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your digital meeting coach



Inclusive Leadership

And What Makes it
Your Most Important Asset

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Introduction

Inclusive Leadership, and What Makes it Your Most Important Asset

Organizations worldwide are increasingly capitalizing on the collective talents of diverse, interdisciplinary teams that span women and men, people with different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and older and younger team members. Research by McKinsey & Company (2020) shows that **diversity can allow your organization to challenge ingrained ways of thinking and boost innovation and financial performance.**¹ Yet diversity does not automatically establish a culture of inclusiveness, which is defined as people feeling that they are treated fairly and respectfully, that they are valued and have a sense of belonging, and that they are confident to speak up. And likewise, having a diverse workforce does not automatically result in high performance.

According to the Harvard Business Review, the critical piece in the puzzle is *inclusive leadership*.² Indeed, the words and actions of leaders determine up to 70% of whether or not employees feel included.³ Why is this important? Besides being an inherently good thing, surely, people who feel included at work are 3 times more likely than their peers to have high engagement, or to feel excited by and committed to their workplace.⁴ **Employees who feel included are more likely to speak up, give extra to get the job done, and collaborate** – which ultimately boosts your organization’s performance.



Introduction

Inclusive Leadership, and What Makes it Your Most Important Asset

Employees value inclusiveness highly. 82% of McKinsey's research participants say that their personal career choices have at some point been informed by a company's culture of inclusiveness. 38% of all respondents say that they have turned down a job opportunity over a perceived lack of inclusiveness.⁵ Millennials, who now comprise 35% of the U.S. workforce and are projected to make up 75% of the global workforce by 2025,⁶ as well as Gen Zs, are the generations most likely to shun companies whose actions clash with their social and environmental values.⁷ **Inclusive leadership positively impacts all demographic groups**, but in light of these demographic trends, we will focus primarily on the ways in which it impacts millennials specifically.

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Certain employees, especially vice presidents and junior employees (44%), women (50%), and ethnic or racial minorities (50%), are less likely to feel included.⁸ There is also a significant mismatch between what employees view as their top competencies versus what they think is valued by their organization. Women, especially, are less likely (40%) to believe their top competencies are represented in their organization's values, which decreases their perception of inclusiveness.⁹ 84% of employees have moreover experienced microaggressions, defined as everyday slights that spring from bias.¹⁰ **Women, minority, and LGBTQ+ identifying respondents frequently report feeling uncomfortable** coming out or talking about identity-related topics at work.¹¹ Unsurprisingly, feeling unable to speak authentically in the workplace for fear of judgment or backlash decreases feelings of inclusion as well as overall performance.¹²

