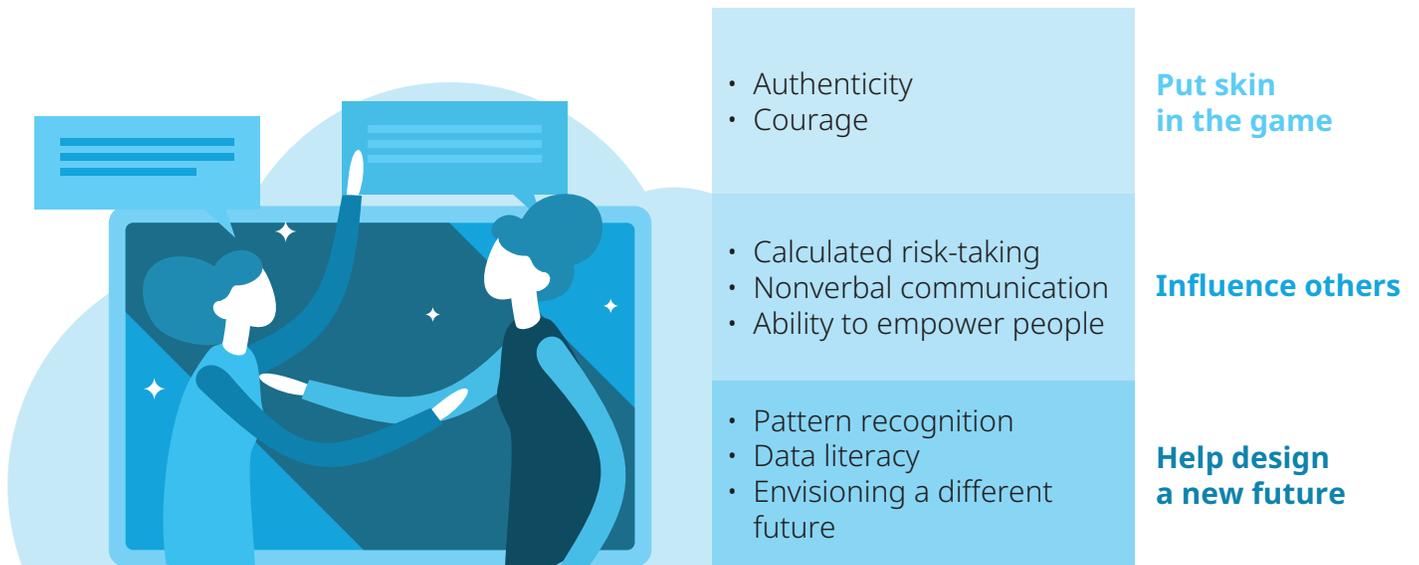
The skills individuals need very clearly reflect their unique opportunity to influence DEIB within orgs. Many individuals lack organizational authority to drive change, yet they can make such an impact when they put their authentic selves into the effort. Our analysis shows that, when individuals exhibit the following skills, they score their org much higher on the DEIB Index (see Figure 15):

1. **Put skin in the game** by showing up authentically, and demonstrating courage in what they say and do
2. **Influence others** by managing their nonverbal communication, effectively empowering people, and engaging in calculated risk-taking
3. **Help design a new future** by recognizing patterns, accurately interpreting data and information, and using that insight to envision a different future while managing ambiguity

This is a clear call to action for orgs to move beyond the basics of DEIB and into teaching managers the skills they need to actually drive change at the managerial level.



Figure 15: Individual Skills—By Theme



Source: RedThread Research, 2021.

As you can tell, by and large, the skills for individuals are quite different from those of senior leaders and managers. For example, the 2 skills we have grouped in Figure 15 under “put skin in the game”—courage and authenticity—are reflective of how personal DEIB efforts are at the individual level. People can’t show up for DEIB just because it’s a corporate goal. Instead, individuals need skills that allow them to make DEIB personal.

“Courage is seen as an umbrella for having difficult conversations. Being courageous catalyzes a healthy culture of constructive feedback. However, offering and receiving feedback is built on the condition of establishing psychological safety. As individuals we need to ask ourselves, “Can I be humble, check my defenses, and tune in with curiosity to see if another person’s feedback helps me grow and learn?”

—Jyoti Argade, Culture, Diversity & Belonging Manager, Autodesk

This concept of “skin in the game” is then very closely related to how individuals can influence others. The skills individuals need here are:

- Calculated risk-taking by knowing what efforts to prioritize and when
- Nonverbal communication via enabling individuals to reinforce their point without words

Interestingly, when we analyze these data by level (i.e., what individual contributors say is important for individuals), we find 2 additional skills relevant to influencing others—approachability and adapting communication style to the audience. This speaks to the overall need for individuals to effectively communicate about DEIB.

Individuals also should be able to empower others. The fact that this item—empowering people—shows up at the individual level is interesting because it has a negative correlation with the DEIB Index at both the manager and senior leader levels. If managers and senior leaders are primarily “empowering” others, then they’re not taking on the responsibilities themselves that are necessary to drive DEIB change. Obviously, leaders can’t drive DEIB culture change on their own. But, as discussed earlier, getting other people involved isn’t the same as holding others accountable for driving change. By contrast, when individuals empower people, they’re doing it without any formal power themselves.

And then there’s the final set of skills—helping design a new future. This involves:

- Data literacy
- Pattern recognition by being able to interpret that data
- Envisioning a new future

These skills, together, allow for appropriate optimism, as well as an ability to push managers and leaders to themselves envision a new future.

“When it comes to individual employees, a sense of optimism, to envision a different future, a better world, and to believe that this work means something, is needed. It is really easy to be disheartened by what we see on the news and around us. But it’s also a chance for organizations to be a glimmer of hope for their employees’ during dark times.”

—Erick Mitchell, EVP, Ivy Planning Group

So, what does it mean to empower others when you lack power? It means to inspire others—to help others see the change that’s within their own power to create, to help others see a new future.



Notably, we saw this set of skills come together during the social justice movements of summer 2020, when many corporate leaders began listening much more to Black employees' experiences and suggestions for how to improve. The following is an example of what this looked like.

Real-World Threads: The power of individuals leading conversations



Equinix, a real-estate investment trust company, releases a twice-monthly blog series, entitled “Nothing Left Unsaid,” which focuses on the typically undiscussed elements of the COVID-19 pandemic and social issues in general. These employee stories have touched on depression, anti-Black racism, anti-Asian racism, being an isolated over 60-worker, addiction recovery, and parenting while sheltering-in-place.

The intent is that, in sharing these stories, it would help everyone become aware of how others may be experiencing this time in our lives, inspire us to more deeply connect with each other, flex our empathy muscles, and perhaps even offer ourselves more compassion and patience during a challenging time. It serves to normalize and open up dialogue for all employees—including between managers and direct reports—on some of the more unstated challenges of the pandemic.

“[Nothing Left Unsaid] has been really powerful in creating space to talk about what’s been happening for employees. We’ve got an incredible response from it.”

—Janet Ladd, Director of Inclusion and Belonging, Equinix

Equinix also launched a 24-hour grassroots event, called “WeConnect,” which utilized Zoom lines, breakout rooms, open chat, and videos to bring employees together to discuss systemic racism, social justice, and self-care. This event featured employee-led “Courageous Conversations” around identity, race, prejudice, inclusion, intersectionality, and being an ally. WeConnect drew in more than 1,800 unique participants, and created an opportunity for employees to come together and work toward change within the organization and the community at-large.



