BUILDING TRUST
Between Managers and Diverse Women Direct Reports
About Catalyst

Founded in 1962, Catalyst is the leading nonprofit membership organization expanding opportunities for women and business. With offices in the United States, Canada, and Europe, and more than 400 preeminent corporations as members, Catalyst is the trusted resource for research, information, and advice about women at work. Catalyst annually honors exemplary organizational initiatives that promote women’s advancement with the Catalyst Award.
TRUST IS ESSENTIAL TO BUSINESS SUCCESS

Trust between managers and direct reports is essential to forming productive workplace relationships; facilitating employee development, engagement, and performance; navigating the workplace; and improving overall performance across the organization.

The immediate manager can help a direct report grow professionally to the benefit of the employee, work teams, the manager, and the company or firm. Those managers who successfully achieve trusting relationships with direct reports will obtain optimal performance from their direct reports, enjoy greater team productivity, and realize personal satisfaction in their successful development of talent.

Diverse women, defined here as those belonging to racial minority groups in North America, often face greater challenges than white women in forming trusting relationships at work. Negative stereotyping, exclusion from influential networks, and difficulty in gaining access to high-visibility assignments can influence the ways in which diverse women experience workplaces, and can limit diverse women’s access to trusting relationships.

In this report, we focus on white male managers because of their prevalence and power in corporate hierarchies. We also use white women as a comparison group for diverse women because prior Catalyst work has shown that businesses have made greater progress in creating inclusion for white women than for diverse women.

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2. In this study, racial/ethnic minority groups are comprised of women who self-identified as Black, Hispanic, Asian, or mixed-race.
4. Data for the study come from surveys, focus groups, and in-depth interviews of diverse women direct reports, white male managers, and white women direct reports in the United States and Canada. See the Appendix for information on methodology.
UNDERSTANDING RELIANCE AND DISCLOSURE IN MANAGER-DIRECT REPORT RELATIONSHIPS

Trust involves an expectation of help from another person and the ability to rely on them. It includes the willingness to be vulnerable to someone else’s actions and, therefore, involves some level of risk. In the absence of trust, people are less willing to take risks and may go to some lengths to protect themselves.

Two types of trusting behavior are relevant to the manager-direct report relationship: reliance and disclosure.

- **Reliance:** Reliance occurs when direct reports are able to rely on a manager to take action on their behalf—for example, by representing their work accurately to others. Reliance reflects observable actions managers take on behalf of their direct reports and indicates that managers are fulfilling their role of supporting employees on the job. Reliance is a basic requirement for successful job performance.

- **Disclosure:** Disclosure occurs when direct reports communicate sensitive or personal information to a manager. It involves some risk, including, for example, a direct report’s willingness to admit to shortcomings or to share honest feelings and frustrations about work. Examples of disclosure include a direct report communicating about a mistake with her manager and asking for assistance in correcting it. Another example is a direct report communicating with her manager about her difficulties in establishing credibility among certain colleagues. Acts of disclosure pave the way to finding solutions to work-related issues, and thus can improve quality of work and organizational productivity. Disclosure in a relationship builds over time and is two-way.

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11. Specifically, disclosure means the extent to which a direct report can honestly discuss with her manager: her feelings about work, including negative feelings and frustration, personal beliefs, sensitive work-related information that she would not want to go farther, and work-related problems that could be used to her disadvantage. See the Disclosure Index in the Appendix for exact wording of questions included.
RELIENCE FOR DIVERSE WOMEN AND WHITE WOMEN IS SIMILAR

Catalyst found no differences between diverse women’s perception of reliance on their managers and white women’s perception of reliance on their managers. That is, both diverse women and white women rated their managers similarly when it came to taking action on their behalf, such as backing them up in difficult situations. This finding is encouraging, as it indicates that white male managers are acting on behalf of their women direct reports irrespective of the woman’s racial background.

But the Impact of Reliance on Career Satisfaction Differs for Diverse and White Women

Catalyst did, however, find differences in the way reliance relates to diverse women’s and white women’s engagement with the organization.

