

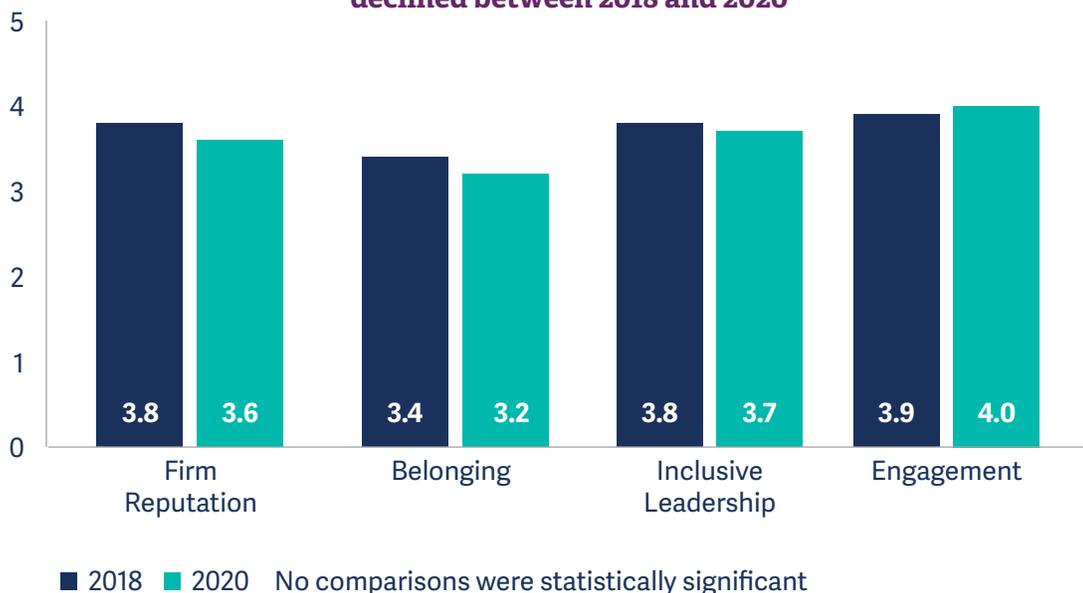
# The Path to Diversity, Equity & Inclusion is Not Always Linear

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Most leaders would like to believe that their organizations are making linear – if slow -- progress on fostering diversity, equity and inclusion. Yet in reality, progress tends to be choppy, with two steps forward in some years and one step back in others.

This reality became apparent in the [2020 Inclusion Index survey](#) that Russell Reynolds Associates ran in partnership with the Minority Corporate Counsel Association. A key finding from our multi-year collaboration: The overall sense of belonging in the workplace has declined since 2018, with little to no progress in other measures of DE&I success.