Real-World Threads: Providing an inclusive language guide for all¹⁵



As part of their diversity and inclusion (D&I) efforts, Standard Chartered has provided its employees with several resources that highlight diverse voices and provide support, one of which is their Inclusive Language Guide. Standard Chartered developed the guide to provide tangible examples of inclusive language across all areas of D&I and help people understand why inclusive language is important.

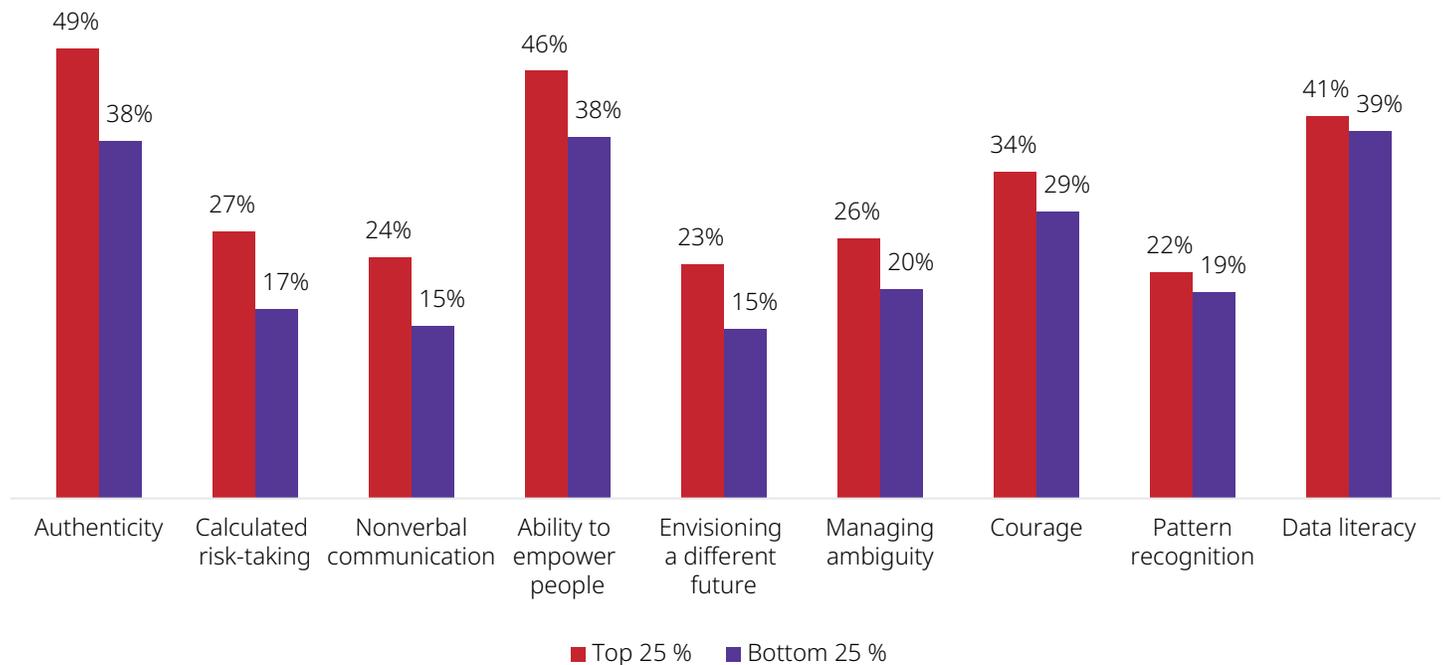
Along with helpful tips and guidance around gender-inclusive language and nationality, ethnicity and racially inclusive language among other areas, the guide provides information around nonverbal communication. Specifically, it helps employees understand what it all encompasses (i.e., eye rolling, crossing arms, and fidgeting when someone is talking) and how it can be influenced by unconscious bias. In addition, the guide helps them understand how they can embrace inclusive nonverbal communication by:

- Active listening
- Eye contact
- Positive body language and facial expressions
- Remembering names and information
- Removing other distractions when someone is talking

Individuals at orgs high on the DEIB Index leverage these skills much more often than those at the bottom of the Index (see Figure 16). The first 2 skills in the graphic reflect the balance of individually showing up (authenticity) with understanding the social complexity of supporting DEIB efforts as an individual (calculated risk-taking).



Figure 16: Frequencies of Positively Correlated Individual Skills—Top vs. Bottom Quartile on the DEIB Index



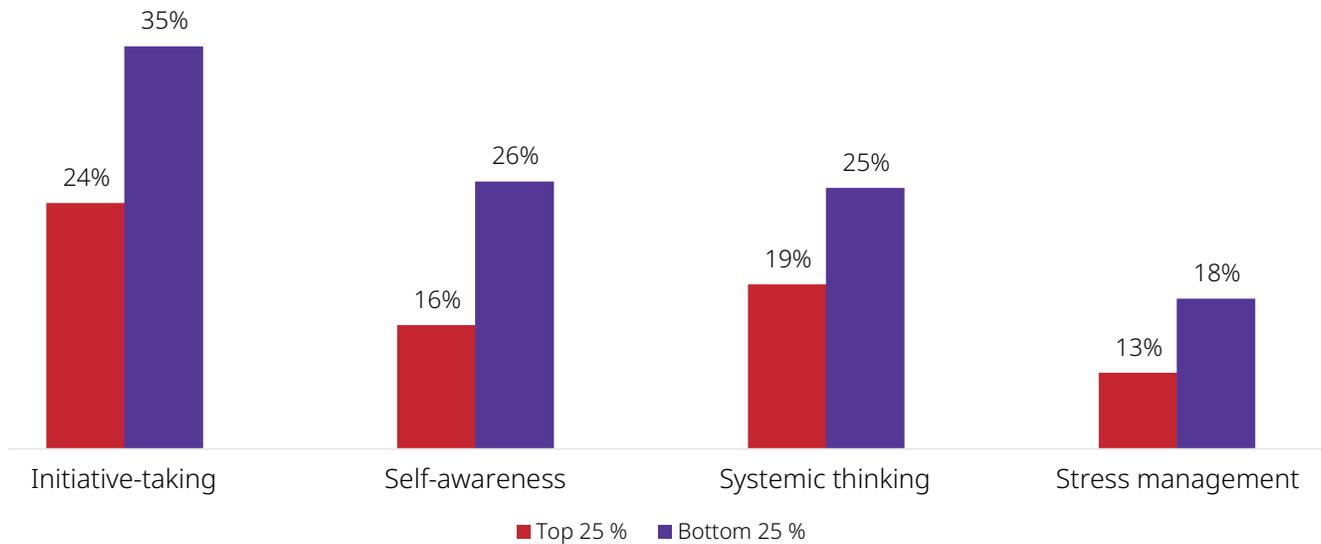
Source: RedThread Research, 2021.

