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**Shifting institutional paradigms to ignite organizational equity
amongst African American professionals**

Michael Fountain

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Pepperdine University
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

SHIFTING INSTITUTIONAL PARADIGMS TO IGNITE ORGANIZATIONAL EQUITY
AMONGST AFRICAN AMERICAN PROFESSIONALS

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction.
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Global Leadership and Change

by

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August, 2023

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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DEDICATION

Dad, you always told me there's a journey we must all take in life. Hence, never take anything for granted, fly higher than the sky, own every room you walk into, treat people respectfully, and always pay it forward. I hope I've made you proud.

I LOVE YOU!

I MISS YOU!!

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Lastly, a special thank you to my amazing mother, loving partner, supportive family, and friends–My Village–whose encouragement and support continue to vitalize my purpose. The empowerment of your love shall forever fill my heart. I love you!

VITA

SUMMARY

Effective business leader with extensive experience in operation efficiencies, transformational process improvement, and innovative strategies and programs. DEI advocate with a passion for nurturing company culture.

RESEARCH INTEREST

Organizational change management, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Belonging, Leadership advancement amongst African American, International Relations

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ABSTRACT

African Americans can become discontented with their jobs and even consider resigning due to workplace anxiety. This quantitative study among African American business professionals in the U.S. highlighted the critical factors that foster positive working environments and organizational equity for African American professionals. The researcher focused on increasing an organization's effectiveness through managing diversity, allowing employees to feel inclusivity, and being part of a team. As a result, there will be happier, satisfied, and committed workers, thereby increasing the level of knowledge in the workforce while reducing expenses. This study analyzed conflict management, cultural diversity, marginalized employee emotions, teamwork, and attitudes to determine the effects of diversity management on organizational effectiveness. The Delphi method was used to survey participants and collect data to find themes. Based on the findings, conflict, feelings of marginalization, and cultural diversity can influence diversity management and effective teamwork, which is equally essential to the success of an organization. Among other things, managers can prioritize diversity management for successful implementation in varied workforces. Employers, managers, and human resources professionals should consider a positive social change to help overcome workplace stress among African American workers. Leaders in organizations can accommodate African American professionals in advancing their careers by promoting workplace inclusion, diversity, and advocacy. The study could assist organizations in addressing the need for social change so that African American professionals can have opportunities to enter into leadership roles.

Keywords: diversity, inclusion, diversity management, teamwork, organizational effectiveness

Chapter 1: Introduction

As a result of globalization, also known as global economic integration, has transformed the world into a global village, the workplace is becoming more diverse than ever (van Niekerk, 2020). Workplace diversity includes ethnic, cultural, national, and corporate cultures (Inegbedion et al., 2020). People, groups, regions, and countries are more interconnected than ever before because of globalization (Smith et al., 2020). According to Mayasari and Chandra (2020), to create a global community, there has been a rise in the number of people from many locations who share clothing, cuisine, music, information, and ideas through various means. Considering the increasing complexity and ambiguity of modern organizations, as well as the enormous pressure brought on by fierce competition, it is essential to develop a global culture that can inspire and attract employees from all over the world, allowing them to work for any organization they choose (Smith et al., 2020).

Understanding the dimensions of diversity makes it possible to determine which aspects of diversity have the most significant effect on employee behavior at work (Bouncken & Aslam, 2019). To improve diversity management, policymakers, particularly strategic company managers, must be aware of the key characteristics and their effects (Fine et al., 2020). The personality category encompasses a person's likes and dislikes, values, and beliefs (Hjerm et al., 2020). Internal dimensions consist of those facets of diversity that cannot be controlled by the individual and are the focus of numerous diversity initiatives. Organizational dimensions include those aspects of diversity that the organization can control, whereas external dimensions include those that an individual cannot control (Meyers et al., 2020).

Leslie (2019) asserts that the external dimensions of diversity significantly impact issues such as preferential treatment and opportunities for advancement or promotion. People from

various backgrounds bring distinctive qualities to the workplace regardless of their classification. Among the characteristics are personality, gender, race, age, ethnicity, and religion. Past scholarly research indicated that the impact of diversity management on organizational success has never been evaluated (Ng & Sears, 2020). Diversity in the workplace significantly impacts organizational efficiency, which is fundamental to a company's competitiveness in today's economy (Anwar & Abdullah, 2021). This fact highlights the significance of this study.

As a result of demographic shifts, the number of people from diverse backgrounds employed in the U.S. is likely to increase in the coming years (Lee & Kim, 2020). Consequently, human service organizations face transforming diversity into beneficial outcomes. Furthermore, diversity in the workplace can have both positive and negative implications. For example, a recent meta-analysis and literature review on the advantages of worker diversity in Health Service Organizations includes enhanced workplace commitment, retention, innovation, and creativity (Brimhall, 2019). Additionally, a high degree of worker diversity has been associated with increased intergroup conflict and more significant employee turnover (Akhlaghimofrad & Farmanesh, 2021). Leaders and managers in human services need to discover methods to capitalize on diversity to improve the quality of treatment (Shore et al., 2018).

An inclusive workplace can increase diversity (Shore et al., 2018). An inclusive workplace is one in which all employees, no matter who they are or what they do, are equally supported and engaged in all workplace elements. Shore et al. (2018) further note that there are many various genders, ethnicities, nations, and sexual orientations and identities that live in a diverse but not inclusive society. Only a small group's ideas are valued or have authority or influence in this environment. Creating an inclusive workplace may foster creativity and improve

service delivery. The proposed study will assess different routes to understand better how the climate for inclusion affects the quality of treatment and job satisfaction in an organization.

Workplace employee behavior has been studied concerning various forms of discrimination, social identity, and stereotype threats (Leslie, 2019; Manzi et al., 2019). When employees work well together and uphold the most fundamental rules of decency and respect for one another, employee morale, productivity, and customer service are at their highest levels (Xu et al., 2022). Unfortunately, this is not always the case when employees engage in improper and disruptive actions (Leslie, 2019; Manzi et al., 2019). If workplace well-being concerns African American employees, the findings may motivate company leaders to devote attention and resources to ensure these employees experience a positive environment. This chapter includes the introduction, study background, problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions, conceptual framework, significance of the study, assumptions, limitations, definitions of terms, and a summary.

Background Context

African Americans are more affected by employment and occupational stress than their White counterparts (Assari & Bazargan, 2019). There may be more significant connections between health, personal resources, and working conditions for African Americans due to the higher incidence of diabetes, hypertension, and health risk behavior problems among African Americans (Assari, 2018). African American men are more prone than their Caucasian counterparts to suffer from various chronic conditions, including hypertension and many malignancies (Marin, 2019). Due to the high prevalence of occupational stress among African Americans and the association between occupational anxiety and stress-related disorders, occupational stress among African Americans is a problem requiring attention (Gilmore, 2021).

As a result of the potential benefits of diversity, the organizational literature has moved its emphasis from diversity management to inclusion (Jonsen et al., 2021; Teo et al., 2020). It is essential to examine how employees feel free to express their authentic selves at work (Jonsen et al., 2021). Employee inclusion is measured by how much employees respect and feel included in their work environment (Teo et al., 2020). In building a more diverse workforce, diversity management relates to an organization's hiring, training, and mentoring practices (Moon & Christensen, 2020). Inclusion management refers to corporate rulemaking and policy-making that recognizes and develops each employee's unique abilities while ensuring that they are involved in all official and informal areas of the business (Westman et al., 2020). A growing body of research (Jonsen et al., 2021; Teo et al., 2020) indicates that fostering an inclusive workplace, particularly among diverse organizational groups, results in positive outcomes such as increased job satisfaction and retention (Li et al., 2019) as well as decreased conflict, (Teo et al., 2020) intention to leave the organization, trust, well-being, and innovation, and decreased organizational turnover (Li et al., 2019).

Creating an inclusive environment is the capacity of a company to make each employee feel valued and regarded as an integral component of the group or business (Teo et al., 2020). Following Teo et al. (2020), the organizational context of workforce heterogeneity for the proposed study was defined as the mix of individual and group-level diversity attributes. Previous research demonstrated the significance of these traits. Various studies indicated that fostering an inclusive workplace, particularly among diverse organizational groups, results in positive outcomes such as increased job satisfaction and retention (Brimhall, 2019; Li et al., 2019).

It has been demonstrated that the presence of African American professionals in the workplace helps businesses utilize diversity. However, whether this contributes to improved healthcare quality for all (Brewer, 1991; Piatt et al., 2019), social identity and optimal distinctiveness can be ascribed to a happy work environment. According to social identity theory, group members who feel valued and essential are more inclined to identify with the group (Charness & Chen, 2020). Individuals may trust and accept one another when recognizing their shared interests and experiences. Inclusion and acceptance feelings are correlated positively. Inclusion is not contingent merely on a member's opinion that the organization shares common qualities but is acknowledged for one's unique contributions to the organization (Teo et al., 2020). According to optimal uniqueness, individuals strive to balance appreciating their differences and their sense of similarity to other organizations' members (Chung et al., 2020). An inclusive workplace is one in which people are valued as group members and distinct individuals with abilities and characteristics. When employees feel connected to the organization, morale and job performance are enhanced (Indradevi, 2020).

Critical race theory (CRT) has also been emphasized with workplace diversity. CRT motivates the socioeconomic problem of organizational support and other resource inequities that African American professionals experience vis-à-vis their White counterparts, *ceteris paribus*. It does not encourage the qualitative data to be collected with which the research, as mentioned earlier, questions were to be addressed. The proposed study was not focused on determining that there is institutionalized racial bias in the U.S. That said, CRT is not focused on diversity and inclusion; it is a technique for exploring the role of race and racism in a society that originated in law school and has since spread to other fields of study (Poole et al., 2021). Rather than being characterized in a fixed and limited fashion, CRT is viewed as a dynamic and ever-

changing activity. It examines how institutionalized racism and the social construction of race produce a racial caste system that maintains the lowest ranks for people of color (Poole et al., 2021). CRT is aware of the connections between race and other identities, including sexual orientation, gender identity, and others. The CRT recognizes that racism still exists today and acknowledges that a nation's social fabric is still shaped by the legacy of slavery, segregation, and the imposition of second-class citizenship on African Americans and other people of color (Solórzano & Huber, 2020).

Historically, African Americans have had limited employment prospects in the U.S. (Bleich et al., 2019). It is generally acknowledged that employment disparity gained popularity following the Civil Rights Movement when federal regulations were enacted to combat a culture of inequality in the U.S. and the workforce (Elzweig, 2021). Since President Kennedy formed the Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity, scholars have concentrated on the recruitment process to eradicate racial discrimination in the hiring and employment processes (Shannon & Hunter, 2020). Conversely, employment practices, such as employee culture and promotion, should be more studied. No systematic research has been conducted on African American employees' specific qualities and attitudes that may be associated with work-related stress and health decline. This is a considerable knowledge gap. As a result, workplace stress is challenging, and well-being among African American business employees is critical in the U.S. The proposed study addressed this knowledge gap, at least in part, by addressing the essential factors associated with the career advancement of African American professionals into senior management positions.

Problem Statement

After years of job growth, the unemployment rate in the U.S. has dropped to its lowest level (Paul & Hamilton, 2018). Despite this, African American workers have great difficulty getting employment and achieving well-being, let alone one that pays well (Spalter-Roth, 2018). Increasing job insecurity and declining salaries contribute to the nation's persistently rising unemployment rate (Paul & Hamilton, 2018). Frequently, workplace segregation results in lower wages for African Americans than Whites, and segmented labor markets make it more difficult for Black people to obtain steady, well-paying employment and a positive work environment (Spalter-Roth, 2018). According to Spalter-Roth (2018), these persistent salary gaps result from systemic obstacles to quality employment, such as overt discrimination against African American workers. Even though African American workers and their families have more employment opportunities and jobs overall, they continue to experience poor labor market results, including more unemployment and fewer excellent positions. However, organizations can create a culture of belonging by practicing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI; Ormand et al., 2022). DEI may facilitate the development of a sense of community or belonging that allows businesses to maximize opportunities for all employees (Witwer, 2021).