50%

less likely to feel included are **women** and **ethnic or racial minorities**

84%

of employees have **experienced microaggressions**

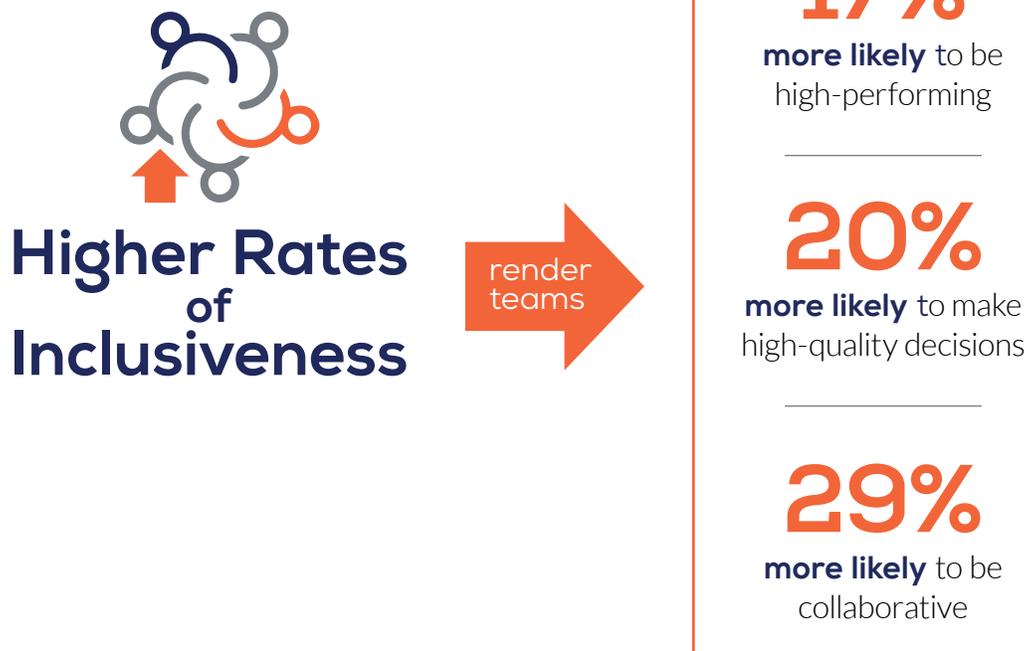
Introduction

Inclusive Leadership, and What Makes it Your Most Important Asset

There are **four factors** that correlate highly with employees' feelings of inclusion:¹³

- 1] Diverse, inclusive leadership
- 2] Meritocracy and efforts to boost fairness
- 3] Sponsorship
- 4] The ability to connect with senior leaders

Employees who believe their leaders to be diverse are **1.5 times more likely to feel very included**.¹⁴ Similarly, they are 1.7 times more likely to feel very included at organizations in which leaders value inclusion and aspire to increase team cohesion.¹⁵ Research has shown that inclusiveness has a direct impact on performance. Higher rates of reported inclusiveness render teams 17% more likely to be high-performing, 20% more likely to make high-quality decisions, and 29% more likely to be collaborative.¹⁶ **A mere 10% improvement in perceptions of inclusiveness increases annual work attendance per employee by 1 day**, thus decreasing organizational spending on absenteeism.¹⁷



Introduction

Inclusive Leadership, and What Makes it Your Most Important Asset

But how do we foster inclusive leadership? Researchers Juliet Bourke and Andrea Titus have identified the **six signature traits of inclusive leadership**, which, as they note, are all *equally important and mutually reinforcing*:

- 1] **VISIBLE COMMITMENT:** Leaders who articulate their authentic commitment to diversity, challenge ingrained ways of thinking, foster accountability, and see diversity and inclusion as top priorities.
- 2] **HUMILITY:** Leaders who exhibit modesty, admit to their mistakes, and create safe spaces for others to share ideas and opinions.
- 3] **AWARENESS OF BIAS:** Leaders who are committed to meritocracy and are aware of both their own blind spots as well as greater systemic issues.
- 4] **CURIOSITY ABOUT OTHERS:** Leaders who are open-minded and curious to learn more about others, listen non-judgmentally, and try to empathize with those around them.
- 5] **CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE:** Leaders who are sensitive to different cultural nuances and make necessary adjustments.
- 6] **EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION:** Leaders who empower those around them, validate diversity of thinking as well as psychological safety, and zero in on team cohesion.

These traits may appear intuitive and characteristic of good leadership in general, but **two-thirds of leaders are unsure of which of their behaviors are perceived by others as being inclusive.**¹⁸ Indeed, only one-third of leaders have an accurate view of whether they are perceived by others as behaving inclusively. The list above can therefore go a long way toward developing greater awareness of what inclusive behavior actually looks like.

As Bourke and Titus put it, “[I]nclusive leadership is not about occasional grand gestures, but regular, small-scale comments and actions.”¹⁹ The researchers compared the qualitative feedback of the most inclusive, or top 25%, and least inclusive, or bottom 25%, of leaders in their sample, and determined that **inclusive leadership is a *tangible and daily practice.***²⁰ This can include, but is certainly not limited to, learning about different cultural nuances, speaking about personal weaknesses, and treating team members as unique individuals.

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Introduction

Inclusive Leadership, and What Makes it Your Most Important Asset

What leaders say and do has a tremendous impact on their employees, and research shows that this impact is heightened when they are leading diverse teams. Subtle words and exclusionary acts by leaders (microaggressions), or turning a blind eye on such behavior by others, can reinforce a non-inclusive status quo.²¹ Leaders, then, have to be both intentional and committed if they want to create inclusive cultures. Inclusive leaders have to develop deeper mindfulness of what they say and do on a daily basis, and adjust their behavior as necessary. **Ultimately, leaders who practice inclusive leadership will see their efforts reflected in the enhanced performance of their diverse teams.**