Interestingly, when we identified the individual skills that have an inverse relationship with the DEIB index, we see very different skills than are present for managers and senior leaders, such as:

- Initiative-taking
- Self-awareness
- Systemic thinking
- Stress management

We see these skills negatively correlated because skills like initiative-taking and systemic thinking are very hard to use as an individual in a DEIB context: Those are skills that are better used by senior leaders and managers, given their larger charter to drive change. Further, self-awareness and stress management tend to be passive and self-focused skills: While important, those skills are unlikely—especially when used on their own—to really change the broader picture of DEIB in an org. (See Figure 17.)

Figure 17: Frequencies of Negatively Correlated Individual Skills—Top vs. Bottom Quartile on the DEIB Index



Source: RedThread Research, 2021.

How This Varies

Below, we’ve highlighted the biggest differences we identified in subgroups of individuals.

HR VS. NON-HR

Interestingly, the primary distinction between HR and non-HR respondents is that the latter conveys a positive correlation between the DEIB Index, and approachability and adapting communication style to audience. These 2 communication-heavy skills underscore how much individuals put themselves on the line when they talk about DEIB. We believe this may be an opportunity for HR to weave a focus on DEIB communication into training efforts.

Approachability and adapting communication style to the audience are two skills called out by non-HR leaders as critical.

DIVERSITY CHARACTERISTICS: RACE / ETHNICITY

When we analyze the data by race / ethnicity, we observe a few interesting insights (see Figure 18). First, for Black respondents, we see a positive relationship between:

- Adapting communication style to audience and our DEIB Index
- Attention to detail and the DEIB Index (with a negative relationship between those 2 for white respondents)

Two other unique correlations by race / ethnicity include:

- Listening—for Hispanic respondents
- Managing ambiguity—for white respondents

Figure 18: Items Positively & Negatively Correlated with the DEIB Index—by Race / Ethnicity*

SKILLS	RACE / ETHNICITY		
	Black	Hispanic	White
Ability to empower people			▲
Adapting communication style to audience	▲		
Attention to detail	▲		▼
Authenticity	▲		
Calculated risk-taking	▲		▲
Envisioning a different future			▲
Initiative-taking			▼
Listening	▼	▲	▼
Managing ambiguity			▲
Negotiation	▼		
Objectivity	▼		
Optimism		▼	
Problem-solving			▼
Self-awareness			▼
Self-regulation	▼		
Systemic thinking			▼

*Black arrows equate to positively correlated items, while red arrows equate to negatively correlated items.

Source: RedThread Research, 2021.

DIVERSITY CHARACTERISTICS: GENDER

We identified 2 interesting findings by gender that negatively correlate with the DEIB Index:

- For women—asking probing questions
- For men—collaboration

Again, it's hard to say why this relationship exists, but we believe it has to do with both of these skills being fairly passive in nature.



Wrapping Up

As we said at the beginning of this report, it's essential to seek out novel approaches to improving DEIB as much of what orgs have done in the past hasn't resulted in meaningful change. We turned to this topic of skills for DEIB because it represented an opportunity for new insight and approaches.

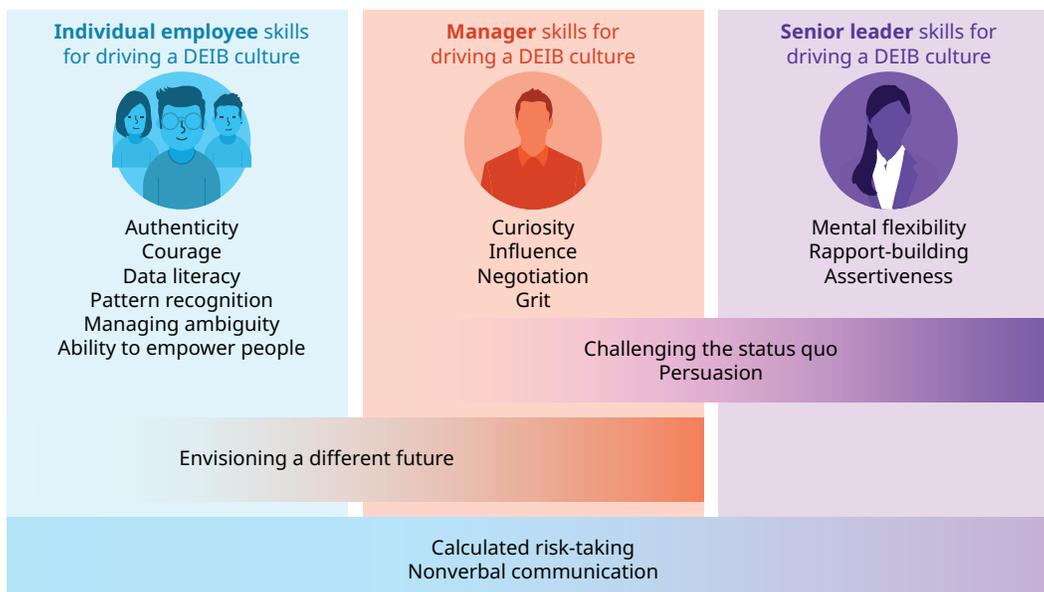
The primary objective of this research is to bring data and clarity to a really difficult question:

Which skills are needed to enable a strong DEIB culture?

We knew the answer would be “it depends”—but, with this report, we've been able to show more succinctly at least part of what it's dependent on—an employee's level, their function, and in some instances their diversity characteristics.

We identified 19 skills that have a strong relationship with a stronger DEIB culture (see Figure 19): Orgs with stronger DEIB cultures have better talent and organizational outcomes.

Figure 19: Skills to Drive a DEIB Culture—By Employee Level



Source: RedThread Research, 2021.



Broadly speaking, we want individuals, managers, and employees to perform the following skills (see Figure 20).

Figure 20: DEIB Skills by Theme for Individuals, Managers & Senior Leaders

		
Individuals	Managers	Senior Leaders
<p>Put skin in the game by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Showing up authentically • Demonstrating courage in what they say and do <p>Influence others by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing their nonverbal communication • Effectively empowering people • Engaging in calculated risk-taking <p>Help design a new future by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognizing patterns • Accurately interpreting data and information • Using that insight to envision a different future • Managing ambiguity 	<p>Be open to new ideas by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being curious • Willingness to envision a different future <p>Drive and monitor change by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenging the status quo • Demonstrating grit in following through • Engaging in calculated risk-taking <p>Navigate social complexity by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leveraging negotiation skills • Exhibiting persuasion skills • Using influence skills • Deploying effective nonverbal communication 	<p>Push for change by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenging the status quo • Being assertive • Showing mental flexibility <p>Use actions to speak louder than words via:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nonverbal communication • Rapport-building <p>Be socially savvy as demonstrated by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking calculated risks • Using persuasion skills

Source: RedThread Research, 2021.

With the insights from this research, we hope you do 5 things:

1. Understand which skills are most important for all employees to have and which might be more appropriate for certain levels
2. Cross-reference the skills we identified with the skills your org focuses on when hiring, developing, and rewarding employees
3. Identify gaps and prioritize DEIB skills to focus on and to make the explicit connection to creating a DEIB culture
4. Experiment with how to integrate DEIB contexts into your skills-based approaches to hiring, developing, and rewarding employees
5. Proceed with confidence that you're moving beyond ineffective approaches and embracing those that have a data-based foundation

With this new approach, you'll find new ways to drive change in your DEIB culture at-scale.