- The more highly a white woman relied on her manager to take action on her behalf, the more likely she was to feel satisfied with her career advancement opportunities, though her degree of reliance did not impact her intent to stay.
- Diverse women’s perception of their ability to rely on their managers made no difference to their satisfaction regarding career advancement opportunities. This may be because diverse women experience the work environment as more exclusive than do white women. They are more likely to perceive racism, sexism, double standards, and negative stereotyping as part of the fabric of the organization.

Negative stereotyping involves inappropriate generalizations that are inaccurate. In businesses, stereotyping can be especially damaging and limit diverse groups’ opportunities for advancement into top leadership positions. This is because negative stereotypes may portray them as lacking qualities commonly associated with effective leadership. In an organization that does not value diversity, it is likely that systemic obstacles exist for diverse groups, such as a lack of acceptance of diverse employees in senior positions. In such an environment, the manager’s facilitation of job performance may not be enough to overcome these obstacles, and therefore will not affect diverse women’s perceptions of advancement potential—or their desire to stay with the organization.

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12. Diverse women mean = 3.86 on 5 point scale versus white women mean = 3.96.
13. The findings hold after taking into account organizational culture, managerial feedback skill, and managerial sharing of information.
14. Diverse women mean = 2.43 on a 5-point scale. White women mean = 1.96; p<.001.
Specifically, diverse women direct reports rated their level of disclosure, or sharing of sensitive information with their white male managers, significantly lower than did white women.$^{17}$

And It’s Important Because Disclosure Predicts Engagement for Diverse Women But Not for White Women

Diverse women’s lower rating of disclosure is crucial, because study findings revealed that the more a diverse woman discloses to her manager, the more likely she is to be satisfied with her career advancement opportunities and want to stay with the company, indicating engagement. Engaged employees are more likely to want to remain with the company.$^{18}$ The existence of trusting supervisory relationships where direct reports feel comfortable disclosing information to managers represents a win-win-win situation—for the individual diverse woman, the manager, and the organization.

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17. Diverse women mean = 3.34. White women mean = 3.58; p<.1.
18. See Appendix for details on statistical model.
Development of trust is a two-way process. Relationships become close because of the range and sensitivity of information that two people mutually disclose to one another. The more one person shares, the more willing the other person is to open up. This two-way sharing, over time, leads to closer and stronger relationships.\textsuperscript{19}

Lack of disclosure on either the manager’s or the direct report’s part can inhibit the development of a trusting, sound working relationship.

\begin{quote}
I know I prefer people to point out opportunities for improvement on my part. To me, it’s a basis for trust. It’s bi-directional. And I think at least if people are willing to do that—people who are non-managers or managers at a lower level [are] not willing to have a bare-metal conversation with their boss—if they can have that kind of a conversation, I think it’s an aid to a better, more trusting relationship.
\end{quote}

—White Male Manager

I’ve got one [woman of color direct report] who’s very reserved. For me, it’s more difficult to work with her; it’s just not the way I’m used to working.

—White Male Manager

\textbf{FIGURE 2}
Relationship Between Women’s Disclosure, Career Advancement Satisfaction, and Intent to Stay

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}
When diverse women perceive a lack of disclosure on their managers’ part, for example in managers' reluctance to provide feedback, this presents obstacles to career development. Such lack of disclosure may be related to negative stereotyping in exclusionary workplaces.

“There is] cross- and back-channel communication, where [the] manager might have gotten feedback about me because people didn’t want to approach me as a woman of color, because of the culture. “Oh, I don’t want to say anything, I don’t want her mad at me,” which is crazy. So then the manager would have the feedback, but wouldn’t share it, and then would let it build up. So there was nothing to be acted upon. Then the manager finally says, “Oh yeah, I knew these things, but I just didn’t say anything.”

—Diverse Woman Direct Report

For managers to provide support to their direct reports, the direct report herself must practice a certain level of disclosure. Some managers more so than others rely on their direct reports to let them know how and in what ways they require support or assistance. A direct report’s disclosure of sensitive information starts the ball rolling and lets the manager know she is open to hearing advice from him.

At its best, disclosure can transform a manager into a direct report’s champion and can create greater career development opportunities, as it did for this black woman direct report.