Inclusive leadership is also the most important way in which to connect with millennials, only 44% of whom report having a positive experience at work, the lowest figure of any generation.²² **When millennials have a great experience at work, by contrast, they will stay with an organization and will be both highly engaged and high-performing.** So much so, in fact, that they are 50 times more likely to desire a long-term future with a company if they perceive a high-trust culture.²³ (Incidentally, this makes millennials even more loyal than their parents' generation.) What millennials want are inclusive, "For All" leaders. They want leaders who foster genuine human connections, are invested in the long-term growth and personal interests of their teams, enable employees to be their unique selves, and show up during critical moments of employees' personal lives or careers.²⁴ In other words -- they want leaders who promote feelings of inclusion.

So inclusive leadership matters. Indeed, perhaps it matters more than ever now that millions of people are working from home and in different locations as a result of the pandemic. That raises the crucial question: How do leaders develop this capability, do it quickly and at scale?

The Current Landscape

of Management and Leadership Development

With large segments of the population working from home,²⁵ the pandemic has made the need for inclusive, forward-thinking leaders more important than ever. Organizations are compelled to develop their leaders, create positive cultures, and help leaders understand their strengths and opportunities for growth. **With each day, organizations are forced to adapt and become faster and more agile as institutions.** Focusing on leadership development can significantly help organizations achieve these goals.²⁶ However, studies on effective leadership development have shown that **traditional delivery methods are lacking**, at best, or failing us, at worst. Even in non-pandemic times, organizations struggle to deliver effective leadership development solutions. Only 19% of organizations say they are “very effective” at developing leaders, and 84% of organizations even anticipate a leadership shortage in the next 5 years.²⁷



Unfortunately, **poor management costs the U.S. an estimated \$960 billion to \$1.2 trillion per year** in productivity due to employee disengagement.²⁸ Positive Employee Experience (EX), on the other hand, has a huge positive impact on organizations. **Every 5-point gain in employee engagement equates to a 3% increase in revenue.**²⁹ MIT’s Center for Information Systems Research has shown that organizations in the top quartile for EX double their customer satisfaction levels (industry-adjusted NPS), double the level of innovation (percentage of revenues from new products and services), and show 25% higher profits than their competitors.³⁰ As we mentioned before, it is leaders who drive 70% of the variance in EX, meaning that it is leaders who have the power to create transformational “ripple effects” across entire companies.

The Current Landscape of Management and Leadership Development

Leadership development as it is done now is tremendously expensive and lacks CEO confidence. **Every year, \$370 billion is spent on leadership development globally**, with almost \$4,000 being spent on average per leader.³¹ CEOs view 90 cents of every dollar as wasted, and their assessments are not far off.³² With typical off-site or e-learning programs, leaders are removed, either physically or based on the content of the training, from their everyday professional contexts. Experiential learning is therefore minimal to nonexistent. Studies have shown that **participants in traditional leadership delivery programs will retain only about 20% of their learning after just 14 days.**³³ This means that of the original \$370 billion invested, only \$74 billion is left after 14 days.

Conversely, action-based leadership development solutions, i.e., ones in which leaders learn in real-time as they are doing, can save companies up to \$278 billion of their initial investment in leadership development. This is critical in light of ever-contracting budgets and the expanding role of the HR function. And the returns are significant on leadership development that actually sticks: leadership growth translates into 7 times greater employee retention at one-third of the cost; high feedback cultures are in the top one-third of numerous financials; and, last but not least, **positive leader impact means employees are 82% more likely to stay with a company.**³⁴

**Action-Based
Leadership
Development
Solutions**



7x
greater employee
retention



1/3
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typical cost

Traditional leadership development also underserves critical talent by being available to only a few people in an organization. 87% of millennials identify career growth and development opportunities as important.³⁵ Yet a whopping 45% of them report that they do not have the skills they need for future success.³⁶ According to the 2019 Great Place to Work® Summary on the best workplaces for millennials, **millennials are generally disappointed with their workplace management and collaboration.**³⁷ They lack significant faith in their leaders, too: 70% believe that their managers play favorites; 67% perceive a disconnect between management's actions and words; and 56% do not perceive their management as competent.³⁸ Moreover, **most millennials experience work as cutthroat and uninspired:** 64% say people use politicking and backstabbing to get their way; 63% say that their ideas and suggestions are ignored; and 63% of people say people are not willing to go the extra mile to get things done.³⁹