We can't wait to hear how it goes. As always, feel free to give us your thoughts, feedback, or progress at hello@redthreadresearch.com.



Appendices



Appendix 1: Research Methodology

This report is a culmination of 6 months of qualitative and quantitative research. We began in March 2021 with an exhaustive literature review of 60 articles, the primary findings of which have been published on our website.

We then conducted extensive qualitative data collection. We facilitated 2 80-minute roundtables in April and May 2021, with 43 and 31 leaders, respectively, representing HR, DEIB, and learning in the first roundtable, and employees from all functions in the second roundtable. The intention was to understand how organizations identify and develop skills for DEIB, and the roles that different groups play in leveraging those skills for DEIB.

We also conducted 60-minute interviews with 20 HR, DEIB, and learning leaders. In addition to this work, we conducted our podcast season, *The Skills Obsession*, through which we talked about all things skills with 8 different guests. These conversations frequently touched on DEIB.

On the quantitative side, we developed a comprehensive 211 item survey, which we ran from June to July 2021. This survey covered organizational and individual demographics, organizational and individual performance, DEIB, skills importance and effectiveness, and other factors that could influence skills and DEIB.

For the skills portion of the survey, we started with a list of close to 100 skills / competencies / behaviors that had been identified as critical during the qualitative portion of the research. We then compared those skills to 5 different existing skills taxonomies to understand how others classify skills. We decided to create our own taxonomy, eventually settling on “personal,” “interpersonal,” and “technical” skill groupings. We then went through an exhaustive minimization process, whereby we first identified if skills are truly skills, using our framework to see if skills are:



- Granular
- What an employee does (vs. how a job is done)
- A learned ability
- Transferable within and across orgs

We then broke down all the skills into their most basic components and eliminated any that had overlap (for example, communication was broken down into listening, adapting communication style to audience, and nonverbal communication). Ultimately, we ended up with a list of 48 discrete skills that we believe covered the range of the close to 100 skills / competencies / behaviors we had initially identified.

Respondents were asked within the survey to identify if a skill was important for themselves as individuals, their manager, and their most senior leader to create a culture of DEIB.

For the latter 2 items, if a skill was identified as important, we then asked them to rate their manager's and most senior leader's effectiveness at that skill. Our assumption was that people would select importance based on what they thought was important, regardless of whether it was present in their managers or senior leaders. It turns out that assumption was wrong, in that people only selected an item as important if they saw their manager or senior leader as effective at the skill. The practical implication was that our effectiveness data had almost no variability since respondents could only rate skill effectiveness if they had identified the skills as important. The larger philosophical takeaway, though, is that people think what's important is what they see being demonstrated. This is an important insight from the study.

We had an n of 1,044 valid responses (see "Appendix 2" for survey demographics). A response was considered valid if the respondent was in our target demographic of being a working professional at an organization with more than 100 people and appeared to have answered the questions in good faith (i.e., no speeders, no responses of only one type, no illogical responses). We completed data analysis in August-September 2021.

We analyzed the data using frequencies, means, crosstabs, T-tests, correlation, principal component analysis, regression, and risk ratios.



In the course of our analysis, we created a DEIB Index, which included 6 questions designed to measure DEIB. These items include:

1. My org represents a diverse group of people (e.g., race, gender, age, disability, sexuality, education, religion, etc.).
2. People from all backgrounds and with a range of identities have equitable opportunities to advance at my org.
3. I feel respected by my colleagues.
4. I feel my unique background and identity are valued at my org.
5. I feel a sense of belonging at my org.
6. I feel included in the discussions and decisions that impact my job.

We initially completed a principal component analysis on these data and found that they had 2 components: org-level components (items 1 and 2 in the list above) and individual-level components (items 3-6 in the list above). For the sake of simplicity in analysis and storytelling, though, we decided to combine these items into a single DEIB Index. We used the mean of these responses to calculate the DEIB Index score.

Due to the challenges mentioned above with the lack of variability in the effectiveness data, the data structure (which was binary: important or not) meant we couldn't run regressions between the 48 skills and the DEIB Index. We therefore relied on correlations and conducted significant correlation analysis among the overall data set as well as within sub-populations. Unfortunately, our data set was not big enough to run intersectionality analysis (e.g., Black women or gay Asian men), so we didn't include that in our report.

We arrived at our conclusions by blending together insights from the quantitative and the qualitative research streams.

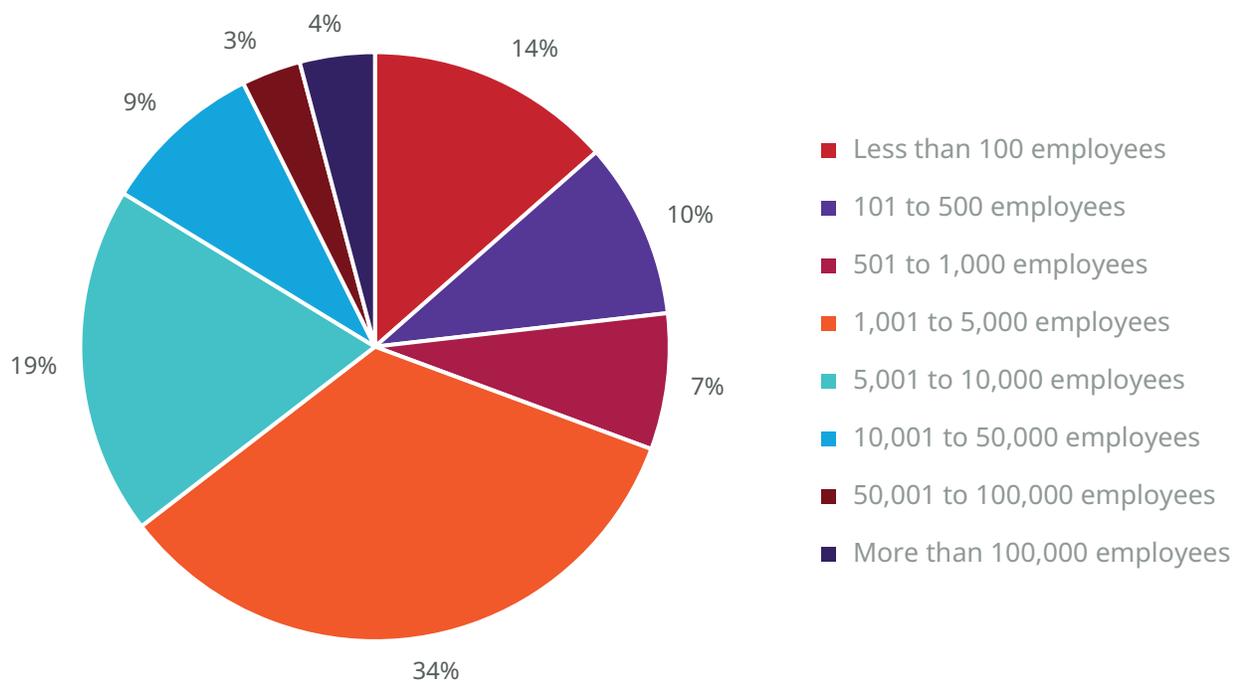
If you have additional questions about methodology, please reach out to hello@redthreadresearch.com.