African Americans are commonly affected by overwhelming work-related stress (Fine et al., 2020). Numerous factors, such as organizational fit, workplace discrimination, and diversity, can contribute to job dissatisfaction and elevated stress levels. African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian Americans are more likely than Whites to leave their jobs annually (Paul & Hamilton, 2018). Multiple studies have revealed that African American educators are less likely than their White counterparts to report high levels of school enrollment, racial stress, and racial socialization (Banerjee et al., 2018).

Stress and job satisfaction vary by age and gender, but little research has focused on the experiences of African Americans in the workplace. Life satisfaction is influenced by numerous factors, including stress and workplace discrimination, among others (Banerjee et al., 2018; Fine et al., 2020). According to Abdulkhaliq and Mohammadali (2019), African American men experienced stress at work due to racial bias creating a hostile environment to work in. The effects of occupational stress on African Americans in management, general employment, and education have all been investigated. The influence of workplace stress on the well-being of African American corporate employees has been researched for the first time, indicating an increased risk of stress among this population in the workforce (Banerjee et al., 2018; Fine et al., 2020; Paul & Hamilton, 2018).

Possessing a distinct identity and a robust feeling of community enhances an individual's sense of belonging (Allen et al., 2021). Uniqueness can improve group performance when accepted into a group and cherished for its exceptional quality. For instance, workers older than their peers may have substantial business and industry knowledge that may be shared with the group. To ensure the firm's success, the senior employee must be regarded as an insider with access to vital information. According to the literature on diversity, it is advantageous to have both a sense of community and a sense of individuality (Goering et al., 2022). Visible minority members have solid networks and a sense of belonging; for instance, they are more optimistic about their futures. It is simpler to strike a balance between individualism and a sense of community when team members are encouraged to regard diversity as a strength. Integration-and-learning workgroups generate high-quality analyses, foster cross-organizational collaboration, and provide opportunities for group members to grow their skills (Barber, 2020).

Conversely, exclusion results from a loss of identity and a lack of belonging (Cruz et al., 2022). People in different departments or groups are regarded as company insiders, yet the individual is not a vital team member. Negating the need to belong can harm employees' cognition, emotion, behavior, and health. In contrast, workplace exclusion, coworker rejection, and supervisor disapproval had a detrimental effect on men's perceptions of work and mental health. The argument made through CRT recognizes this workplace exclusion and argues that racism is a more commonly unintended (though sometimes predictable) consequence of actions than the result of isolated, unreasonably awful deeds committed by individuals (Poole et al., 2021). The terminology used to characterize beliefs, policies, or actions is shown as a frequent method of hiding racism. CRT makes it possible to theorize, study, and combat the hidden and explicit influences of race and racism on social structures, practices, and discourses (Christian et al., 2019). According to the CRT, studies that fail to account for racial disparities are not neutral but promote existing racial inequalities. This way of evaluating racial dynamics in society is handy for civil rights lawyers. Despite the current attacks against CRT, any civil rights attorney serious about tackling racial inequality in the U.S. must be familiar with the theory and its core concepts (Christian et al., 2019; Poole et al., 2021).

These elements contribute to their lack of influence on the senior management team and the increasing market recognition of their exceptional human capital (Cruz et al., 2022; Fine et al., 2020; Settles et al., 2021). According to these findings, it is vital to consider a person's uniqueness as well as their sense of belonging while investigating the critical factors for fostering a positive workplace for African American professionals (Cruz et al., 2022; Fine et al., 2020; Settles et al., 2021).

Purpose Statement

Critical factors influencing group cohesiveness, thus creating a positive working environment for African American Professionals, are group size, member similarity, group success, entry challenges, external competition, and threats (Ghosh et al., 2019). The proposed study will examine the critical factors and how organizations can facilitate the success of a group, thus creating cohesiveness and the workplace well-being of African American corporate employees. Workplace well-being includes the quality and safety of the physical environment, employee attitudes toward their jobs, working settings, the culture at work, and work structure (Faez et al., 2021). Effective diversity management in a global corporate culture allows anyone, regardless of location, to join any business (Asatiani et al., 2021). In essence, the proposed study will help to understand what African American professionals who have achieved senior management positions in their respective professions perceive to be “best practices” for facilitating the advancement of African American professionals at earlier stages of their careers. However, the proposed study will further identify contingencies across study participants to develop a contingency theory of practices (versus simply reporting a gamut of so-called “best” practices). The contingencies are discussed in the theory and related sampling method discussions.

Research Questions

The research study addressed the following research questions:

- RQ1: What critical factors have facilitated the advancement of African American professionals to senior management positions?
- RQ2: Can a theoretical model be developed for the critical factors that facilitate the advancement of African American professionals to senior management positions?

Theoretical Framework

This study investigated the critical factors for creating positive workplace cohesion and the possible theoretical models that can ignite organizational equity for African American professionals. Additionally, the research examined these factors of developing a productive workplace and fostering employee harmony using a framework of appreciative inquiry (AI) theory. The AI theory was deemed more appropriate than CRT as the former informs a survey and interview questions aligned with the study's purpose and research questions. In recent years, AI has evolved from its origins in organizational management and development into a technique widely used and accepted by facilitators and engagement professionals (He & Oxendine, 2019). The phrase "deficit-based" systems change is used to define the emphasis of AI on developing good ideas instead of identifying issues that need to be addressed. AI can be understood as using group debate and inquiry to generate positive thoughts that would otherwise be obscured by negative, albeit subtle, societal biases (Hodgson et al., 2022).

Developing the interview questions occurred through a modified Delphi design with open-and closed-ended questions motivated by a theoretical framework. The theories included in the framework were briefly introduced in this chapter and thoroughly explicated in Chapter 2.

Appreciative Inquiry Theory

AI theory will inform the nature of the questions to be asked during qualitative data collection but not the content per se. AI theory has evolved from its origins in organizational management and development into a widely used and accepted technique by facilitators and engagement professionals (Cooperrider & Fry, 2020; He & Oxendine, 2019). Upon initial development of the theory, Cooperrider and Fry (2020) proposed the Discover, Dream, Design, and Destiny model, which heralded a five-stage design and inquiry focused on implementing and

appreciating team development. As an expansion of the theory, the phrase “deficit-based” systems change is often used to define the emphasis of AI on developing good ideas instead of identifying issues that need to be addressed (Garrett, 2022). Participants undergo a sequence of questions and dialogues designed to reveal their team's strengths, advantages, and potential (Hodgson et al., 2022). The participants then collaborate to develop and implement new improvement ideas.

A social-constructivist theory that asserts human development is fundamentally a social process and that social and cultural interactions, relationships, and dialogues construct knowledge about how people understand, interpret, and experience the world, as well as how they organize to achieve their goals as individuals and organizations (Zajda, 2022). Alternately, suppose a person's social or cultural conditions influence how they view the world and other people's problems, difficulties, thoughts, and opportunities. In that case, these things will become visible and, consequently, susceptible to change. People with a certain level of social privileges, such as wealth or belonging to a racial majority, may be more likely to believe that social problems are caused by the actions of the underprivileged or members of minority racial or ethnic groups, as opposed to systems that favor some and disadvantage others, such as the wealthy and those of a particular race or ethnicity (Blacksher & Valles, 2021). Consequently, AI can be understood as using group debate and inquiry to generate positive ideas that would otherwise be obscured by negative, albeit subtle, societal biases (Hodgson et al., 2022). Thus, the good socially manufactured concepts that emerge and evolve because of AI counterbalance the adverse socially constructed problems. Indeed, AI is a widely applicable theory that informs the development of survey and interview questions focused on growth and positivity in response to social biases (He & Oxendine, 2019).

Optimal Distinctiveness Theory

Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (ODT) was used to develop the open-ended questions, which allowed for qualitative data to be collected in tandem with the two research questions. Inclusion refers to the degree to which a person feels valued at work by receiving treatment that satisfies their needs for distinctiveness and belonging (Emirza, 2022). This definition of inclusion, unlike others, is grounded in ODT and emphasizes belonging and difference. In the literature on diversity and inclusion, themes of belonging and individuality coexist, but the necessity for a balance between these two traits has yet to be investigated.

In diverse literature, the significance of identification in establishing both in and out-groups has been intensively researched (Sassonko, 2020; Seering et al., 2018). According to the literature on diversity, the basis of social category identification is a symbolic commitment to the group (Sassonko, 2020). As a result of their shared membership in the group, members develop emotional ties with one another. Identity has both a social and an individual component, requiring the individual to define him or herself as an individual. Social identities inhibit individuation because they permit individuals to incorporate group features into their self-concepts (Seering et al., 2018). ODT exemplifies the tension between the desire for individuality and self-expression and the desire to be accepted by others and feel like a group (Sassonko, 2020). This desire for belonging is a need to build and sustain strong, secure interpersonal relationships (Sassonko, 2020). Sassonko (2020) asserted that people acquire social identities with groups and want to be accepted into those organizations to satisfy this need.

ODT represents the tension between the desire for individuality and self-expression, the passion for being accepted by others, and feeling like a group (Sassonko, 2020). To achieve a balance between these two objectives, people attempt to join as many groups as they can

(Seering et al., 2018). This desire for belonging is a need to build and sustain strong, secure interpersonal relationships. Sassonko (2020) asserted that people acquire social identities with groups and want to be accepted into those organizations to satisfy this need. Furthermore, they note that isolation can result from having a solid sense of self, but acceptance and the importance of belonging it fosters help avoid it.

Being a member of a group has numerous advantages. Favoritism and favorable characteristics are shown in one's social group members (Pavez et al., 2021). The group members' dedication to one another, capacity to collaborate, and dependability all contribute to the group's feeling of safety. Individuality, or the desire to maintain a distinct and unique sense of self, cannot be realized if group members are perceived as too similar (Abosag et al., 2020). In this way, they note that people frequently make parallels between themselves and other social group members due to the desire to stand out. According to Abosag et al. (2020), people choose to identify with a group that simultaneously satisfies their need to belong and want to stand out. Although ODT testing indicates that in some instances, just one condition is necessary, both requirements are crucial. Therefore, the significance of a person's demand for uniqueness or a sense of community will change depending on the circumstances. A specific social identity may become more apparent when a particular environmental scenario provokes one of these requests. When an African American is the sole member of a team of Caucasians, her ideas are rejected publicly. She attributes the rejection to her color, and the need for belonging may grow (Way et al., 2022).

Significance of the Study

The study aimed to identify the critical factors for fostering a supportive work environment for African American professionals while showing how diversity management

improves organizational effectiveness and team cohesion. This study is relevant because it will help corporate employers, executives, supervisors, and human resource experts understand the relationship between workplace stress and workplace well-being among African American professionals in the U.S. This information will assist them in determining whether a workforce has a stress-related issue. The findings can influence company leaders to invest more resources to minimize workplace stress, creating a positive workplace.

Due to increased ethnic and gender diversity brought on by globalization, companies must learn how to deal with cultural variations and employees' diverse attitudes toward work. Managing employees in a diverse workplace presents possibilities and challenges as the workforce gets more varied (Tamers et al., 2020). Taking advantage of shifts in the labor force and the market can provide a competitive advantage. Managing employees with different values and views and escaping accountability is challenging when management mishandles unique work conditions (Meneses, 2021). In addition, this study's findings would impact future research in this field, expanding knowledge on the subject. In addition to psychology, numerous other professions, such as counseling, public policy and administration, and business administration, can benefit from the study's findings. The study's findings would be helpful to the Center for International Private Enterprise, the National Human Resources Association, and other agencies and organizations. This study was essential for a better understanding of business diversity in America, as women of color are considered minorities in the workforce, and men hold many of the leadership roles.

The contributions of African American women to the American economy are highly beneficial. Despite their education, women of color may experience isolation in the business sector due to a lack of support (Criscuolo et al., 2021; Norwood, 2020). Business advantages

such as access to a broad talent pool, the adoption of new competencies, and increased returns are forfeited by organizational leaders who place barriers in the way of the inclusion of the population. Due to the country's current employment restrictions, few African American women are in senior positions, making it difficult to abolish racial and gender discrimination that breaches industrial ethics (Norwood, 2020). The findings aim to increase awareness and encourage businesses and legislators that they must change to effect societal change. This can be altered, as women of color are underrepresented in leadership positions and have fewer job opportunities.