When [she] came into the meeting, she was not prepared; she was not really observing or being on point. I asked her, “How did the meeting go?” She said, “I was not prepared. I was in the shadow of [my predecessor]. I [had been] with my son who had the flu [the night before].” That was a milestone. She recognized this as an opportunity for me to coach her. I asked how could she handle it differently....She said she shouldn’t have come in that day, she was almost dozing off; I said, that is exactly right. She said she did not know the material, she should have studied. I gave her hints such as, “Did you stand in front of a mirror and practice presentation skills? Did you practice in front of peers? Every time you step in front of an audience, you are representing [the company].” Very quickly, she recognized that and leap-frogged past her peers.

—White Male Manager
WHITE MALE MANAGERS MAY OVERESTIMATE THE LEVEL OF TRUST

At the crux of manager-direct report interactions is how each member judges relationship dynamics. It seems that many white male managers are misreading diverse women’s assessment of the working relationship. They are unaware that their diverse women direct reports do not trust them. In particular, a white male manager is likely to overestimate his diverse woman direct report’s level of trust, much more so than in relationships with white women direct reports.20

In a higher proportion of cases—54.2 percent of the relationships involving diverse women direct reports versus 17.2 percent for white women—white male managers rated their direct report’s level of disclosure higher than how the diverse women direct reports themselves rated their own level of disclosure.21 This finding suggests that managers may not receive “early warning signs” when their diverse women direct reports are dissatisfied and considering leaving the organization. Examples of such early signs may be a direct report telling her manager that she is frustrated in her working relationships with certain colleagues or telling him that she does not find him supportive of her future career growth. But if a direct report is not willing to disclose, the manager will have no idea of these issues.

Perceptions of Negative Stereotyping or Double Standards May Inhibit Disclosure by Diverse Women

Diverse women often find themselves in organizational contexts in which they perceive that they receive exclusionary treatment, such as being negatively stereotyped and subject to double standards. In such an environment, it is adaptive to not expose one’s vulnerabilities. Workplace factors can discourage greater disclosure as much as a manager’s willingness or lack thereof to disclose.

- Diverse women in the workplace are often faced with a trade-off not experienced by white women. Diverse women can either stay in a “comfort zone,” restricted to sharing with similar others such as those from the same racial background or hierarchical level, or communicate directly with managers and other senior leaders who, while more able to facilitate their career advancement, are more likely to be white men. Letting oneself be vulnerable and taking risks in working relationships runs counter to the self-protective mechanisms used by those from diverse groups.

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20. Base sizes in these analyses are very low, and, therefore, findings are suggestive rather than firm. N=32 for dyads involving white women, and N=26 for dyads involving diverse women.

21. p<.01, chi square. Managerial ratings of direct report disclosure were considered “higher” when the index score by the manager was at least 0.5 points higher on a 5-point scale than was the direct report’s level of disclosure (e.g., a direct report rated her level of disclosure at 3.0, and the manager rated her level of disclosure at 3.5).

I just realized how important your personal relationships with your coworkers are, especially at the senior level, because a lot of opportunities come through just knowing people and hearing people talk about things. I knew it was important to get your face in front of partners and to go into people’s offices, but I think when you’re really junior…[this is] intimidating.

—Latina Woman Direct Report

For example, black women sometimes protect themselves by setting boundaries between themselves and others in less than inclusive environments. In one study, black women were found to be quite guarded in white-dominated corporate work environments in revealing details about their personal lives at work. In turn, the women’s reluctance to share appeared to lead to lower levels of rapport with colleagues and limited the depth of relationships they achieved.24

• In exclusionary environments, those from diverse groups often feel that they must project an image of being extremely competent to overcome double standards.

...for some of the guys, it’s like if they’re just good in one area, that might be enough. But I really feel, for the Asian woman, you have to be good at everything. Like look at her, she’s everything…it is a higher bar, and more bars.

—Asian Woman Direct Report

Our demonstration of skills is not necessarily sufficient to achieve recognition…the bar is higher at all times. It can become frustrating…. If I were to ask for things or say something like my Caucasian counterpart, well then they’re going to look at me and say, “Who is she?”

—Latina Woman Direct Report

• To admit to a need for help may undermine an image of extreme competence, but to not ask for assistance when it is actually needed is itself risky.

As a woman of color, sometimes you’re almost afraid to ask for the feedback, because the inference may be that you’re struggling. And so the tendency is to be as self sufficient as possible, before you go and ask for any kind of feedback.