The Current Landscape of Management and Leadership Development

Without a doubt, we have on our hands a large pool of untapped and underserved talent. Studies show that when managers sincerely connect with millennials, companies can boost their innovation and agility by up to 7-8 times.⁴⁰ One such way of engaging with millennials is through innovative, effective leadership development. **Companies that prioritize recruiting, retaining, and inspiring millennials experience significant competitive advantages.**

Organizations that are rated as great workplaces for millennials have 47% higher productivity; 30% improved recruitment; 37% higher retention; and 47% better customer service.⁴¹

Millennials are not the “selfish job-hoppers” that they have been stereotyped as. They are simply looking for jobs with inclusive leaders, fair base pay, and support for their real-life needs.⁴² Millennials will not stay at bad jobs, which makes it critical to invest in their job satisfaction and concomitant leadership development. **When millennials feel involved and engaged, they are 6 to 64 times more likely to go the extra mile, stay with their company for longer, recommend their workplace, and contribute their best at work each day.**⁴³

Companies with happy millennials are able to retain their best talent and continually achieve strong business results.



Finally, the global pandemic has ushered in an exponential growth in virtual meetings. Roughly 55 million professional meetings happen in the U.S. alone every day. This time is extremely expensive, with \$1.4 trillion spent on meetings a year in the US. **69% of employees, however, report that most of their meetings are unproductive.**⁴⁴ An additional **50% report that they would rather do any other work** than attend their weekly team update meeting.⁴⁵ Something is very much wrong here, and a lot of money is being wasted. Yet the pandemic has only increased this professional focus on meetings. This is reflected in the vast number of meetings happening in Microsoft Teams each day. We are witnessing exponential growth, with a new daily record (on March 31, 2021) of 2.7 billion meeting minutes in one day, which marks a 200% increase from 900 million after just 15 days!⁴⁶

Lessons

from the qChange “Voice of the Leader” Study

At qChange, we were galvanized by the current state of affairs to conduct our own study on *what leaders and their teams actually want*. Our research study, titled the “Voice of the Leader,” (2021) proved infinitely insightful, complementing everything we know about inclusive leadership and what constitutes truly effective leadership development.

To begin with, **our research revealed widespread leader and employee dissatisfaction with the lack of feedback and coaching sessions available** to them in traditional work environments. 94% of leaders shared that they want more real-time feedback, and 88% want this in a 360-degree format. 95% would use technology to provide and receive feedback, and 91% believe it would increase engagement in the organization.⁴⁷ **Our research also highlighted significant dissatisfaction with current leadership development opportunities.** Most participants in our study believe it is not offered enough, if at all, and that it is too time-consuming and theory-based.



In our qualitative research, we asked leaders and their teams to describe what they view as the main bottlenecks preventing their team, peers, or boss from engaging with them. Overwhelmingly, participants cited a shortage of time; not being able to talk due to, ironically, *being in meetings*; and too many open projects. Fatalistically, perhaps, some cited these as “system limitations.”⁴⁸