When hiring individuals of diversity, employers have access to a bigger pool of qualified candidates (Duchek et al., 2020; Ely & Thomas, 2020). As the number of job applications increases, so does the possibility of filling positions requiring highly trained employees. Consequently, businesses that employ women and minorities have a market edge. Hiring individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds helps companies comprehend worldwide customers' preferences. Analyzing demographic marketplaces can give firms valuable information and feedback about their products and services (Ely & Thomas, 2020). Therefore, firms that value variety are more likely to acquire new clients. It is possible to generate fresh concepts by bringing together individuals from diverse backgrounds. One can approach a problem or topic from various perspectives, resulting in more possibilities. Regardless of race, age, or gender, every individual has a unique viewpoint on the world around them. The exchange of experiences fosters the growth of creativity. If the management wants to maximize a team's performance, it is essential to have members with diverse backgrounds and experiences (Duchek et al., 2020). Groupthink can be avoided by incorporating a variety of perspectives.

Assumptions of the Study

The study was anticipated to be accurate given the research design, delimitations, data-gathering method, and interpretive analysis employed. Researchers and other study participants made assumptions about potential affecting factors (Wolgemuth et al., 2018). When this research was conducted, there was a growth in the number of underrepresented people in the workforce, and fewer barriers to progress were anticipated. Thus this research could benefit a similar population of African Americans engaged in corporate America. There were observations on aspiring and established leaders as they reflected on prior contacts with the phenomenon and conducted interviews based on the assumption that respondents would deliver accurate comments without coercion. The findings of this study could have a positive effect on society if corporate leaders devote more time and resources to assisting African American workers in coping with workplace stress and creating a positive working environment.

Limitations of the Study

Due to unintentional decisions made during the study's development, its limits are difficult to control and may compromise validity (Roth, 2019). Since the researcher is the instrument of the study, erroneous interpretations of the research findings account for many restrictions (Busetto et al., 2020). To ensure the credibility and success of the study, the researcher must refrain from disclosing personal biases throughout interviews and observations. Due to the wide variety of vocations and career levels of participants who had experienced the phenomenon, the study was limited to a small number of African American Professionals in several industries.

This study had several limitations. Participation by a small number of African American male and female corporate employees who work for autonomous legal entities owned by

shareholders, such as private sector corporations that support the U.S. government, may have limited the generalizability of the findings. There may have been difficulties in extrapolating the findings to all African American business personnel or the entire U.S. Another constraint involved bias-related challenges, including social desirability bias and inattention. As validity threats, inattention and social desirability reactions were troublesome.

Definitions of Terms

- *African Americans* are individuals descended from any of Africa's Black racial groups (Parra et al., 2001).
- *African American corporate employees*: African Americans are employed by a separate legal entity owned by shareholders, such as a business that supports the federal government of the U.S. (Parra et al., 2001).
- *Occupational segregation*: Occupational segregation is the overrepresentation of a given demographic group in a particular job or work. The research indicates that gender-based occupational segregation is more a result of presumptions about the types of labor for which different genders are most suited than an adequate distribution of intrinsic aptitude (Bene & McNeilly, 2020).
- *Diversity*: Refers to variations in many characteristics that make up an individual, including age, gender, race, marital status, ethnicity, religion, education, and a host of other secondary features (Piatt et al., 2019).
- *Workplace stress*: A person's adverse reaction to pressure or other obligations at work.
- *Well-being*: A broad term that encompasses a variety of factors, such as the physical workplace itself, employee attitudes toward their jobs and workspaces, the company's

- culture, and the day's schedule. "job contentment" is frequently used to refer to workplace satisfaction (Bonilla-Silva, 2019).
- *Racism*: Discrimination based on an individual's or group's phenotypic characteristics or membership in an ethnic group (Sukalova & Ceniga, 2020).
 - *Stereotypes Threats*: It refers to the unpleasant psychological response to encountering preconceived notions about a person's race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or social position.
 - *Barriers*: Barriers are policies, laws, rules, institutions, and limitations that present a challenge and make it difficult for persons to advance or gain access to specific areas—workplace barriers, impediments, or difficulties that impede the advancement of employees. As a result, the performance of impacted individuals will change because of the obstacles they face when engaging in activities. The study defines barriers as constraints to advancing African American professionals in the workplace. It identifies them as pervasive, even though these professionals may be qualified for employment opportunities and promotions (Dayé, 2018).

Chapter Summary

In the U.S., employees of African descent face numerous obstacles, many of which date back decades (Grzanka et al., 2019). Recent studies demonstrate that inequality permeates the current capitalist culture. Numerous academics believe that the social and racial history of the U.S. is to blame for the current problems. Businesses must overcome formidable obstacles to make significant strides in their respective industries. To achieve equity for African American workers in the private sector, numerous obstacles must be overcome, including geographic location, industry, type of job, day-to-day concerns at work, and cultural concerns.

To alleviate these macro problems, the proposed study will start at the micro level. CRT posits that racial inequities are institutionalized in the U.S. The empirical research generally supports CRT. Until institutionalized racism in the U.S. is alleviated, what can help African American professionals who are early in their careers succeed is an understanding of the critical factors that African American professionals in senior management positions identify as having been facilitative of their career success despite the national climate and, institutionally, the organizational environments of their respective workplaces.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Organizations may maintain a competitive advantage and increase productivity by actively recruiting and involving African Americans in decision-making processes (Evans, 2022). If organizations adopt best practices in building a diverse workplace, they may be able to recruit and retain the brightest and most skilled employees (Zaharee et al., 2018). The size of its customer base can judge any company's performance. As a result of technical advancement, the expansion of global markets, and growing workplace diversity, the world has become more complicated (Cletus et al., 2018). Companies that cannot correctly manage variety will be unable to use their employees' abilities fully, struggle to adapt to changing market conditions, and ultimately fail (Zaharee et al., 2018).

Consequently, buyers may anticipate lower quality from these businesses. Even though research and literature indicate numerous benefits to correctly managing diversity in the workplace, various challenges must be overcome before firms can reap these benefits. These issues were divided into two categories: those of an organizational nature and those of a purely personal nature. Environmental barriers can be eliminated by implementing diversity measures to provide an inclusive workplace for all employees (Dayé, 2018). From the standpoint of the workforce, inclusion is adopting a transition that will result in a more uniform evaluation of the workforce's quality by all employees (Dover et al., 2020). Hence, inclusion is a critical aspect of avoiding discrimination against workers.

Even if a company's policies, processes, and practices are not explicitly racist, they may harm African American employees (Kartolo & Kwantes, 2019). This is called organizational discrimination. According to Kartolo and Kwantes (2019), these dynamics represent the

disintegration of structures meant to combat racial inequity and the subsequent proliferation of colorblind norms that justify more covert and insidious forms of racism. Business policies instituted after the Civil Rights Movement and the passage of affirmative action legislation forced Black executives to accept racialized employment (Austin, 2021). Racialized employment was difficult to integrate because it was less integrated into the organizational structure, offered less long-term security, and provided fewer avenues to top management positions (Austin, 2021). Occasionally, bias in the workplace can stem from ingrained cultural norms and customs. While legislation and regulation have been designed to avoid race-based bias, the vestiges of organizational culture result in difficulty in overcoming the bias (Gupta & Saxena, 2022). It's likely expected that Black people are underrepresented in many fields, given the barriers they confront from institutions, organizations, and coworkers (Griffin, 2020). According to Wingfield and Chavez (2020), no matter their minority status, Black employees often report experiencing racial discrimination and marginalization in the workplace.

Sometimes discrimination results from an individual's opinion, perspective, or bias rather than a legal mandate (Griffin, 2020). According to Griffin (2020), it is conceivable for individuals to uphold racial prejudice in institutional contexts actively. This is known as individual discrimination since it is based on personal prejudices. Even without explicit organizational orders, individual managers may bias against Black employees during the hiring and promotion by favoring white employees with comparable qualifications (Ray, 2019). Even persons whose names appear to have a racial connotation run the danger of encountering such bias. Treating employees differently can be motivated by overt or unconscious bias (Gorman & Mosseri, 2019). This decision is still being determined whether it is supported by policy. Wearing and Hughes (2021) demonstrate that organizational policies that are ostensibly

colorblind but discriminate against people of color, institutional networks that allocate resources unequally along racial lines, and individual behaviors and interactions that facilitate unequal treatment are distinct. Therefore, management must be abreast of the characteristics of workers that contribute to the organization's diversity, or that could be grounds for illegal discrimination by management.

Management must be aware of employees' backgrounds and how their behavior and values shape their decision-making in a varied set to manage diversity in the workplace effectively (Stephens et al., 2020). Managers as leaders are responsible for individual and group efforts to comprehend and motivate others to recognize what must be done and how and accomplish common goals (Badura et al., 2020). A leader's performance depends on organizational, human, and interpersonal characteristics (Stoverink et al., 2020). Effective leadership emphasizes the necessity for charitable work that significantly benefits the leader's organization (Badura et al., 2020). Employees may attribute significance to leaders' exemplary conduct in the workplace, which may motivate them to establish their own goals. Thus, management must accept their role as influencers of the individuals and culture of the organization and how the activities of management as leaders create a message for workers concerning the organization's values.

The influence of a competent leader extends well beyond the immediate group and permeates all levels of society (Stoverink et al., 2020). A leader's responsibility is to inspire their team to give their all, demonstrate their willingness to make sacrifices, and strive for extraordinary achievements in their work (Plachy & Smunt, 2022). Effective leadership can set a vision for the organization's future, ensuring its members are committed to this vision and maintain their attention on it (Allen et al., 2021). Personal sacrifice is one of the most apparent

methods for a leader to demonstrate concern for the organization's success (Stoverink et al., 2020). Managers of human resources departments have unique challenges in navigating workplace cultural diversity (Cowan et al., 2021). An organization can mitigate the effects of these challenges by nurturing a more diverse workforce through fostering an environment of tolerance, promoting open discourse, and developing conflict resolution strategies (Greenhaus et al., 2018). In addition to actively seeking out and recruiting individuals from underrepresented groups, organizations must have policies and processes to protect employees' legal rights and ensure legal compliance (Dick, 2021). Business leaders must consider how corporate policies and procedures may affect various employees. Questionnaires and suggestion boxes can assist companies in learning more about the viewpoints of their employees regarding diversity initiatives (Zhou et al., 2019). Both positive and negative feedback should be examined. The input should be the grounds for changing the business policy.

Companies should be adaptable enough to modify or delete policies that employees perceive as hindering or counterproductive (Zhou et al., 2019). A company's unstated "rules" must also be communicated to each employee for the organization's fundamental principles and culture to be effectively communicated (Dubinko et al., 2021). A properly established and documented policy is the most significant way to show a company's commitment to diversity (Zhou et al., 2019). When new policies are ready to be implemented, they should be written and included in an employee handbook. The company's diversity policies must be reviewed when hiring new employees. The current workforce must be informed of any policy changes. Therefore, managing diversity is critical to successful organizational management.

Managing diversity creates workplace cohesion by allowing everyone to develop their abilities and perform their best work (Sukalova & Ceniga, 2020). Numerous characteristics

distinguish one person from another, including but not limited to gender, race, disability, religion, sexual orientation, age, and a person's distinctive work style, personality, and cultural background. The workplace could become more amicable and productive if everyone's differences are acknowledged and celebrated (Gomez & Bernet, 2019). The company's objectives will become more apparent as a result. The organization has demonstrated its appreciation for the differences of its employees by providing them with the resources they require to perform their jobs effectively. Managing diversity is about allowing individuals to grow and achieve their best work, which is why it is crucial to foster a thriving atmosphere. Theories have a vital role in providing context for understanding the multifaceted characteristics of human beings (Lindberg, 2020). Critical race theory is one of those fundamental theories.