—Diverse Woman Direct Report

Distrust, which is an expectation of negative behavior by another and often is created by an act of betrayal,27 may be another reason to not disclose. As one focus group participant put it:

I thought I had a very trusting relationship, and then something happened about five years ago, and the one person that I probably trusted the most in this company did something that I just couldn’t believe. So from that point forward, I decided that I can’t really fully 100 percent trust.

—Diverse Woman Direct Report

Lack of disclosure among diverse women in this study is so deeply rooted that even when their managers shared their “insider” information with diverse women—that is, their knowledge of corporate politics, unwritten rules, and people in their networks—diverse women’s disclosure did not change. This finding is in marked contrast to the experiences of white women direct reports, who were not only more likely than diverse women to receive such insider information, but also for whom sharing of insider information led to higher levels of trust.28

Well-Developed Managerial Feedback Skill Is Key to Developing Trust

Because disclosure is about communication, the manager can improve disclosure by modeling openness in his own communication. A manager’s ability to give high-quality, candid feedback and to make the direct report feel comfortable asking for feedback—known as managerial feedback skill—positively affected disclosure among diverse women.29 White women also benefitted from managerial feedback skill.30

—I think that’s really good….providing feedback on a real time basis. I like to know where I stand. And I’m not saying that everything I do you have to say good job, good job, good job, or bad job either. But when it matters, [know] when it matters and [provide] feedback. When I am doing something and I’m not doing it right, be comfortable enough to say “Hey, you know what, here’s something I noticed, and I don’t want you to go down this road and think you’re doing it right.”

—Diverse Woman Direct Report

It is as-necessary, so that when you’re in the moment and there is a coachable moment or an opportunity, say, “Hey, the way you did that was great,” or “The way you did that could have been more impactful if you had approached the situation this way,” or “That was not acceptable at all, and let’s talk about how we can fix this and what was wrong with that.”

—White Woman Direct Report

Participatory and Inclusive Workplaces Support Managerial Feedback Skill Development

In turn, among both white women and diverse women, what affected managerial feedback skill was how participatory their organizations were. A participatory work environment is characterized by:

1. Employee participation in decision-making,
2. A non-hierarchical openness in communication, and
3. Acceptance of different behavioral styles.31

Such environments help set the tone for candor in manager-direct report communications.32

29. See Appendix for details on statistical model.
30. White women and diverse women were at parity on managerial feedback skill (3.74 mean for white women versus 3.67 for diverse women).
32. See Appendix for details on statistical model and specific items.
AN ORGANIZATION-WIDE EFFORT IS NEEDED TO OVERCOME BARRIERS TO BUILDING TRUST

Trust is not easily established or maintained when people are dissimilar or are in a workplace that is unwelcoming to diverse groups. Study findings indicate that white male managers of diverse women, and the direct reports themselves, have steeper barriers—including lack of consistency in managerial modeling of disclosure and low managerial awareness of diverse women’s lack of trust—to overcome in achieving trusting relationships and leveraging those relationships as compared with white male managers and white women direct reports.

Overwhelmed Managers May Deprioritize Diversity Management

Managers often find themselves overwhelmed by work responsibilities, deadline pressures, and lack of adequate resources. Discomfort and unfamiliarity with those from different backgrounds may inhibit managers in communicating effectively with all team members, and work pressures may then place diversity management low on the priority list. In addition, those from majority groups may find it challenging to give straightforward feedback to those who are different from them, and norms in organizations may also reinforce managerial lack of candor.

Regardless, Managers Must Continue to Role Model Disclosure for Direct Reports

If managers themselves fail to disclose—fail to communicate adequately—they are not acting as effective role models for their direct reports and are not doing their part to develop trusting relationships.

Finally, Senior Leaders Must Step Up

Barriers diverse women must overcome in building trusting relationships with their managers that are external to the immediate manager-direct report relationship may include perceptions of negative stereotyping or double standards. This may stem from lack of access to mentors and powerful networks, lack of high visibility assignments, or perceived unfair career advancement processes. While everyone, from the human resources staff to managers at all levels to individuals themselves, has the power to influence the environment, Catalyst recommends that senior organizational leaders, in particular, take responsibility for creating more inclusive environments by:

- Implementing career-monitoring programs,
- Integrating diversity considerations into talent management processes,
- And by incorporating greater accountability into their organization’s diversity and inclusion efforts.