Appendix 2: Survey Participant Demographics

After data cleaning, a final set of 1,044 respondents was included in the analysis. Below is the demographic breakdown for the survey participants by company size by number of employees, company size by annual revenue, job level, job function, headquarter location, industry, age, gender, and race.

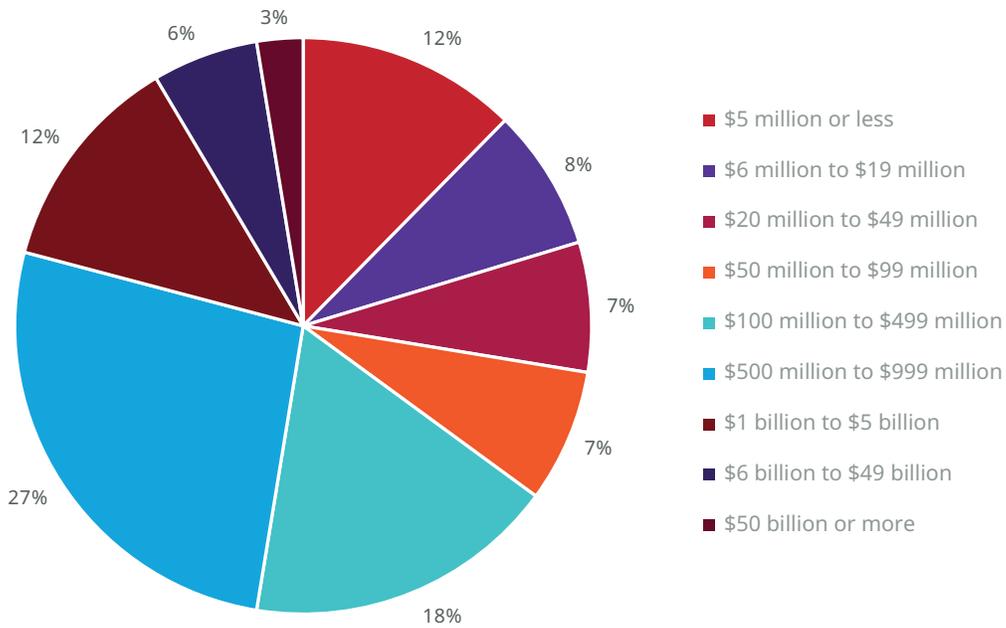
Figure 21: Respondents by Org Size—Based on Number of Employees



Source: RedThread Research, 2021.

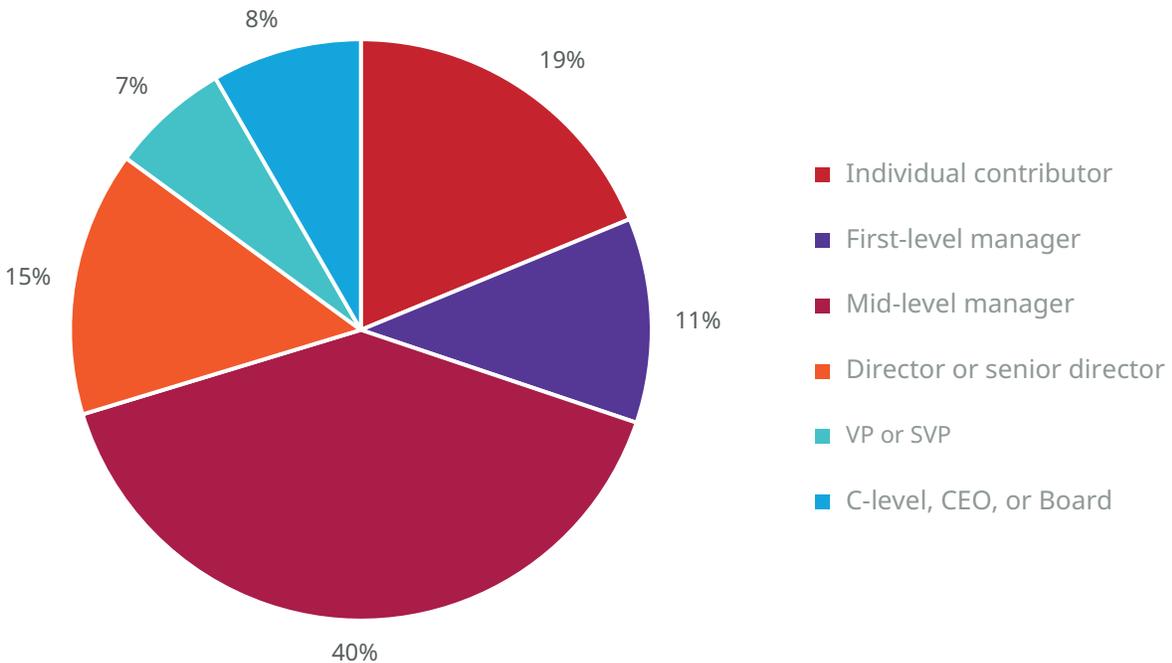


Figure 22: Respondents by Org Size—Based on Annual Revenue



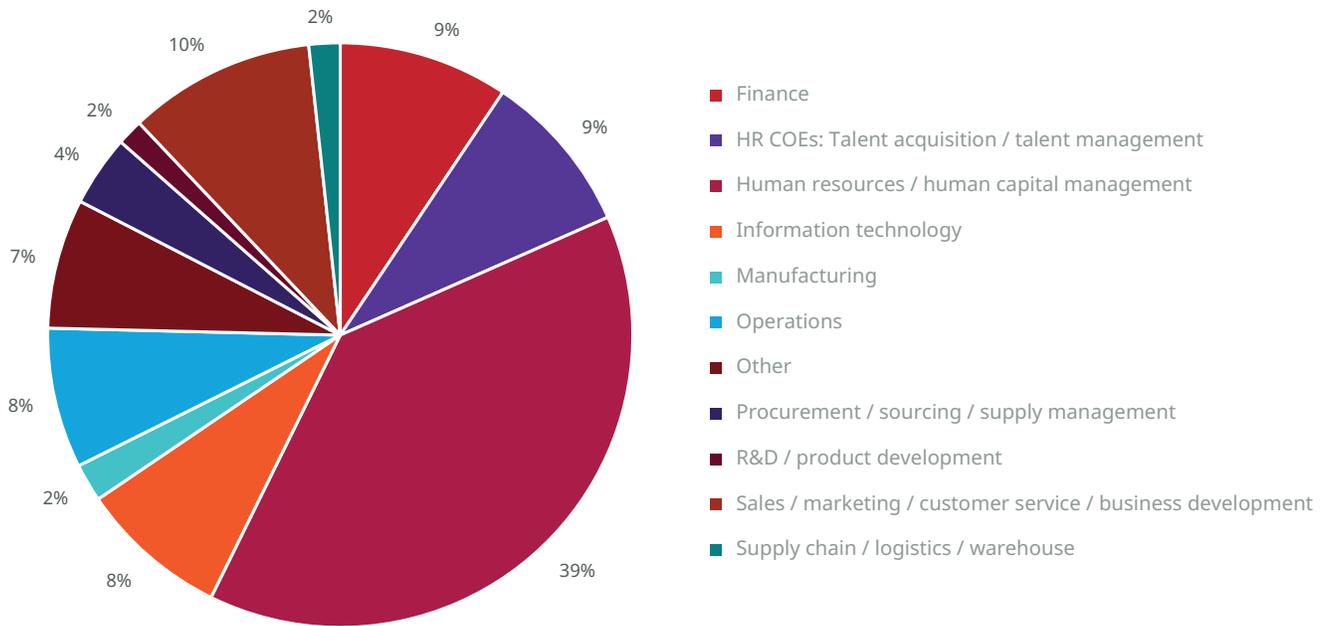
Source: RedThread Research, 2021.