Appreciative Inquiry Theory

Utilizing inquiries and dialogue, AI helps individuals, communities, and organizations recognize their potential and capitalize on their current strengths (Ahmed et al., 2020). The asset-based approach is a way of encouraging group and organization participation. According to the social-constructivist theory, which posits that human development is inherently social and knowledge is constructed through social and cultural interactions, relationships, and dialogue, AI enhances how individuals and groups collaborate to achieve their goals (Boyland, 2019). If people's perceptions of the world and others are social constructions, then different issues, approaches, ideas, and possibilities will be prioritized and, therefore, more flexible, depending on the individual's social or cultural background (Cikara et al., 2022). Social privilege, whether because of financial security or participation in a racial majority, may ascribe societal ills to the actions of underrepresented groups rather than the discriminatory policies and laws that produce those results (Suyemoto et al., 2022).

The opposing socially manufactured challenges can be counterbalanced by the positive socially generated ideas that emerge and evolve through AI. In this case, it may become apparent that framing social problems in terms of negative group behaviors rather than systemic structural biases in society that give rise to negative behaviors serves the interests of those who benefit from the discrimination, thereby maintaining a worldview that views inequitable policies as solutions to the problems themselves (Suyemoto et al., 2022). Since unfavorable, if subtle, societal biases can obscure helpful ideas, AI can be viewed as an endeavor to uncover those ideas through collective debate and inquiry (Boyland, 2019). Over the past three decades, the AI community has settled on a standard paradigm, even though there are various iterations of AI. The methodology has been applied worldwide (Adefila et al., 2020). The first model of AI, known as the 4D Cycle, consisted of four stages and five guiding principles. However, some practitioners later identified a fifth step, which resulted in the development of the 5D Cycle.

Definition (Clarifying)

In the first step of an AI, the central problem, question, or topic that will lead the remainder of the procedure is identified. In this phase, the scope and objectives of the investigation are outlined. While detailing methods, AI takes a constructive, problem-solving perspective (Reed, 2020). AI begins with positive, asset-based framing inquiries to establish what is already working in a community, company, or team rather than with data collection and identifying inadequacies, as is often the case with traditional problem-solving strategies (Demeshane & Nel, 2018). Where the two camps 'part company is on the question of what can be done to reduce customer wrath and complaints, and the Center for AI cites this as an example of an obsolete inquiry. According to Demeshane and Nel (2018), an AI-based strategy would have enquired about the situations in which clients were most satisfied with the offered services

and the lessons that could be gleaned from such cases (Reed, 2020). This strategy is also widely referred to as the Affirmative Topic within the discipline of AI.

Discovery (Appreciating)

Some models break down the Discovery stage into two parts: the first finds and discusses instances of success, while the second looks for commonalities among these instances. As part of the second phase of AI, team members and stakeholders provide their perspectives on the group's or organization's strengths (Ding et al., 2020). When starting a conversation, framing inquiries positively encourages open communication and gets people thinking about what's already going well (Cooperrider & Fry, 2020). This can be achieved by studying efficient and dynamic examples of organizational excellence. To better grasp the specific aspects, including leadership, relationships, technology, and underlying processes, which make the high points possible, people consciously let go of analysis of failures and carefully attempt to isolate and learn from even the most minor wins (Ding et al., 2020).

3. Dream (Envisioning)

At this point in an AI, everyone involved can share their vision for the future of the organization, team, or group they are a part of (Reed, 2020). One way in which AI is distinct from traditional methods of foresight and planning is that it generates future visions considering actual examples of its past performance (Farrow, 2022). According to Farrow (2022), instead of speculating on potential solutions to past problems, AI participants are tasked with actively designing the future they envision, which is grounded on proven strategies yet allows for complete freedom of expression in the arts.

Design (Co-Constructing)

In the fourth phase of AI, participants co-construct a new or improved community, organization, or team (Jennewein, 2021). All the organization works toward producing the best possible setting. The group's efforts are directed at the creation of doable ideas. Every tactic, procedure, choice, system, and joint action is grounded in the positive core, and innovative premises and organizing principles are conceived to back it all up. After participants had spent time daydreaming about potential outcomes in the Dream stage, they moved on to the Design stage, where they started to put together the practical pieces of a strategy.

Destiny (Innovating)

The last step of an AI is to implement the group's design. According to the Center for AI, this is a critical juncture in which communities, organizations, and teams improvise and integrate AI competencies into the culture by recognizing and celebrating successes that are bringing the system closer to the future that the community, organization, or team co-created (Tittle, 2018). Cooperrider and Fry (2020) decided to rename the final stage of the paradigm from Deliver to Destiny because the former word conjured up dull images of change management (Tittle, 2018).

AI has been used by public and private organizations of varying sizes around the world to address issues such as revenue growth, customer service enhancement, the pursuit of sustainable value creation, the development of influential leaders, the restructuring of World Vision's internal departments, and the reduction of wasteful cycle times and costs (Feijóo et al., 2020). Meetings, medium-sized groups, and large-scale change efforts involving thousands of people can benefit from AI. The system can be set up locally or remotely. This could be a short-term commitment of a few days or a long-term commitment of months or even years, depending on the nature and breadth of the issues being investigated and the number of people involved.

Compared to other approaches to organizational visioning and change, AI stands out because it focuses on the good qualities of the present as the foundation for determining future objectives, according to (Benbya et al., 2021). Compared to traditional methods, AI emphasizes taking stock of one's inner and external assets and successes (Stavros et al., 2021). This positive strategy encourages exceptional performance by reinforcing relationships and culture, offering a single vision and direction, supporting learning and creativity, and stimulating collective action (Benbya et al., 2021).

Critiques of AI Theory

Some of the most well-known objections against the AI model are that it is excessively optimistic and lacks empirical evidence of its efficacy (Peters, 2022). In addition, some spectators have acquired mistrust in the AI process and the objectivity of the AI community due to some AI practitioners' evangelical conduct, fervor, and language. The degree to which a given model achieves its intended objectives depends on the care with which it is executed; this can be a complex process involving various variables, some of which may have unintended implications (Oeij et al., 2019). This is the case whenever individuals attempt to apply theoretical, conceptual, or operational models to the operations of a group, organization, or team. Therefore, it is frequently challenging to determine what went right or wrong with the execution of a specific model or technique.

One major complaint against the AI framework is that it puts too much emphasis on the good. However, proponents of AI would argue that "deficit-based" strategies have limitations. Many studies show that traditional problem-oriented approaches rarely result in positive revolutionary change (Stavros et al., 2021). AI critics argue that if problems are constantly avoided, minimized, or rejected, a revolutionary shift will unlikely occur in society, industry, or

team. The optimistic outlook of AI has been criticized for its potential use to stifle discussion of difficulties by team, community, and organization leaders. The board of directors in this situation has the incentive to avoid discussing the organization's challenges because of the strong possibility that bad leadership is a crucial source of the difficulties. While AI can be taught to help people have more productive conversations about a wide range of topics, it still can't eliminate the discomfort of having difficult talks.

The most promising and potentially perilous part of the concept of AI is the possibility that an AI method may be applied to reinforce and preserve racial or cultural bias, prejudice, and discrimination (Walton, 2018). If, for example, a process of inquiry, discussion, or engagement is mandated to focus solely on positive questions, comments, and ideas, the AI process could be used, intentionally or not, to stifle the voices of victims of bias, prejudice, and discrimination. Because it is characteristic of unfair, oppressive, and discriminatory institutions to silence justifiable anger, dissatisfaction, and complaints, the perceived prohibition on negativity in AI, when applied to equity-based dialogues or engagement procedures, raises significant and well-founded concerns. Experts and practitioners in the engagement field who facilitate AI-based processes in culturally diverse communities and workplaces should be mindful of their cultural biases and motives (Gupta & Saxena, 2022). Change considerations are warranted so conversations about racism, sexism, and sexual harassment in the workplace are not stifled.

Generativity in AI emerges from a desire to grow an organization at the intersection of connection and appreciation (Berente et al., 2021). Practical collaborative efforts toward a new future, characterized by greater appreciation and connection to boost capacity, are made possible by AI interventions (Tittle, 2018). Engaged workers exhibit heightened energy, a sense of purpose, passion, and challenge as understood by commitment, and total immersion and attention

to their work as understood by absorption. Engagement in one's work can be primarily predicted by one's access to a job and person-related resources such as social support, performance feedback, possibilities for growth, and a feeling of autonomy (Reed, 2020). Team members may benefit from social feedback and training opportunities if they can better align their skills with their colleagues. Employees' positive self-perception has been identified as a critical personal predictor of professional engagement, and appreciation-based inquiry into shared potentials can help foster that (Obrenovic et al., 2021).

Critical Constructivism

Constructivism, broadened and modified in critical constructivism, rejects positivism and holds that no one or thing can provide an objective, impartial perspective (Duffy et al., 2022). According to constructivism, the universe and all its knowledge are social constructions (Cho, 2018). This perspective mentions both ontologies, the study of the nature of reality, and epistemology, the study of the nature of knowledge. The critical constructivist method promotes necessary cognition and criticality in the research process by combining constructivist or constructionist ideas with the critical epistemology developed by the Frankfurt School (Kellner & Share, 2019). Critical constructivists contend that knowledge is chronologically and culturally located; and that knowledge and phenomena are socially formed through a dialogue between culture, institutions, and historical contexts (Crabtree & Stephan, 2022). According to critical constructivism, historical, social, cultural, economic, and political settings shape people's perspectives of the world, themselves, and others (Jung, 2019). In contrast to ontologically critical constructivists, epistemologically critical constructivists study how the knowledge foundations of a specific environment surround an object of investigation.

The benefits of critical constructivism include increased self-awareness and social consciousness, the growth of independent thought, the recognition of authoritarian tendencies, the comprehension of how knowledge relates to authority, and the motivation to take constructive action (Basic et al., 2021). Influential organizations constantly destroy competing abilities to retain the validity of their knowledge construction. According to critical constructivism, only a few groups and institutions can attain prominence and be recognized as knowledge owners (Gidlund & Sundberg, 2021). This strategy aims to disrupt traditional teaching and research approaches that may unwittingly contribute to the persistence of class, racial, cultural, and gender oppression by fostering reflexivity and question-raising through dialogue and critical self-reflection. The primary essential objective of constructivism is increased conferences aimed at a deeper mutual understanding (Bogna et al., 2020). Postcolonial, decolonial, and feminist theories, among others, have embraced critical constructivism. As a result, it encourages dialogue on critical awareness and invites a reevaluation of typical knowledge-creation techniques.

The culture in which a person lives significantly impacts how its members think and behave. However, some civilizations' knowledge is viewed more highly than others (Charmaz, 2020). Critical constructivists believe knowledge cannot be saved and withdrawn like cash from a bank vault. The fundamental tenet of the required constructivist method is exposing concealed knowledge while seeking fresh viewpoints. According to Charmaz (2020), this method seeks out non-Western epistemologies, challenges dominant institutions of knowledge production, and exposes elitist assumptions embedded in present knowledge to integrate knowledge excluded and marginalized from mainstream discourse.

Critiques of Critical Constructivism

Initially, the constructivist perspective is criticized for associating it with discovery learning. The fundamental argument levied against constructivism by proponents of discovery learning is that all information must be actively generated (Buttler, 2019). Opponents of constructivism conclude that it places greater importance on student-generated information than modeled, communicated, or otherwise taught information. It has also been stated that indirect instruction makes students less inclined to apply and expand upon what they have learned than constructivist instruction. A few comprehensive studies show that direct instruction is more successful than discovery learning (Kucuk & Richardson, 2019). Thus, the empirical evidence creates significant difficulty for constructivism's essential premises.

However, research studies frequently adopted a discovery learning model in which students were left to autonomously discover the significance of the control of variables and approach a scientific inquiry without teaching (Buttler, 2019). Prominent constructivists have openly acknowledged the significance of "teacher input" in their conception of education as a process of meaning negotiation (Nwani, 2021). Adopting a constructivist perspective in the classroom does not need or even imply that students are given unlimited powers to recreate in a matter of weeks or months what knowledgeable people spent decades mastering. Therefore, this argument needs to be more concise and has established a constructivist pedagogy to which only some constructivists adhere.