Lessons

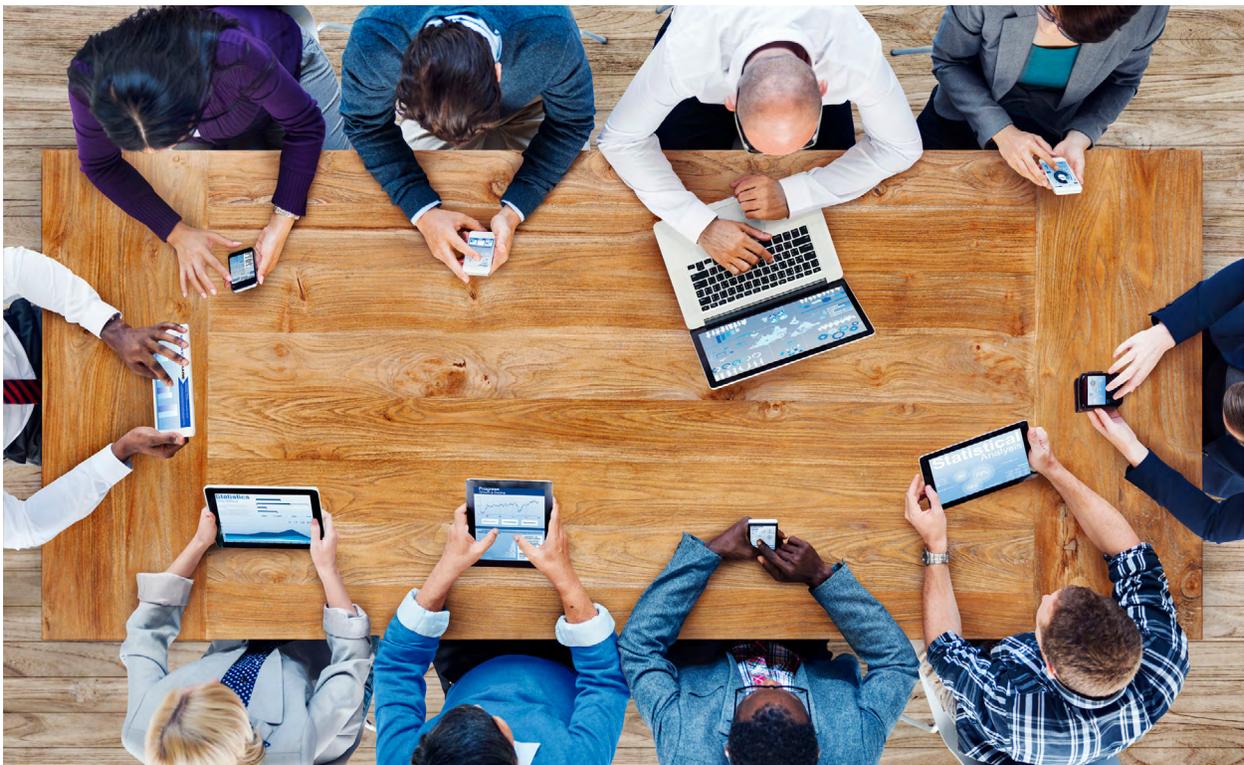
from the qChange “Voice of the Leader” Study

Our research shows that teams value Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; and that they are very open to trying new technology and development tools. 95% of leaders agree strongly or somewhat that working for the betterment of their team is important to them.⁴⁹ In fact, the majority of people want to develop as leaders not for themselves, but in order to improve their teams. Gaining insight into why people do the things they do and focusing on this in the future (i.e., building self-awareness) also scores very highly. Almost 80% of leaders see themselves as the kind of people who like to try all kinds of new technological products at least once.⁵⁰ Likewise, the vast majority of leaders are highly interested in development tools and gaining insight into their professional habits and leadership styles. **Team members and their leaders alike want teamwork to be efficient and empowering.** As one leader said, “Taking charge of a solution in a meeting and keeping people interested is a skill we all need but most of us lack.”⁵¹

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Between the existing research literature as well as our own study, it is evident that **leaders have to develop their inclusive leadership capabilities**, and that the pandemic has created both a unique and exciting openness to learning through new technology.



qChange:

A Cutting-Edge Solution to a Global Problem

qChange was born out of the need to disrupt a broken system and accelerate leadership development to the present. By listening to our customers and drawing on the most up-to-date research on behavioral science and economics, we have created a solution that targets the biggest shortcomings of traditional leadership development. What we did was create a tool that marries talent development and inclusive leadership, effectively converting meetings into *talent development assets*.

As we have discussed, inclusion is about small, everyday behaviors. Yet most leadership programs do not operate in the flow of work, and therefore involve no real-time feedback. Instead, they are typically theory-based and entirely conceptual in nature. **qChange distinguishes itself by being practical, specific, and just in time.**

Responding to industry demand, **we created an empowering, data-driven leadership development delivery method** that allows leaders to grow in context, in the flow of work, and using neuro-linguistic programming science. The qChange solution provides leaders with behavioral prompts (nudges), real-time assessment, measurement, and feedback on their performance from their team. The solution recognizes the differences between departmental teams and work environments, so we have made our solution customizable to different organizational leadership models, cultures, values, and initiatives.