Methodology — Sample
A survey was conducted in addition to focus groups and in-depth interviews.

Survey
The survey sample was recruited from private sector organizations in the United States and Canada. Survey samples consisted of 107 diverse women direct reports comprised of 47 African-American/black women, 25 Asian women, 19 Latinas, and 16 mixed race/other; 211 white women direct reports; and 126 white male managers. Within those samples, there was a subset of 58 manager-direct report pairs.

Qualitative
Qualitative work was done in the United States, consisting of nine focus groups with separate groups of managers and direct reports and eight in-depth interviews representing four women direct reports and their four managers.

Wording of Survey Items and Scales
All individual measures used 1=strongly disagree, 2=somewhat disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=somewhat agree, 5=strongly agree.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale Name</th>
<th>Alpha</th>
<th>Items</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participatory Culture Index</strong></td>
<td>.796</td>
<td>1. It is appropriate for employees to initiate discussions with higher ranking employees.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Decision-making is shared across levels.</td>
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<td>3. It is appropriate for employees to challenge the way things are done.</td>
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<td>4. Upper management keeps employees informed about what’s going on.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5. This organization supports different styles of working to get the job done.</td>
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<td><strong>Managerial Feedback Skill Index</strong></td>
<td>.934</td>
<td>1. My manager has been candid in his/her communications with me.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. My manager gives me useful feedback about my job performance.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>3. My manager makes me feel comfortable in asking him/her for feedback about my performance.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. My manager gives me positive feedback frequently.</td>
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<td>5. My manager makes me feel confident in the feedback he/she gives me.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6. My manager gives me honest feedback about my performance.</td>
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<td><strong>Disclosure Index</strong></td>
<td>.884</td>
<td>1. I can discuss how I honestly feel about my work, even negative feelings and frustration.</td>
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<td>2. I can discuss work-related problems or difficulties with my manager that could potentially be used to disadvantage me.</td>
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<td>3. I can share my personal beliefs with my manager.</td>
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<td>4. I can share sensitive work-related information with my manager that I would not want to go any further.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Reliance Index</strong></td>
<td>.882</td>
<td>1. I can depend on my manager to handle an important issue on my behalf.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. I can rely on my manager to represent my work accurately to others.</td>
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<td>3. I can depend on my manager to back me up in difficult situations.</td>
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<td>4. I can rely on my manager’s people skills at work.</td>
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<td>Scale Name</td>
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<td>Items</td>
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| Career Satisfaction Index | .768  | 1. I am satisfied with the career opportunities in this organization.  
2. I believe I can compete successfully to advance in the organization. |
| Intent to Stay Index     | .739  | 1. I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this company.  
2. I would be very receptive to an offer from another company for a lateral move (i.e., a position at the same level I now occupy). *(Reverse Coded)*  
3. I would be very receptive to an offer from another company that is a promotion for me. *(Reverse Coded)*  
4. I am actively looking for a job with another company. *(Reverse Coded)*  
5. I would like to find a job with another company that is less demanding, even if I earned less. *(Reverse Coded)* |
| Managerial Capital      | .882  | 1. My manager helps me understand the unwritten rules of our organization.  
2. My manager introduces me to influential people in his network.  
3. My manager helps me understand the politics of the workplace. |
| Exclusion Index         | .835  | 1. Cultural differences are appreciated. *(Reverse Coded)*  
2. Racist comments are tolerated.  
3. Many employees feel uncomfortable around members of my racial/ethnic group.  
4. Sexist comments are tolerated.  
5. Many stereotypes exist about women of my racial/ethnic group.  
6. To fit in, women of my racial/ethnic group must make many adjustments. |
IBM SPSS Amos structural equation modeling software was used to run confirmatory factor analysis and to fit the model below to the two subgroups within the study: diverse women and white women. Indices suggest an acceptable model fit for the sample as a whole is CFI = .905; RMSEA = .05. Each path in the model was tested for white women and diverse women. Unless otherwise noted, each pathway is significant at p<.001.

**FIGURE 4—**
Model for Diverse Women

**FIGURE 5—**
Model for White Women
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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