Figure 23: Respondents by Job Level



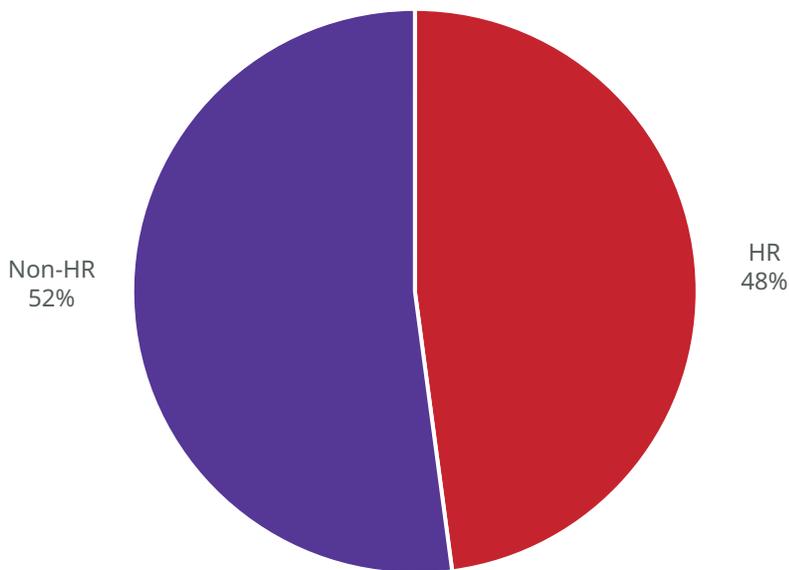
Source: RedThread Research, 2021.

Figure 24: Respondents by Job Function



Source: RedThread Research, 2021.

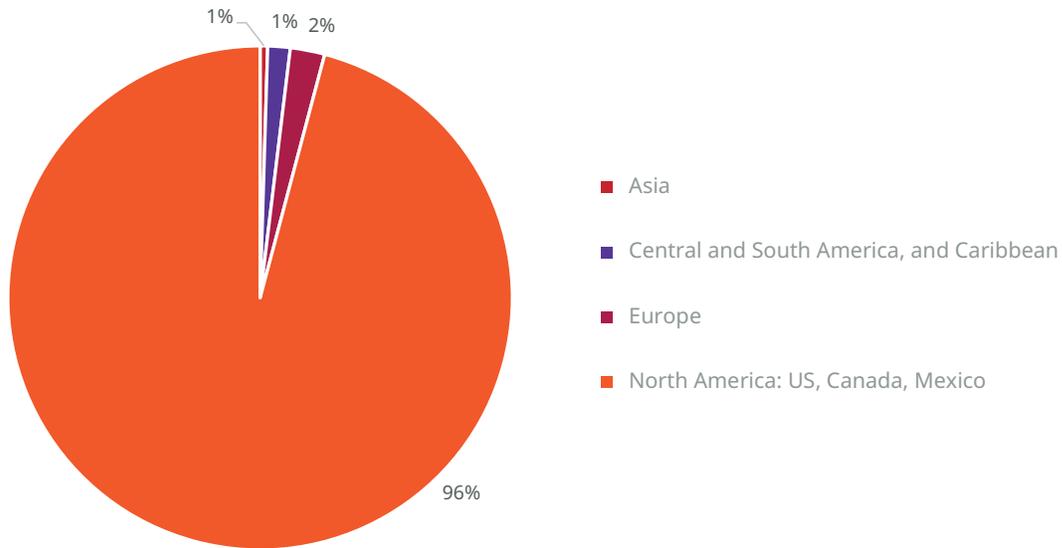
Figure 25: Respondents by Job Function—HR vs. Non-HR



Source: RedThread Research, 2021.

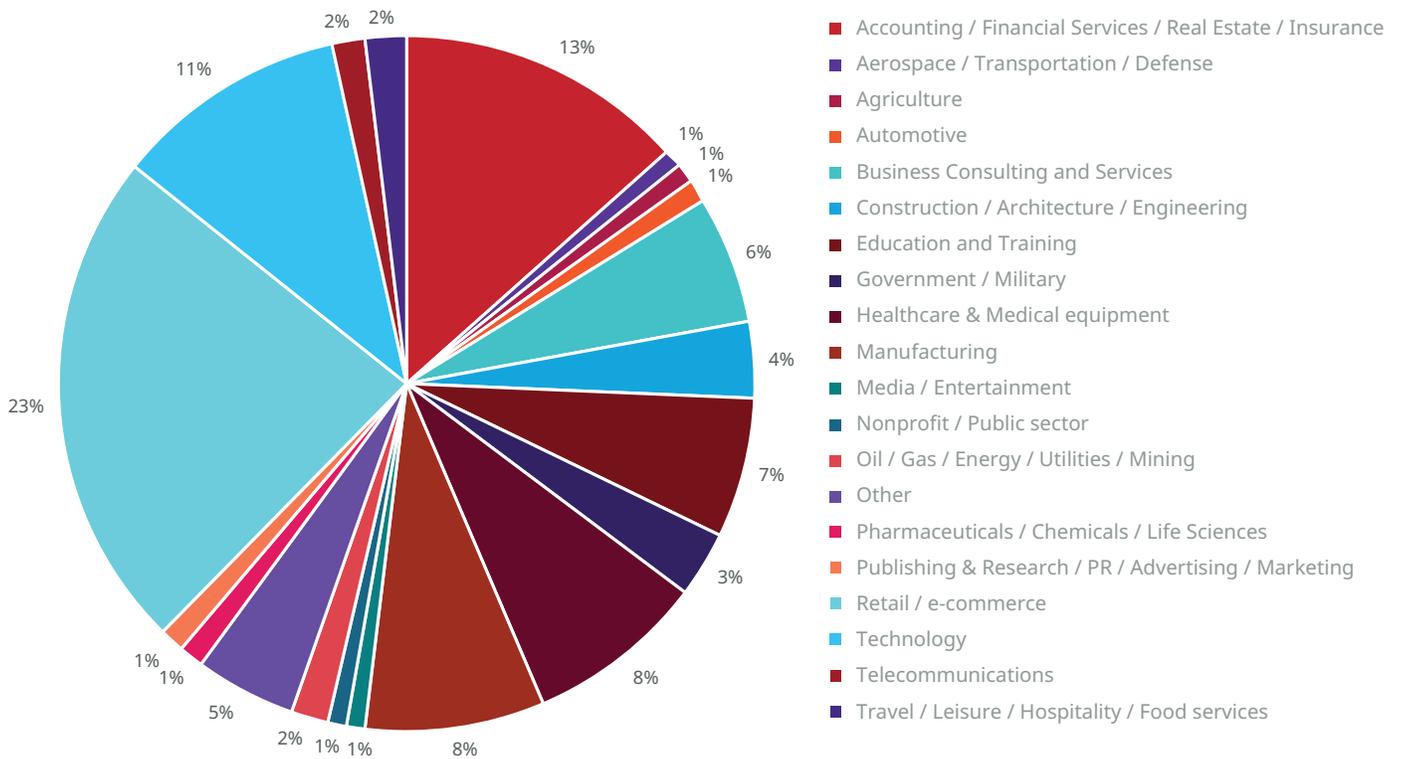


Figure 26: Respondents by HQs Location



Source: RedThread Research, 2021.