Both the current research literature and our “Voice of the Leader” study underscore that **everyone has to be included in the conversation about inclusion.** As research on organizational barriers to inclusive workplaces indicates, “tactical inclusion reminders,” or nudges, can be very helpful in promoting more inclusive behaviors.⁵² Our solution therefore leverages nudge theory, which proposes that behavior change is best influenced by positive reinforcement and indirect suggestions. Indeed, research on habit building has shown that the most effective way of forming a new habit is to attach it to a pre-existing one.⁵³ **Tiny changes and feedback in the flow of work can lead to tremendous long-term changes.**

Since our research study revealed that **91% of leaders would like to receive real-time nudges**,⁵⁴ the first step in our patent-pending qLX cycle begins with a prompt, or “nudge,” based on the areas in which a leader wants to be nudged. Using artificial intelligence (AI), the qChange solution studies the leader’s calendar and delivers a relevant nudge right before the start of their meeting. In keeping with nudge theory, the timing is very much intentional. In terms of the delivery of a nudge, the type of meeting influences the type of nudge. For instance, if a leader is in a one-on-one meeting with a direct report, the leader will receive a nudge that is relevant to the meeting, such as Coaching for Success. Similarly, if a later meeting focuses on defining a strategy, the system will rise to the occasion and provide a nudge relevant to that area, such as Thinking Strategically.

“Over-nudging” runs the risk of causing mental fatigue, so the **qChange AI optimizes nudge effectiveness** by limiting the number of nudges a leader receives to no more than twice a day, and 10 times a week. The qChange solution boasts more than 950 unique nudges available to leaders in the flow of work. This allows leaders to become more mindful of their behavior, and consequently, to show up as stronger, more empathetic leaders in those meetings. Once the meeting is over, leaders are asked a simple question, such as: “Did you do [insert behavior] during the meeting?” At the same time, team members are asked to answer a different question, like: “Did [name] demonstrate [insert behavior] during the meeting?”

With over 11,000 academic articles written on the subject, **gratitude has been shown to have a profound impact on both the giver and receiver.** qChange facilitates cultures of gratitude by allowing leaders to receive written feedback on their leadership and to validate their team members’ contributions and unique insights. When a leader finds written feedback to be helpful, for example, the qChange interface allows them to send a “gratitude card” to the team member who provided the unique insight. This leads to a more engaged and appreciative team, increasing productivity and reducing turnover. Most importantly, it builds bridges in teams by creating appreciative moments that lead to better conversations and relationships.