Another criticism of constructivism is that the constructivist theoretical stance attempts to create significance from insignificance (Jokinen et al., 2018). The foundation of constructivism is attacked for being nothing more than a presupposition. Most people would agree that people are born with the ability to understand abstract ideas and language and that these skills are honed

via exposure to and engagement with the world and other people (de Villiers, 2022). The argument is that most of what passes for knowledge, whether at the general or specialized level, is made up and that there is only one way to learn it through conversation alone. Instead, it is up to individuals to draw their conclusions based on the data. Students should be actively engaged to know well, even when listening to a lecture. Nothing will be understood, and changes will only be made to the individual's conceptual structures if the learner completes the mental effort to process the information provided.

Optimal Distinctiveness Theory

The optimal distinctiveness hypothesis was developed to address a gap in the literature on social identity (Raskovic & Takacs-Haynes, 2020). In the early formulations of social identity theory and the evolution of self-categorization theory, cognitive processes of categorization and perceptual accentuation were widely explored (Reimer et al., 2020). It lacked an incentive for in-group identification, particularly for long-term in-group participation. In this instance, it is clear how and why specific social categories and in-group/out-group distinctions became so significant. However, the theory could not adequately explain the motivational aspects of social identity's antecedents, such as the prediction that desiring positive distinctiveness of the in-group due to social identity salience has motivational consequences.

Many social psychologists are intuitively dissatisfied with the notion that social identification, including all its requisite emotional and behavioral corollaries, is founded solely on cold cognition (Cornell & Bucci, 2020). In some instances, a commitment to a group identity may compel an individual to renounce crucial personal ambitions to maintain the success and cohesion of the group. The individual's motivations and mental processes must be analyzed to comprehend why and under what circumstances they are willing to do this. In addition,

motivational reasons were necessary to understand why group membership does not invariably result in identification and why certain in-groups are more frequently vulnerable to chronic titles.

The optimal uniqueness notion states that people have two opposing drives that shape their sense of identity in connection to the communities to which they belong (Smith et al., 2019). A person's need to blend in, be accepted, and feel at home in a group drives them to actively seek out and participate in those communities. The second is an aversion to blending in with the crowd, which is at odds with the first. The need for diversity and the want for unity can both be met when an organization expands its membership (Cornell & Bucci, 2020). When inclusiveness drops, on the other hand, people care less about being noticed for their unique qualities and more about being accepted for who they are (Smith et al., 2019). These opposing pressures balance one another out, preventing the interests of one level from being consistently jeopardized for those of another. The notion claims that social affiliation with other groups satisfies both needs despite seeming contradiction.

According to the central idea of the optimal distinctiveness model, group identification is driven by the inherent tension between differences and the demand for identity inclusion (Schwab, 2019). In particular, it is argued that people actively pursue and adopt social identities to the extent that doing so helps them meet the needs for integration and differentiation in any given social setting (Haslam et al., 2019). The best identities meet the requirements for in-group membership and uniqueness by drawing lines between the in-group and the out-group. It's not a new idea that individuals try to strike a harmony between their desires for belonging and standing out. Indeed, academics often see belonging, the desire for uniqueness, or both as vital to a healthy sense of self. However, this idea is the foundation for identity and other individuation theories focusing on social comparisons to fulfill needs for belonging and distinctiveness (Tang

& Vandenberghe, 2022). Optimal uniqueness theory, in contrast to other motivational frameworks, emphasizes the need to identify and join diverse and inclusive groups to meet the needs of the individual and the group (Brannon et al., 2018).

Having something in common with one's peers is essential for forming solid social identities. When confronted with societal classifications that are too wide or too limited, individuals frequently opt to identify themselves in how they stand out from the rest (Taylor, 2019). Maintaining equilibrium entails compensating for less-than-ideal circumstances. People who are significantly dissimilar to others around them may adopt more inclusive social personas due to their heightened drive to fit in. According to Taylor (2019), if people are in a circumstance that causes them to feel disconnected from their true selves, they may feel prompted to seek a more distinctive identity to regain their sense of wholeness.

Contrary to popular opinion, there may be a positive association between the capacity of a group to accommodate individuals' demands for belonging and distinctiveness (Nishii & Leroy, 2022). As noted previously, the request for inclusion can be addressed by assimilation within the group, whereas the need for differentiation can be met through comparisons between groups (Bernstein et al., 2020). People desire membership in ideally distinct groups that may be included and distinguishable; hence, groups can thrive on both dimensions (Nishii & Leroy, 2022). In addition, evidence reveals a positive correlation between more significant perceived intergroup divergence and greater reported intragroup inclusion.

Critiques of Optimal Distinctiveness Theory

The self-categorization analysis of group identities is occasionally criticized for emphasizing cognitive and perceptual rather than emotional and motivational components (Reimer et al., 2020). Second, constructionist viewpoints recognizing individual and communal

efforts to establish and maintain identities are similarly underrepresented (Blanchard et al., 2022). A strictly perceptual conception of one's own and other people's social and personal identities can be complemented and contested by drawing on several self-motives or demands described in the literature on the individual self (Reimer et al., 2020). Two examples of intrinsic motivations well represented by the social categorization theory's emphasis on social reality as the basis for social perception and stereotyping are accuracy and self-verification (Van Rossem, 2019).

Social identification theory effectively addresses self-evaluation and enhancement motivations less obvious in social categorization theory. Still, social identity theory effectively addresses enhancement and positive uniqueness incentives at the group level (Raskovic & Takacs-Haynes, 2020). Social identity theory proposes that, to the extent that individuals internalize their social identities and identify with the group, they desire a positive group uniqueness in which they are viewed as distinctive and superior to a comparison group (Agostini & van Zomeren, 2021). Uncertainty exists about whether the more individualistic idea of self-esteem can or should be eliminated from the positive group uniqueness foundation. However, this has yet to prevent the self-esteem hypothesis from generating significant research. According to social identity theory, to develop or maintain group identity, it is customary for groups to differentiate themselves most starkly from out-groups that are otherwise equivalent (Neville & Reicher, 2018). This raises some intriguing problems regarding the social categorization hypothesis, which claims that group distinctions are the basis for discrimination between them.

The optimal distinctiveness theory is a paradigm for investigating the nature of individual and group identities (Martinangeli & Martinsson, 2020). In contrast to social identity theory's

notion of uniqueness, which is based on similarities between groups, optimal distinctiveness theory uses group size as a requirement (Way et al., 2022). Some have argued that small, discrete groups are the most significant way to satisfy both the urge to stand out and the desire to blend in. Intergroup emotion theory seeks to distinguish the analysis of the emotional relations between groups that shape the nature of intergroup relations and the specific behaviors elicited by different intergroup relationships (Nunney et al., 2022), in contrast to social identity theory and optimal distinctiveness theory, which provide a motivational dimension to group behavior by focusing primarily on distinctiveness processes. Consequently, there has been a significant increase in the study on how social identification at the level of various groups influences intergroup emotional functioning (Mackay et al., 2021). This demonstrates that membership in a specific group affects how its members feel about members of other groups. This method improves comprehension of discrimination and prejudice, which can manifest as emotions such as wrath, disdain, and jealousy.

One possible criticism of social identity theory and related approaches to group identity in social psychology is that they place excessive emphasis on cognitive-perceptual processes, which can lead to the reification of social categories and, in turn, self-categorizations (Froehlich et al., 2021). Despite social identity theory's assertions that social classes are intrinsically related to context and comparison, there appears to be little room for individuals or groups to change categorizations that appear to predefine comparisons (Jetten et al., 2021). The perceptual theoretical lens only sometimes provides a clear picture of individual agency when examining identity creation, negotiation, and alteration through social conflict. The social identity theory, established as a theory of social change and an intervening variable in social change, provides a more nuanced method for addressing this issue.

However, the theory of social identity could be critiqued for failing to account for the fluidity and complexity of social identities (Jacobson & Mustafa, 2019). Social identity theorists, specifically self-categorization theorists, sometimes frame their work as a reaction to the extreme forms of social constructionism that, per postmodernist theory, appear to contradict the social reality upon which their work is built (Brown, A. D., 2022). Some social identity theorists have attempted to demonstrate that social categories and social identities are constantly contested and fought over, especially within the context of political conflict and struggle, despite receiving severe criticism for doing so (Muldoon et al., 2021). The significance of social identities, and consequently one's identity, could be significantly altered. In other words, social and personal identities may be viewed as more than merely equivalent content descriptions in the present context. They can also be interpreted as instructions for transforming one's environment and, by extension, one's identity, which develops through interactions with others.

Best Practices in the Field or Industry

White supremacist culture significantly influences professional norms, often known as the institutionalized and systematic emphasis on whiteness (Newlove, 2022). According to Newlove (2022), when it comes to professional settings, white supremacist beliefs emphasize whiteness in terms of one's attire, vocabulary, and work habits. Several factors have contributed to the institutionalization of whiteness and being Western as the norm and the superiority of these identities and behaviors over other ethnic, racial, and regional groupings (Damasco, 2020). This white supremacist ideology is not viewed as aggressive by many, but it can lead to physical violence and institutional injustice. Organizational characteristics of white supremacist culture include the belief that traditional standards and values are objectives, stressing quantity over quality (Wei & Bunjun, 2020). These views, validated over time, served as the foundation for

today's white supremacist narrative supported by the professional world. Multinational firms' hiring and firing methods and broader management philosophy serve as examples in this narrative.

When discussing discrimination in the workplace, businesses cannot just focus on the apparent problems like harassment or unfair hiring and firing policies (Pettigrew & Martin, 2020). According to Pettigrew and Martin (2020), management needs to focus more on removing less visible barriers, such as biased recruiting practices and a predilection for specific work styles. When this occurs, people in the U.S. and other countries with a sizable white population can begin to repair the damage caused by their discriminating professional norms. This clarity can only be achieved when organizations are open about how they learn information that contradicts their existing assumptions. One of the first steps toward establishing a just and equitable workplace is to recognize and appreciate each employee's unique cultural background, life experiences, and levels of expertise (Sims, 2018). The following are organizations' best practices in creating workplace cohesion among African American professionals.

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement quantifies an employee's dedication and connection to an organization (Ahakwa et al., 2021). An engaged workforce has become increasingly important in today's competitive corporate world. Strong employee involvement boosts stakeholder value, creates loyal customers, and helps businesses keep their best employees. Many companies provide employee engagement activities to keep their employees interested and involved. The amount of money invested in an engagement activity is sometimes a reliable predictor of success. The only things needed for an action to be successful are proper planning, flexibility, and participation. Managers can learn more about their staff and develop an environment that

supports everyone's values by paying attention to employee engagement. According to CEOs worldwide, increasing employee engagement is among the top five global corporate initiatives (Ghlichlee & Bayat, 2020). Engagement significantly impacts customer happiness, brand equity, and business return on investment. To achieve a competitive advantage, firms increasingly look to HR to identify the direction of employee commitment and engagement.

Work ethic discrepancies indicate fundamental and potentially essential differences in workers' life experiences (Cha & Roberts, 2019). The ability to build solid and trustworthy teams and relationships with people is shaped by one's experiences with others, whether positive or negative (Winter et al., 2019). When management fosters a trustful and open environment and African American workers feel valued, they are likelier to stay with the company (Bouty & Drucker-Godard, 2019). Team members who do not feel included are less likely to speak up (Winter et al., 2019). Factors that contribute significantly to productivity and performance include employees' belief that their opinions matter and that their teammates are motivated to deliver high-quality work, among other things (Bartscher et al., 2022). African American employees that are emotionally invested in their jobs are more productive. Both organizations and individuals benefit from inclusive practices like employee engagement, which are strongly correlated (Bartscher et al., 2022; Cha & Roberts, 2019; Winter et al., 2019).