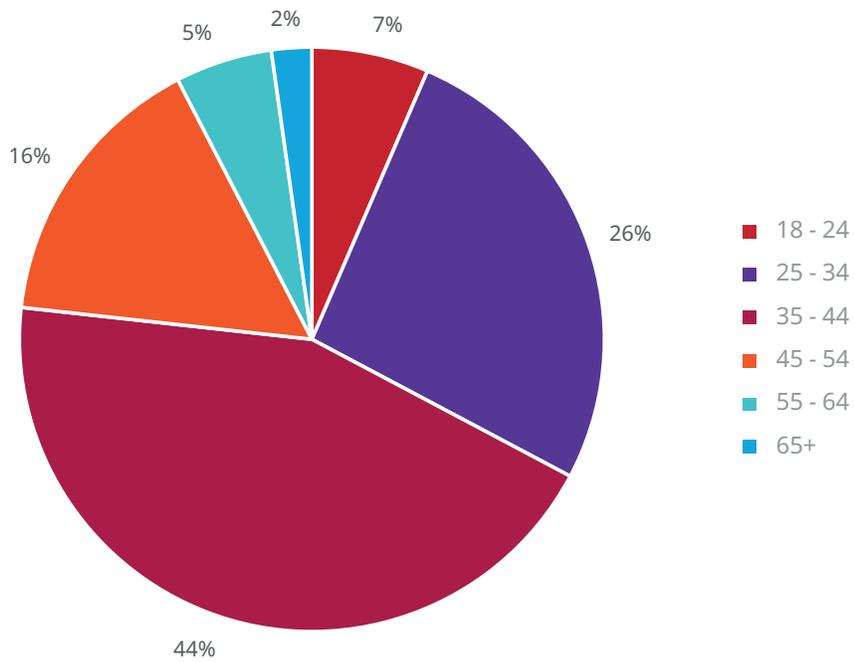
Figure 27: Respondents by Industry*



*Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

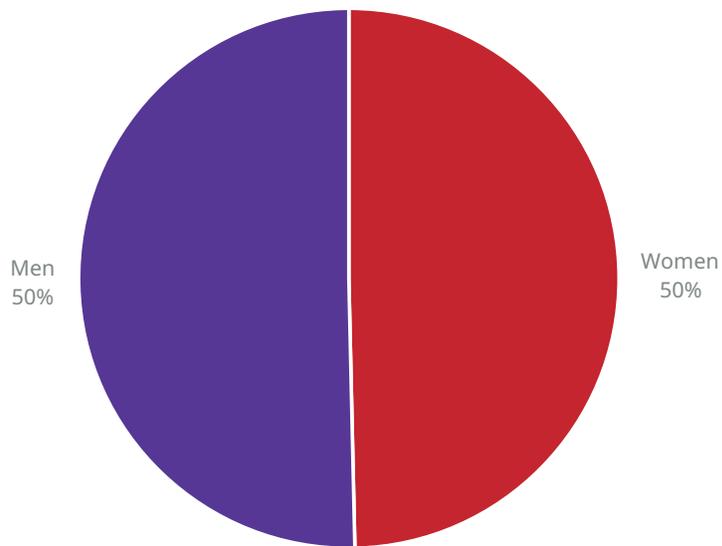
Source: RedThread Research, 2021.

Figure 28: Respondents by Age



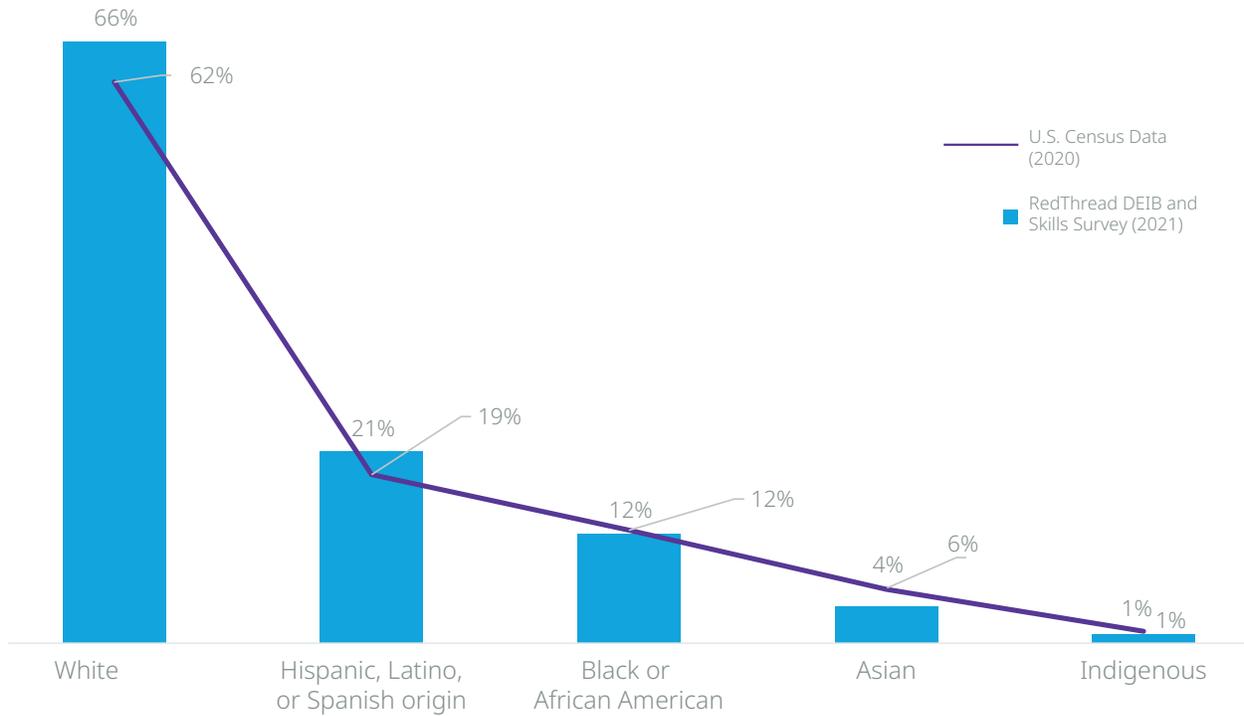
Source: RedThread Research, 2021.

Figure 29: Respondents by Gender



Source: RedThread Research, 2021.

Figure 30: Respondents by Race



Source: RedThread Research, 2021; U.S. Census Bureau 2020.

Appendix 3: Skills Frequencies by Top & Bottom Quartile

Figure 31 displays the frequencies for top quartile vs. bottom quartile for all skills tested in the survey.