**Key MCCA/RRA Inclusion Index outcome measures declined between 2018 and 2020**

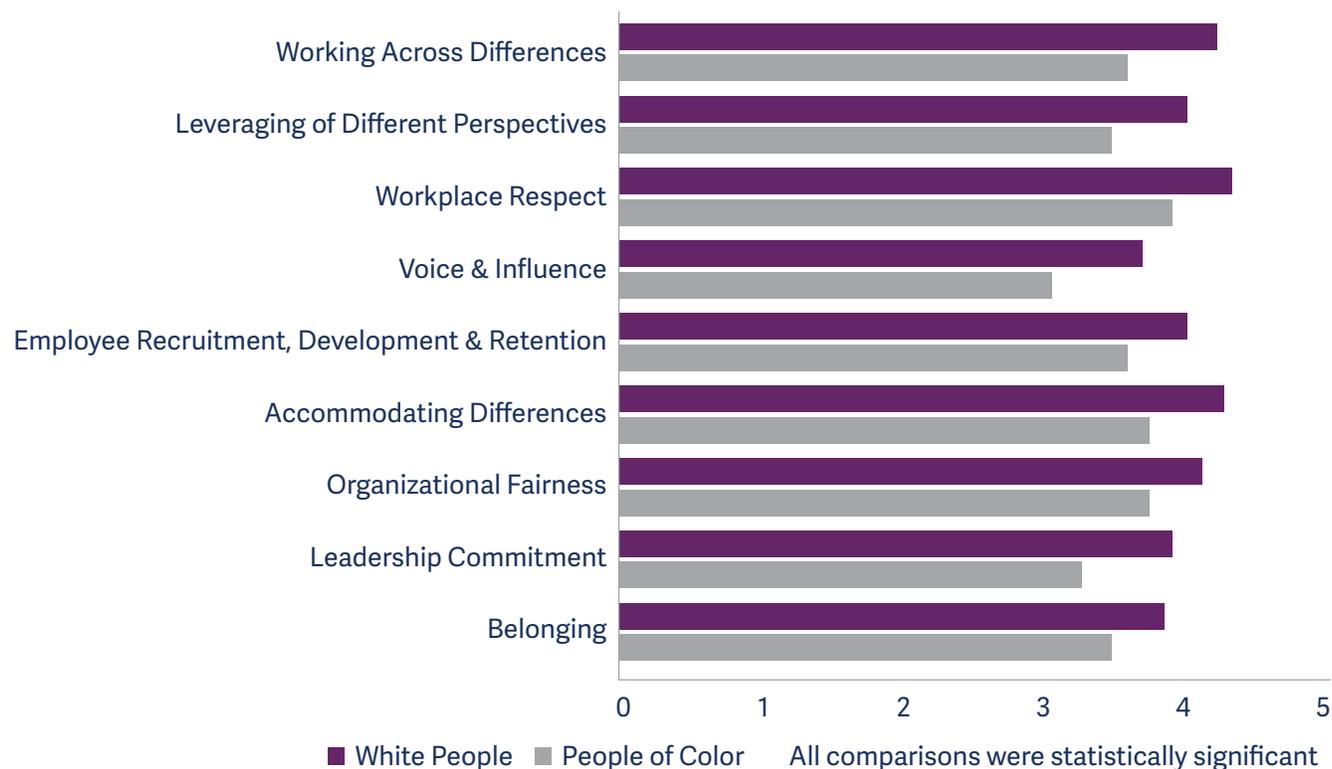


Note: MCCA/RRA Inclusion Index 2020, n=283; MCC/RRA Inclusion Index 2018 n=655

The Inclusion Index research asked hundreds of attorneys at law firms and in-house legal departments how they felt about their organizations’ leaders, hiring practices and cultures. While survey respondents had common job titles, they represented many organizations across the US, and a particularly diverse set of demographic groups. Of the nearly 300 respondents, more than 70 percent identified as Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latinx. Similarly, in our 2018 study, 62 percent of respondents identified with one or more of these groups.

The diversity of this data gives us rich insight into broader trends across the US. Drilling down a level, we find that while this sense of disconnection is particularly prevalent among people of color, who rated their employers lower on every component of the Inclusion Index than white professionals.

**Average ratings from attorneys who are Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic, or Latinx were below those of white attorneys on all MCCA/RRA inclusion index factors**



Note: MCCA/RRA Inclusion Index Survey 2020, n=200 attorneys identifying as Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic, or Latinx, 71 attorneys identifying as White  
Survey responses are based on a 1-5 scale, with 1 lowest and 5 highest

These relative differences are a reminder that diversity, equity and inclusion do not necessarily move in lock step. In fact, as different groups of people come together, equity and inclusion levels may well decline – at least in the short term. To mitigate this trend, leaders need to ensure that their organizations have thoughtful strategies to address pain points in constructive ways, rather than doing more of the same or expecting problems to improve on their own.

### How to improve diversity, equity and inclusion

The dynamic nature of diversity, equity and inclusion means organizations need to change the way they think about their DE&I operating models. Certain elements – the right people, budget and other resources – are fundamental, but equally important is the ability to adapt over time to meet an organization's changing needs. [As we recently explored in our research](#) on this topic, advanced DE&I organizations have the following features in common:

- They see DE&I as an organization-wide business priority and look for ways to engage leaders across the enterprise.
- They constantly measure and monitor progress, recognizing that DE&I will never be a “set it and forget it” issue but rather one that needs constant and proactive tending.
- They recognize the importance of the voice of employee and look for ways to hear it, including through executive-sponsored employee resource groups.

What an organization needs from its diversity, equity and inclusion efforts may be different tomorrow than it was yesterday. Understanding this will help leaders put survey findings into context, even when trend lines are negative, and find constructive ways to move forward.