Most business owners and managers know the association between employee engagement and business performance (Bonilla-Silva, 2019). Given the high percentage of disengaged employees, most businesses have a long way to go before fully exploiting their staff's talents (Small & Pager, 2020). Employees that lack interest in their work and perform only the bare minimum are a widespread problem in the workplace (Skinner, 2020). The rapid adoption of a "9-to-5" mentality, the avoidance of extracurricular activities, and the growth in social

isolation are prominent indicators of disengagement (Skinner, 2020; Small & Pager, 2020).

Burnout manifests when an ordinarily cheerful and upbeat individual loses all motivation and makes no constructive contributions (Skinner, 2020). Some dislike their jobs, constantly complain to their coworkers, and hinder productivity (Bonilla-Silva, 2019).

Social cohesion, feeling supported by one's boss, information sharing, shared objectives and vision, communication, and trust can all positively affect employee engagement and output (Moon & Christensen, 2020). When employees show that their contributions and efforts are respected, they appreciate them. High-engagement employees are typically devoted to their employers and competent at their jobs. Thus, researchers and consultants have created several definitions of employee engagement (Nkomo et al., 2019). They have also devised typologies for classifying the various levels of worker participation. Engagement of employees and job happiness are linked but distinct concepts (Moon & Christensen, 2020; Nkomo et al., 2019). An individual's degree of job happiness is more significant than their contribution to attaining organizational goals (Skinner, 2020).

Radical Candor Approach

The art of offering others constructive criticism is a balancing act (Mharapara & Staniland, 2020). On the other hand, a leader could be too forgiving and provide no feedback whatsoever. The rival leader may have alienated or demoralized his people by being too rigorous. Although achieving this equilibrium may be difficult, the benefits can be substantial (Schrage et al., 2021). The concept of radical candor has spawned a whole school of thought. As a radical candor, providing direct, constructive feedback about another person's work is crucial while demonstrating genuine concern for their wellbeing. Radical candor is providing honest and immediate feedback to help the receiver realize where they need to change without being so

harsh that the recipient feels discouraged or underappreciated (Schrage et al., 2021). Extreme honesty can be advantageous when assisting people in their professional development since it balances criticism and empathy (Anthym & Tuitt, 2019). When one is given excessive focus while the other is disregarded, it may hinder a person's development in both areas. When providing feedback, radical candor gives equal weight to both constructive criticism and statements of compassionate concern. This feedback is beneficial since it increases people's self-esteem and motivates them to grow. Since the feedback process is excessively time-consuming and is perceived as a diversion from more essential problems, many organizations prefer to disregard it (Bene & McNeilly, 2020).

However, a firm and its employees can only flourish by listening to what they say (Bene & McNeilly, 2020). If businesses put enough time and money into their feedback loops, they may take advantage of the benefits of this evolution (Seijts & Milani, 2022). If employees are sincerely committed to the organization's development, management must be resolute in its feedback obligations, consistently carry them out, and forbid employees from putting them off. Making feedback an intrinsic part of daily operations is one technique for training employees on offering and accepting constructive criticism. Micro-feedback techniques used by management should be integrated into meetings and tasks (Scott, 2019). After a discussion, for instance, attendees can vote on a single improvement idea (Roth, 2019). Managers should also set aside time daily to motivate employees by providing constructive feedback and expressing gratitude for a well-done job (Roth, 2019; Scott, 2019). The management's handling of employees is visible in many ways, then just how they react. When possible, management can demonstrate its appreciation for its employees by considering their perspectives on the job (Bene & McNeilly, 2020).

Conceptualizing Inclusion

In affluent Western nations, "inclusion" has reached the mainstream of business parlance (Romansky et al., 2021). Corporations prioritize inclusion to ensure that underrepresented groups are treated fairly in the workplace (Bohonos & Sisco, 2021). Companies are marketing themselves as "inclusive employers" by emphasizing their inclusion activities and the growing number of awards and accolades they have received (Corvo, 2019). There is a whole industry devoted to supporting businesses with these processes. Inclusion is a beneficial force that can transform unwelcoming organizational practices. Diversity and inclusion appear to have evolved from "inclusion" and "diversity," although "equality" and "equity" are now employed less frequently (Bohonos & Sisco, 2021; Romansky et al., 2021).

The importance of analyzing how anti-Black bias and white supremacist culture influence African Americans' sense of professionalism in the workplace is growing (Khosa et al., 2023; Suresh & Dyaram, 2020). African American success as individuals, families, and communities rests on addressing how white supremacist ideology has permeated Western civilization and, as a result, spread worldwide (Khosa et al., 2023). All facets of society, from the political to the cultural, are permeated by white supremacist ideology (Bohonos & Sisco, 2021; Romansky et al., 2021). Because of the nearly insurmountable barriers erected to African American people and communities' ability to advance socially and economically have invaded every aspect of their everyday lives (Hasan, 2022). Since whiteness and its privileges remain essential to the country's common understanding, simple experience, and shared identity, Western culture, standards, and policies are all rooted in a culture of white supremacy (Christian, 2019). White supremacist ideology promotes the view that whites are inherently better than people of other races (Hasan, 2022). Nothing has changed in the professional world, where whiteness is regarded as the

standard and anti-Black prejudice is reinforced through attire, language, behavior, and legal and policy discrimination (Christian, 2019; Hasan, 2022).

Diversity and inclusion are frequently discussed together. However, these notions must be separated to appreciate the potential applications in theory and practice (Yu & Lee, 2020). Even though diversity studies have long existed, arguments regarding its meaning and how to manage it successfully continue (Fujimoto et al., 2022). According to research, shifting social concepts and causes have contributed to a movement from the language of equal opportunity to that of diversity management and organizational inclusion (Fujimoto et al., 2022; van Niekerk, 2020). Critics claim that the rhetoric used to promote diversity has gradually supplanted the language and methods used to promote equal opportunities, transforming diversity and equality into a business case supported by economic considerations (Christian, 2019).

Typically, inclusion is viewed as maximizing the benefits of diversity inside organizations by supporting and encouraging full rights, access, employment, and promotion advantages for all members (Blanck et al., 2020; Bohonos & Sisco, 2021). Working with diversity requires inclusion, which enables individuals, groups, and institutions to realize the benefits of diversity (Brands & Rattan, 2020). There have been numerous studies on how businesses should do variety. Diversity management primarily focuses on a diverse workforce's potential financial benefits (Mason et al., 2019). As previously stated, managing challenges from diversity is a significant advantage of inclusion. Both mainstream and niche media have claimed that diversity alone is insufficient and inclusion is required (Brands & Rattan, 2020; Mason et al., 2019).

An inclusive work environment for African Americans includes authenticity, teamwork, a sense of worth, safety, and participation in workplace choice (Collins et al., 2021; Kohon, 2018).

Recent empirical research on how organizations practice inclusion has emphasized the inherent contradictions in inclusion initiatives, indicating that these tactics may be bound to fail (Kohon, 2018). Even if a company portrays itself as an inclusive employer and implements various inclusive practices, more than its inclusion programs and policies will probably be required to abolish the hierarchies between employee groups (Dobusch, 2021). Despite efforts to integrate disadvantaged groups through various organizations, migrant communities exhibit exclusionary characteristics (Brands & Rattan, 2020). However, research indicates that workers may avoid or even actively oppose organizations with unmet inclusion promises (Dobusch, 2021). A policy may create a subset of an organization's workforce to promote diversity and inclusion (Brands & Rattan, 2020; Dobusch, 2021; Kohon, 2018).

Management of Career Development

Increasing numbers of African Americans enrolling at elite institutions enhance career development (Graham, 2019; Taani et al., 2020). Historically Black institutions and universities provide fresh business talent (Graham, 2019). Companies must do more to recruit college students, but efforts to elevate African American leaders must go beyond this (McGee, 2021). If more African Americans are to advance in the workforce, substantial and strategic investments in retention and development are necessary (Taani et al., 2020). However, data indicates that many African American women acquire this assistance early in their careers, albeit at a price (Garcia, 2019; McGee, 2021). White leaders raise them as "pets," but their privileged background ultimately turns against them. Those who choose not to assume the pet character are frequently perceived as timid by their employees and exposed to hostility and isolation (Ladson-Billings, 2021). According to a poll of recent college graduates, African American graduates are more likely than their white counterparts to obtain formal mentorships (Piatt et al., 2019). They

discovered that informal mentoring, in which senior executives engage them through professional networks or shared interests, was more advantageous. A mentor could guide if one does not share the same ethnic background as the company's higher management.

African American workers, particularly those at the beginning of their careers, want safe workplaces where they may learn, grow, and experience real failures and successes without becoming entangled in racist beliefs (Coenders & Verhoef, 2019; McGee, 2021). Leaders and guides can provide the required safety precautions. Sponsorship, or promoting African American people for advancements and demanding employment, is significantly more prevalent (Powe, 2020). The ability to speak multiple languages effectively and foreign job experience are crucial factors contributing to the executive success of Black Harvard MBAs (Dayarathna et al., 2019). Politics tends to arise constantly with so many intelligent and ambitious individuals. Therefore, African Americans need more influential allies to lobby on their behalf.

Additionally, prompt critical input is essential. Emphasis should be placed on helping individuals identify and hone their unique abilities, filling gaps in their education or experience, and eventually realizing their full potential (Cadenas et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2022). As they grow in their careers, executives of color should be actively encouraged to pursue personal interests such as board memberships and given serious consideration for high-stakes, high-visibility roles (Cadenas et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2022; Marshall et al., 2020). Organizations may stress these CEOs as role models who shift leadership norms and encourage them to carry on their legacy by transferring contacts and endorsements, teaching wisdom through tales, and creating opportunities for the next generation to assume top roles (Li et al., 2023). Although it is integral to successful programs, most published diversity and inclusion models do not consider that career stage-specific demands vary.

Challenges in the Field or Industry

Underrepresented, Unsupported, Unfulfilled

In numerous significant enterprises across the U.S. and the rest of the world, the significance of diversity and inclusion (D&I) efforts has increased. Companies actively encourage hiring minorities, provide financing for anti-discrimination education, and offer aid to high-potential employee groups that include people of color. According to research, executives are becoming increasingly conscious that a diverse workforce is more likely to produce new ideas and improve upon old ones (Lee & Kim, 2020). Nonetheless, despite decades of corporate D&I activities and years after the implementation of the Civil Rights Act, African Americans' advancement toward top management positions, improved economic wealth, and political power are, at best, negligible.

In 2008 and 2012, the U.S. of America elected Barack Obama, of African origin, as its first Black president (Thomas & Tesfai, 2019). Despite increasing African Americans acquiring bachelor's and master's degrees, they continue to encounter discrimination in the labor market (Byers et al., 2021). However, such evidence provides the impression of inclusion as one organization that assists underrepresented individuals in progress in their profession. According to research, the income disparity between African Americans and other Americans in the U.S. is growing (Thomas & Tesfai, 2019). It has been difficult for Black leaders to advance in numerous significant sectors and disciplines. Among the areas that could be affected are housing, employment, education, infrastructure, consumer credit, and retirement funds (Inwood, 2019).

The problem of inadequate representation is already a serious issue. Extensive studies show that African American managers and employees in the U.S. have much fewer positive experiences in the workplace. The recent rise of white nationalism has resulted in overt and

covert racism against African Americans in the workplace (Inwood, 2019). When hiring and promoting employees from diverse backgrounds, many companies say they want to eliminate biases but rarely succeed. Minorities must work harder and more efficiently than their white peers to advance the corporate ladder. Furthermore, studies show that African American executives who are successful in pursuing top positions are disproportionately given "glass cliff" assignments or those with high rewards but a higher risk of failure (Collins et al., 2021).

According to Collins et al. (2021), numerous studies have found racial disparities in various outcomes, including hiring, evaluations, promotions, and more. Many African American professionals have griped that they must do twice the work because they must serve both their employer and the members of the minority group for whom they were hired. They must also act as cultural ambassadors, listening to the issues of their fellow African American employees and finding solutions. They are also subjected to diversity fatigue due to being selected to represent their demographic in various industries and positions, necessitating constant participation in task forces, training, and discussions about race. Leaders of color often struggle with a sense of insincerity on the job (Brown, J., 2019).