Figure 31: Top Quartile vs. Bottom Quartile Skills Frequencies—By Leader Level

	INDIVIDUALS			MANAGERS			SENIOR LEADERS		
PERSONAL SKILLS	Top 25%	Bottom 25%	Delta	Top 25%	Bottom 25%	Delta	Top 25%	Bottom 25%	Delta
Approachability	50%	44%	6%	51%	56%	-5%	49%	51%	-2%
Attention to detail	52%	54%	-2%	39%	32%	7%	30%	28%	2%
Authenticity	49%	38%	11%	37%	41%	-3%	38%	39%	-1%
Calculated risk-taking	27%	17%	10%	26%	21%	5%	34%	26%	8%
Confidence	53%	53%	-0%	40%	39%	1%	39%	32%	7%
Courage	34%	29%	5%	31%	26%	5%	29%	22%	7%
Critical thinking	43%	45%	-2%	39%	42%	-3%	37%	42%	-4%
Curiosity	21%	23%	-3%	24%	16%	8%	12%	11%	1%
Envisioning a different future	23%	15%	8%	29%	21%	8%	31%	34%	-3%
Grit	16%	17%	-1%	17%	16%	1%	15%	14%	2%
Humility	31%	22%	9%	34%	31%	2%	28%	26%	2%
Initiative-taking	24%	35%	-10%	28%	27%	1%	18%	25%	-7%
Mental flexibility	26%	23%	2%	23%	19%	3%	30%	21%	10%
Objectivity	19%	17%	2%	24%	30%	-6%	32%	26%	6%
Openness to experience	18%	20%	-2%	24%	19%	5%	22%	21%	0%
Optimism	19%	19%	-1%	21%	16%	5%	31%	28%	4%
Patience	21%	23%	-2%	27%	32%	-5%	30%	30%	-0%
Reflective thinking	15%	12%	3%	16%	16%	1%	21%	23%	-2%
Self-awareness	16%	26%	-10%	19%	25%	-6%	15%	24%	-9%
Self-regulation	9%	12%	-4%	11%	14%	-3%	14%	15%	-1%
Stress management	13%	18%	-5%	16%	19%	-3%	18%	23%	-5%
Vulnerability	6%	5%	1%	8%	8%	-1%	8%	9%	-1%

Source: RedThread Research, 2021; U.S. Census Bureau 2020.

Figure 31: Top Quartile vs. Bottom Quartile Skills Frequencies—By Leader Level

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS	INDIVIDUALS			MANAGERS			SENIOR LEADERS		
	Top 25%	Bottom 25%	Delta	Top 25%	Bottom 25%	Delta	Top 25%	Bottom 25%	Delta
Ability to empower people	46%	38%	8%	49%	61%	-12%	55%	60%	-5%
Adapting communication style to audience	44%	40%	4%	44%	40%	4%	44%	38%	5%
Advocacy	40%	37%	4%	39%	41%	-2%	36%	36%	1%
Assertiveness	34%	41%	-7%	32%	29%	3%	31%	27%	4%
Challenging the status quo	37%	37%	1%	34%	29%	5%	37%	33%	4%
Collaboration	53%	53%	0%	48%	47%	1%	41%	42%	-1%
Compassion	31%	32%	-1%	33%	36%	-3%	30%	33%	-3%
Discretion	27%	31%	-4%	30%	30%	-0%	23%	26%	-3%
Empathy	39%	41%	-2%	44%	44%	-1%	38%	43%	-5%
Feedback	35%	28%	7%	35%	35%	0%	28%	29%	-1%
Influence	23%	22%	1%	35%	24%	11%	27%	29%	-2%
Listening	44%	49%	-5%	46%	48%	-2%	49%	44%	5%
Nonverbal communication	24%	15%	8%	19%	14%	5%	24%	18%	6%
Persuasion	21%	16%	5%	25%	16%	8%	25%	18%	7%
Rapport-building	29%	30%	-1%	25%	24%	1%	31%	24%	7%
Respect	45%	47%	-2%	38%	41%	-3%	48%	51%	-3%
Storytelling	9%	10%	-1%	8%	7%	0%	15%	14%	1%

Source: RedThread Research, 2021; U.S. Census Bureau 2020.

Figure 31: Top Quartile vs. Bottom Quartile Skills Frequencies—By Leader Level

TECHNICAL SKILLS	INDIVIDUALS			MANAGERS			SENIOR LEADERS		
	Top 25%	Bottom 25%	Delta	Top 25%	Bottom 25%	Delta	Top 25%	Bottom 25%	Delta
Asking probing questions	49%	50%	-1%	40%	33%	8%	41%	34%	7%
Creativity	56%	50%	6%	38%	32%	6%	36%	30%	6%
Data literacy	41%	39%	2%	36%	31%	5%	28%	33%	-5%
Managing ambiguity	26%	20%	6%	39%	37%	1%	32%	28%	4%
Negotiation	23%	23%	-1%	38%	29%	9%	35%	29%	7%
Pattern recognition	22%	19%	2%	32%	30%	3%	28%	28%	-0%
Problem-solving	54%	55%	-1%	44%	56%	-12%	51%	57%	-6%
Systemic thinking	19%	25%	-6%	22%	33%	-12%	38%	42%	-5%

Source: RedThread Research, 2021; U.S. Census Bureau 2020.

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Stacia is a researcher and thought leader on talent management, leadership, D&I, people analytics, and HR technology. A frequent speaker and writer, her work has been featured in Fortune, Forbes, The New York Times, and The Wall Street Journal as well as in numerous HR trade publications. Stacia co-founded RedThread Research in 2018, after leading talent and workforce research for eight years at Bersin by Deloitte. Before Bersin, Stacia spent approximately five years conducting research and creating learning content for the Corporate Leadership Council, part of CEB/Gartner. She has an MBA from the University of California, Berkeley, and a master's degree from the London School of Economics.



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Endnotes

- 1 We define these terms as follows:
 - **Diversity:** The variation in backgrounds, attitudes, values, beliefs, experiences, behaviors, and lifestyle preferences with respect to gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, language, age, mental and physical abilities and characteristics, sexual orientation, education, religion, socio-economic situation, marital status, social roles, personality traits, and ways of thinking.
 - **Equity:** The fair and respectful treatment of all people, which includes providing equitable access, opportunity, and advancement for everyone, and taking into account factors that may have resulted in uneven distribution of resources.
 - **Inclusion:** Acts or practices that provide an equitable and fair distribution of resources (jobs, income, opportunities, access to information, etc.). Such acts and practices enable all members, including those from underrepresented groups, to be respected and appreciated for their unique contributions and be fully integrated into the informal networks of an organization.
 - **Belonging:** The sense of security and support one has resulting from a belief in being accepted and valued for being their “authentic self.”
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- 10 “Why Doesn’t Diversity Training Work? The Challenge for Industry and Academia,” *Anthropology Now* / Frank Dobbin & Alexandra Kalev, September 2018, <https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/dobbin/files/an2018.pdf>
- 11 Another study to come out of this effort on DEIB analytics. *Diversity Analytics: A Guide to Why & How to Get Started*, RedThread Research / Stacia Garr & Priyanka Mehrotra, August 2021, <https://redthreadresearch.com/deib-analytics-guide/>
- 12 There are some articles out there about DEIB skills, but they’re almost always based on people’s opinions of which skills matter, not data.
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