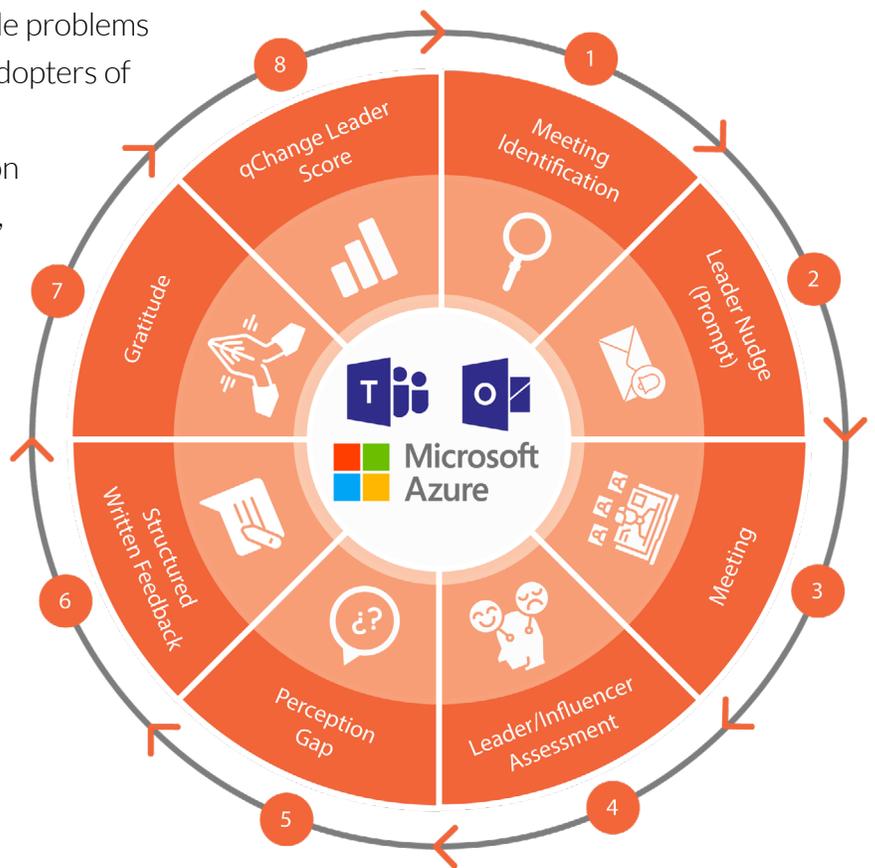


Every leader receives a personalized **Leader Score** that allows them to learn if their self-assessment of their leadership reflects the assessment provided by their team members. If there is a large Perception Gap, leaders are given the opportunity to close this gap by requesting anonymous feedback in writing. This creates a more continuous, agile, and inclusive leadership development process. By using our proprietary Leader Score and focusing on continuous feedback and development, **we provide organizations with continual performance management, leader assessment, and objective data** for talent management discussions and decisions.

The qChange solution targets the most widespread problems inherent in traditional leadership development, and does this for just one-tenth of the traditional cost.⁵⁵ Instead of serving just a small number of leaders in an organization with less effective programs, qChange can serve all leaders more effectively and at a greatly reduced cost. We've created a solution that not only optimizes the learning process by being 100% action-based, but can **save companies up to 75% of their initial investment in leadership development.**

Our platform allows leaders to tackle problems immediately and effectively. Early adopters of qChange have provided us with overwhelmingly positive feedback on receiving feedback, giving feedback, and the developmental insights received in our qLX process.

With qChange, leaders have a tool that allows them to connect better with their diverse workforces and action the shared values of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.



Conclusion:

Creating the Leaders of Tomorrow

qChange makes leadership development and boosting employee engagement both **straightforward and intuitive**. Rather than dealing with generic development material with no immediate application, qChange allows leaders to learn in real-time how they can address unique and specific issues in creative ways. We offer leaders the unique opportunity to develop with each meeting and during each meeting. In essence, **the secret to the qChange solution is that it is 100% action-based learning**, as even the best leaders have a hard time taking their off-site learning and applying it in the real world. Our qChange solution therefore jumpstarts the positive ripple effect of inclusive leadership. The qChange solution also allows your organization to better connect with millennials and Gen Zs, who value diversity and inclusion, and who deliver superior performance if they enjoy their workplace.

With the qChange solution, **we have expanded and democratized the pool of people** that are able to benefit from effective leadership development. qChange involves every member of a meeting and validates the importance of each individual contribution by pushing leaders toward greater self-awareness. As one of our study participants shared: “Having a guide or opinion on how to be more mindful is important [...] It would also allow me to be aware of the effect that my words can have on people, both positive and negative.”⁵⁶

Through our proprietary qLX cycles in which leaders receive nudges, feedback, measurement and development, all within a continuous 360-degree format and in the flow of work, the **qChange solution can significantly enhance self-awareness** and shape us into the inclusive, empathetic leaders we want to be. We provide leaders with the opportunity to build cultures of gratitude and feedback by recognizing and thanking their team members in the qLX process. We are inspired by research that shows that celebrating small accomplishments creates a positive dynamic in which everyone wants to do better.⁵⁷ Indeed, a study by Glassdoor found that **80% of employees would be willing to work harder for an appreciative boss**.⁵⁸ As we previously discussed, inclusive leadership is not about sporadic grand gestures, but is instead about tangible, everyday actions.

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Having a guide or opinion on how to be more mindful is important [...] It would also allow me to be aware of the effect that my words can have on people, both positive and negative.

At qChange we believe that the better the leader, the better the team — and the better the team, the stronger the company. qChange provides a solution for everyone to get together, for everyone to play a part, and for leaders to lead by example. Through qChange, leaders are able to put their teams first by listening to individual voices and creating cultures of feedback and inclusion. We believe that leaders who stretch themselves, try new things, challenge mindsets and cultures, and ask for feedback, are those who truly thrive.

Ultimately, making the workplace a better place for everyone pays dividends. We want to help you find the untapped talent within your organization and build leaders that connect diverse people, allowing everyone to contribute authentically and meaningfully to your organization's success.

If you're interested in trying out our qChange Leader Experience solution, we would love to hear from you and discuss how we can help your organization reap the boundless benefits of inclusive leadership and more.

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your digital meeting coach

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Source Citations

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