According to research, many marginalized groups feel compelled to put on masks of conformity, hiding their true selves to fit in with the dominant culture at work (Brown, J., 2019; Sellers, 2019). For the previously stated reasons, African-descent employees are less likely to show workplace support, engagement, and commitment than their white counterparts (Sellers, 2019). There is a disparity between the amount of emotional and social support given to white and African American managers (Wilson et al., 2020). African American workers are less likely than white workers to believe their jobs are meaningful, that their white coworkers will produce quality work, and that they can grow professionally within their company (Sellers, 2019).

Leaders of white ethnicity are less likely to resign from their positions than their black counterparts. Most companies' cultural norms and leadership defaults produce a hostile environment that alienates even the most skilled African American employees and sometimes forces them to leave their positions (Brown, J., 2019).

Diversity Implementation Challenges

Having a cross-section of society represented in the workplace is a laudable ideal, but it may be challenging to attain in practice (Chen et al., 2021; Friant et al., 2020). Although numerous resources exist on diversity, no single strategy can be considered "optimal" in every circumstance (Waltz et al., 2019). Because everyone has their conception of what variety entails (Waltz et al., 2019). Diversity enforcement is the responsibility of senior decision-makers and hiring managers. Due to managers' hectic schedules and inability to spend sufficient time on the work, diversification strategies sometimes receive the attention they merit (Noon & Ogbonna, 2021). Diversity policies must be more than just lip service and have the full support of management to have a real influence on the organization (Chen et al., 2021). Public and private businesses can take on various activities to increase the success of their diversity initiatives (Chen et al., 2021; Friant et al., 2020).

However, such policies need to be more widely adopted due to their inherent dependence on the cooperation of businesses (Chen et al., 2021). A case in point would be when diversity policies are not widely recognized, accepted, or viewed as detrimental (Dover et al., 2020). It is imperative to determine when legal mechanisms governing business behavior are necessary. It is challenging to find the "right mix" of bottom-up and top-down strategies, and choosing the optimal balance between mandatory policies and voluntary commitments can be complicated by

the fact that the effects of compulsory policies may differ depending on the type of diversity measure and the group in question (Waltz et al., 2019).

Moreover, certain companies may have a more fruitful history with diversity efforts than others (Neblett, 2019). For instance, if there is discrimination in the application process, it may be preferable to use anonymous application processes (Stanley et al., 2019). By concealing applicants' identities, ages, and residences on unknown applications, employers are prohibited from favoring under-represented applicants when their qualifications are similar. This could have the opposite effect on companies that value diversity. Determining probable winners under such regulations is also discussed (Vesnic-Alujevic et al., 2020). Since the impact of mandatory rules may vary between individuals, businesses, and policy types, a single regulatory policy framework cannot be applicable in every circumstance. Due to the context-specific nature of such rules, it takes work to establish general guidelines for when legislative frameworks are required to govern corporate operations (Neblett, 2019; Stanley et al., 2019).

Group-Based Approach and Targeting Policies

There is a limit to how specialized methods can be in practice, even though the facts reveal the requirement of policies that are particularly adapted to the barriers minorities and women confront (Butler et al., 2019; Stanley et al., 2019). While the group-based approach is the norm for addressing issues of diversity and equality, it may fail to consider individuals who do not identify with any groups categorized as diverse (Umeh et al., 2022). Women and minorities are already marginalized, and this trend could be exacerbated by perpetuating stereotypes about their ability by labeling certain groups as "in need of support." For instance, evidence suggests that grants that identify recipients as having a disability may stigmatize their productivity in the workplace.

Similarly, women in workplaces with gender quotas may be hired based on the allocation rather than their merits (Fine et al., 2020). Despite these constraints, tailoring diversity policies to specific groups' unique difficulties and requirements is an often-viable policy strategy. Given that a single policy instrument might have different effects on different populations and potentially damaging repercussions for some people, it is only sometimes the case that a blanket approach is the best way to go (Stanley et al., 2019). For example, if women make up a disproportionate share of the workforce, implementing flexible work arrangements that women only choose could have long-term adverse effects, such as preventing promotions and career advancement, if the strategy fails to provide sufficient incentives for male employees (Dover et al., 2020; Neblett, 2019).

On the other hand, targeting is only feasible to a certain extent, given that it is both expensive and ineffective (Butler et al., 2019; Julian McFarlane et al., 2022). Specific challenges should be factored into formulating regulations at the finer level. Policies may become too niche to appeal to many people if they try to address every possible combination of disadvantages (Julian McFarlane et al., 2022). Therefore, aggregation inside groups is a more efficient and helpful method. Finding this sweet spot can be difficult; getting included is likely contentious and will vary by the country's policy climate (Song et al., 2021). Stakeholder participation is essential for understanding the issues experienced by different groups; thus, civil society organizations and social partners should be frequently involved in the consultation and evaluation process (Lewis & Shah, 2021; Song et al., 2021).

Ineffective Policies

One common complaint about diversity programs is that they are promoted as a marketing tool or a branding opportunity rather than for their intended purpose (Byrd, 2018).

Companies with "empty shell policies" have been criticized for having diversity initiatives that never amount to more than words on paper (Cha & Roberts, 2019; Bonilla-Silva, 2019).

Unfortunately, only around half of the companies with diversity policies put them into action.

When such protocols exist, employees may face barriers to participation based on their position in the company's hierarchy (Bene & McNeilly, 2020). These results are especially problematic considering that members of high-status groups may be less sensitive to unfair treatment simply because diverse structures exist (Roth, 2019). Managers and high-ranking employees have been shown to respond more harshly to claims of discrimination from members of underrepresented groups (Dover et al., 2020). Therefore, regardless of whether diversity policies are mere window decorations, businesses can use them as a legal strategy to defend themselves against discrimination accusations (Dover et al., 2020).

Policies that lack substance could be more efficient at addressing diversity challenges and may have the opposite impact (Bouty & Drucker-Godard, 2019). This is because the sheer existence of diversity policies gives the impression that appropriate efforts are being made, which could hamper efforts to detect and remedy systemic issues (Cunha et al., 2022). While altering a company's fundamental objectives may be challenging, policy design can help deal with the unintentional implementation of empty shell rules. Organizations must create comprehensive strategies for recruiting, retaining, and developing employees, with measurable goals at each stage (Li et al., 2023). In addition to setting clear goals and allocating responsibility for their achievement, monitoring and reporting on diversity initiatives' development over time are crucial (Winter et al., 2019). Finally, a more bottom-up approach to bolstering accountability can be fostered by building internal networks and empowering people through staff networks and mentorship programs (Li et al., 2023).

Absence of Diversity in Leadership

African Americans are constantly disadvantaged and less likely to attain leadership positions, regardless of the industry or their qualifications (Darity & Mullen, 2022). A significant employee turnover rate is seen among people of color even though recruiting tactics make it possible for them to join a company (Nkomo et al., 2019). It is difficult for these workers to form bonds with anyone in the company's upper tiers because no one there looks like them (Roth, 2019). More minority employees will join a company if its leadership includes people from underrepresented groups (Hasan, 2022). Leaders across all sectors need to be open to reimagining what it means to be a leader considering the unique experiences, perspectives, and worldviews that members of underrepresented groups bring to the table (Scott, 2019).

Relationships with leaders from groups with different perspectives on leadership should be prioritized over pursuing the conventional leader (Khan et al., 2018). Due to cultural and value-based differences, there may be discrepancies in how some leadership practices are perceived (Bonilla-Silva, 2019). They can gain from leadership diversity in ways beyond fundamental social responsibility (Small & Pager, 2020). Diversity encourages creativity, giving businesses a leg up in the marketplace and the chance to offer their clients innovative goods and services (Suresh & Dyaram, 2020). Every leader's job is to ensure that their organization's norms and practices are welcoming to all community members (Hasan, 2022). The glass ceiling for people of color remains unbroken when diversity is not utilized, and inclusion is lacking in the workplace (Spell-Hansson, 2022). Leaders in a company need to take the initiative to fix this systemic problem if they want to alter the present climate.

Measures of Success

Shifting from Diversity to Inclusion to Create a Culture

Due to evolving demographics in the workplace, leaders face challenges in creating their company's culture while also managing the values and backgrounds of their employees (Kaul, 2020). Culture enables individuals to work with others in the face of uncertainty and change to achieve their needs (Munro, 2019). This means that the values, norms, processes, communication styles, recruiting strategies, and even leadership styles of an organization's members can all represent its culture. These principles dictate how the organization will respond to internal and external change.

The needs of all employees, not just a chosen few, must be considered while building an organization's culture (Kaul, 2020). As a result of cultural tensions, subcultures form within the dominant organizational culture when other cultures coexist in the workplace. There are, thus, two sorts of cultures: ideal and actual. This begs the question of which outstanding culture represents reality more accurately (Blanck et al., 2020; Brands & Rattan, 2020). This chasm consists of employees who, for various reasons, feel they need help to contribute entirely to the rest of the firm and cannot contribute altogether to its success (Torres, 2022). According to Torres (2022), leaders must understand how inclusion can help reduce the gaps between their organization's present culture and their ideal culture, improve the quality of their decisions, and increase the bottom line once these disparities are identified (Collins et al., 2021).

Torres (2022) asserted that developing an inclusion strategy or a detailed action plan that contains goals, targets, and related tasks can assist leaders in making the transition from diversity to inclusion and fostering an inclusive workplace. Executives must integrate diversity principles across all company areas to preserve consistency in inclusion efforts (Chen et al., 2021). To

ensure the success of diversity programs, inclusion must permeate every aspect of the organization, from the executive suite on down (Brands & Rattan, 2020). A company's business practices will reflect its inclusive and welcoming policies (Chan et al., 2021). Their strategies for recruiting, retaining, leading, and managing people and their approaches to internal and external communication, education and training, and career and professional development (Torres, 2022).

Thirdly, frequent encounters between intergenerational and interdepartmental teams are crucial (Lehmann-Willenbrock et al., 2020). To shift from diversity to inclusion, training in teamwork and leadership must be a top priority for executives. In addition, it will provide them and their leadership team with the tools necessary to manage a multicultural workforce (Doz, 2020) effectively. Finally, leaders are being asked to seek the middle ground. Therefore, while the reluctance of senior leaders to take risks may hinder the development of some businesses, in others, the challenges may lie with middle management. According to Doz (2020), leaders that encounter this issue with their central management teams need to design strategies or take other remedial actions to ensure that it does not impede the organization's growth (Dover et al., 2020).

Leadership that does not move beyond diversity to inclusion struggle to develop a market-differentiating culture (Torres, 2022). Inclusion is a rallying cry encouraging all employees to contribute their unique abilities, expertise, experiences, and perspectives to the company's success (Erthal & Marques, 2018; Torres, 2022). Without an inclusive workplace, executives will focus on addressing contradictions between the ideal and actual cultures rather than developing a dominating company culture (Erthal & Marques, 2018).

Changes in Leadership Demographics

Companies are increasingly utilizing a new metric to evaluate the effectiveness of executive teams. In today's society, more than knowledge and skill are needed (Bohonos &

Sisco, 2021). According to Anning-Dorson (2021), it is crucial to assess different factors by CEOs when determining if their organization is sufficiently varied to adapt to a changing market. They are particularly interested in discovering whether the company's top leaders are adequately diverse. There is a vast diversity of managerial skills, but the most effective managers possess common leadership characteristics (Lee et al., 2022). They are great communicators, critical thinkers, decision-makers, and problem-solvers regarding team leadership (Li et al., 2023). Some skills are innate, while others can be acquired through a management course (Turconi, 2020). However, it is more challenging to develop the ability to evaluate management decisions from multiple perspectives; therefore, firms may find it simpler to employ diverse leadership teams. Diversity in leadership has numerous good consequences for an organization; however, not all are measurable or explicable.

Similarly, there are divergent opinions among leaders. Turconi (2020) stated that a management team with ten individuals from various backgrounds is more likely to develop in-depth strategies. This is in comparison to a management team where everyone is of the same age, race, and background (Lee et al., 2022). Diversity is the availability of diverse perspectives and social and experiential backgrounds (Turconi, 2020). A business with a varied collection of leaders and employees is less likely to fall into a mental rut (Garcia, 2019). A more diversified group of leaders generates a more extensive range of specialized knowledge (Tsai et al., 2019). Some abilities are determined by culture, while others can be taught (Friant et al., 2020). When a business attracts a diverse group of managers, it obtains access to new viewpoints, experiences, and skills (Lee et al., 2022). For instance, younger individuals are frequently more adept with modern technology and social media. A person who grew up with social media may be a better

candidate for improving a company's social media statistics than someone who has never used it (Diaz et al., 2020).

Enhanced employee relations are only one of the secondary effects of a more varied leadership (Al Khajeh, 2018). Most employees feel a stronger connection to their employer if they see themselves in the upper echelons of management (Bryant & Merritt, 2021; Hernandez et al., 2019). This is encouraging since it demonstrates that the company values its employees and is willing to hire individuals from diverse backgrounds (Bryant & Merritt, 2021). Employees committed to their work are less inclined to seek employment elsewhere. Consequently, it is easier to attract applicants who need to become more familiar with the company's culture (Al Khajeh, 2018).

The company's reputation will reach heights if its leadership is more varied. The people at the top of a firm represent the entire organization (Reed, 2020). The first and most apparent benefit is its message to the broader public about the value of a welcoming and diverse workplace to the organization. It also demonstrates to the people that the organization can accommodate a variety of clients (Mousa et al., 2020; Reed, 2020). Internationally successful organizations recognize the importance of a diversified workforce when serving a large consumer base (Kundu et al., 2019). Similarly to employees, buyers enjoy seeing themselves in managerial positions. When a corporation welcomes diversity, its potential for contact with the outside world increases, resulting in more opportunities (Kundu et al., 2019; Mousa et al., 2020; Reed, 2020).

HR Reports Based on Diversity

By fostering open communication between employees and Human Resources (HR) regarding diversity and inclusion concerns, top management will be better equipped to recognize

positive and negative organizational trends and build a strategy to address them (Karman, 2020). Human resources are one of the most essential tasks of every organization. HR could benefit in several ways from strategic management. With interactive HR dashboard templates, organizations may obtain a deeper understanding of their workforce, identify problems as they occur, and take preventative measures, allowing for the more effective administration of HR operations and a stronger focus on outcomes (Drake et al., 2019). Human resource analytics software can assist organizations in maintaining a healthy work environment, attracting and retaining top employees, and enhancing productivity through regular reporting. Human resources key performance indicators enable firms to track HR-specific data and use that knowledge to refine and improve HR processes over time (Wirges & Neyer, 2022). Firms of all sizes need to generate reports for management and team members to get an advantage in today's cutthroat economy.

Human resources are responsible for producing a varied spectrum of leaders within the organization by identifying, cultivating, and promoting top performers from various backgrounds. Using HR models and lenses, executives can identify unique and atypical sources of talent (Wikhamn et al., 2021). Leaders of diversity and the individuals they hire will be the company's best cheerleaders and recruiters, continuously spicing up the workforce with abilities that might otherwise go unrecognized. Leaders utilize this lens in diversity and inclusion to encourage and celebrate various employee perspectives. CEOs who do not value and consider different opinions miss out on growth opportunities and inhibit innovation, as it takes a variety of perspectives to solve today's complicated problems (Hoel et al., 2021). Using a varied lens does, however, require a commitment to specific responsibilities. A diverse and inclusive workforce

requires continual sustenance and support, as the needs and situations of employees might vary dramatically.

A diversity report's value depends on how much it contributes to the company's broader diversity and inclusion strategic framework (Sung & Choi, 2021). An integral component of any good D&I strategy is a well-considered approach to communication with internal and external stakeholders (Chan et al., 2019; Drake et al., 2019). It is essential to explain the plan's evolution and successes in each area of focus and its broader strategic objectives (Lang & Kahn-Lang Spitzer, 2020). The report must cover employee diversity, supplier diversity, community relations, charity, investments, and reputation management. Effectively utilized, the annual diversity report can inform stakeholders about the organization's commitment to diversity, emphasize its aims, and enhance its reputation (Chan et al., 2019; Drake et al., 2019; Lang & Kahn-Lang Spitzer, 2020).

Employee Engagement Survey

A diversity and inclusion survey is a good tool for determining how effectively an organization promotes a diverse and inviting workplace (Lee & Kim, 2020). Diversity survey questions must be carefully crafted to collect relevant information from the workforce (Storer et al., 2020). With this information, which will shed light on a complex topic, managers can assess their progress on diversity and inclusion and identify areas where they may improve (Sharma et al., 2020). Consequently, one method for measuring diversity and inclusion is to inquire about the perspectives of various employee groups on the company's culture and how they are reflected in multiple departments (Das Swain et al., 2020).

Frequent staff surveys are an excellent approach to keeping people in mind and management abreast of requests (Chan et al., 2021). The organization may ask its employees

some extra open-ended questions about their sense of belonging at work to understand better how it might strengthen its inclusive policies (Sharma et al., 2020). By examining the findings of these surveys each year, management can learn more about employees' attitudes toward their working conditions. To effectively attract, develop, retain, and reward employees, HR policies must reflect a comprehensive understanding of the workforce's constituents (Chan et al., 2021).

Surveying the workforce is an effective method for gathering this information. However, conducting good staff surveys requires months of planning, implementation, and analysis (Drake et al., 2019; Mousa et al., 2020). The workforce's morale may only be protected if the data is understood and feedback is addressed (Smulowitz et al., 2019). By conducting a well-designed and executed survey, management could learn much about their employees and how to improve the workplace (Jordan & Troth, 2020). When a company cherishes the opinions of its employees, it sees improvements in areas such as staff retention, absenteeism, productivity, service quality, and morale (bin Abdul Hamid et al., 2020). Even if the company does not appreciate its employees' opinions, conducting a survey may send a good message. Managers can also polish their abilities by better understanding the issues that affect their particular areas. Regarding employee relations, conducting a survey could backfire dramatically if upper management is not fully committed to and willing to truly listen to and, most importantly, act upon what employees say (Kim & Baker, 2019).

According to Jordan and Troth (2020), companies must frequently administer surveys to their employees. Through the frequent delivery of advice requests, management demonstrates its genuine interest in employees' opinions and ideas at work (Kim & Baker, 2019). Employers need to design surveys that offer data that may be used to identify problems and assist management in addressing them, and they need to perform these surveys regularly (Jordan & Troth, 2020).

Employers frequently conduct employee surveys on work-life balance, customer service, company vision, and employee motivation (Hernandez et al., 2019). With a thorough survey, it would be easier to determine how content individuals are in any of these and other areas. It is a waste of time and resources if employees do not answer surveys or if the data gathered is worthless due to poorly prepared survey questions (Lang & Kahn-Lang Spitzer, 2020).

Existing Literature Around Recommendations

Despite the well-documented prevalence of racial discrimination in the workplace, many organizations hire employees who look identical to everyone else (Garcia, 2019; Li et al., 2023). In addition, corporations continue to employ arbitrary barriers such as racial segregation and gender bias in their employment policies (McGee, 2021). Despite evidence that diversity in the workplace has good consequences, such as enhanced creativity and invention and improved problem-solving, and promotes an environment where people feel accepted despite their differences (Li et al., 2023; Waltz et al., 2019), these gaps persist. Therefore, firms must foster an environment where cultural sensitivity, fairness, and honesty are highly valued (Shannon & Hunter, 2020). This can be accomplished by codifying initiatives to encourage diversity as rules and regulations. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination based on a person's sex, gender, race, religion, national origin, age, or disability (Shannon & Hunter, 2020).

The absence of initiatives to build a more inclusive and varied environment concerns many organizations (Lee et al., 2022). Despite evidence demonstrating that a solid commitment to diversity and the full engagement of all employees will contribute to superior performance, increased idea exchange, and the retention of quality staff, few diversity programs are in place (Garcia, 2019; Li et al., 2023). Incorporating diversity into an organization's primary objectives and values is one approach to demonstrating a firm commitment to diversity in the workplace

(Butler et al., 2019). To nurture the professional and personal growth of employees of all races and ethnicities, businesses must adopt a framework that enables their full participation in all decision-making processes (Lewis & Shah, 2021).

Unfortunately, many firms do not go beyond achieving the essential legal obligations and instead fail to implement diversity programs (Hernandez et al., 2019). Despite evidence indicating that the corporation can continue and assume responsibility for this transition by equipping key personnel with the training, experience, and education in crucial areas to recognize and combat stereotypes, the corporation has not yet undertaken this responsibility (Cadenas et al., 2020; Powe, 2020). Instead of relying exclusively on the possibility of legal repercussions, it is recommended that firms devise audacious strategies to combat exclusivity within their borders. To attain this objective, it is vital to place individuals in positions where they can influence practice in areas where gender, race, or ethnicity prejudice exists. These folks must be knowledgeable, forceful, and dependable (Diaz et al., 2020; Song et al., 2021).

When defining diversity, many companies examine racial and gender differences, ignoring other criteria such as sexual orientation, age, ethnicity, and ability (Bryant & Merritt, 2021; McGee, 2021; Reed, 2020). While studies demonstrate the need for a broad definition of diversity and the necessity for businesses to create a clear distinction between diversity and affirmative action, this remains true (Chan et al., 2019; Storer et al., 2020). Companies are advised to establish a policy of broadly defining diversity to encompass all its facets. Policies should be formulated in simple language for all parties to comprehend (Smulowitz et al., 2019). However, not all firms successfully approach ethics management or provide their employees with the resources necessary to assume responsibility for their work (Lang & Kahn-Lang Spitzer, 2020). According to research, an ethics management program will assist the company in

accomplishing the desired workplace behaviors and provide businesses with better tools and knowledge to understand their values and how to manage them (Remišová et al., 2019). However, this is not true (Remišová et al., 2019). Therefore, it is strongly recommended that all businesses adopt a corporate ethics management program and recognize that doing so is essential (Bryant & Merritt, 2021; McGee, 2021; Reed, 2020). The desired activities of the group are an integral result of any management approach. Therefore, good moral ideas and intentions are of little value if they do not transfer to the fair treatment of coworkers (Diaz et al., 2020). Each practice must develop ethical principles or codes of ethics and the regulations, procedures, and teaching that give these codes merit (Cadenas et al., 2020; Li et al., 2023).

Chapter Summary

When top-level executives demonstrate their support for diversity in the workplace, it sets the tone for the rest of the organization. If upper-level management does not actively promote workplace diversity, all other efforts will be ineffective or of limited value (Roh & Sung, 2022). For this reason, good leadership is required to steer an organization toward genuine diversity. Low participation in the workplace is a persistent issue that requires continuous attention. Leaders can increase participation by identifying participation barriers and the tipping points at which these barriers can be overcome. Businesses must determine how to assign inclusivity responsibilities to individuals with the most impact. In the future, companies that promote diversity and inclusion will flourish. People form interest-based groups, which support job segregation, pay inequities and a shortage of career opportunities for African Americans. Companies aim to hire and retain similar employees, just as individuals are attracted to those with similar characteristics. One of the critical purposes of diversity management is to ensure that all employees, regardless of gender, race, country, age, or ethnicity, have equal opportunity

to contribute to the organization's goals and attain their full potential. It has been discovered that teams with diverse backgrounds and experiences are better equipped to think creatively and generate original ideas.

Despite progress in many areas, African Americans remain underrepresented in high-paying, high-responsibility industries. Most African Americans fall short when tested against the objective, the conventional criterion of the high status of promotions, elevated annual income, and superior organizational level in Corporate America. African Americans have a long history of workplace discrimination and are still legally prohibited from competing with Whites in the ostensible free market economy (Craemer et al., 2020). Although education, experience, and connections all play a part in obtaining employment, many positions are filled by personal ties, and African Americans frequently lack the social capital to break through. Despite increasing awareness of the issue, African Americans still encounter restrictive attitudes, practices, and culturally insensitive behaviors in the workplace. African Americans suffer specific forms of job stress, including individual, organizational, and structural discrimination in the workplace, which can be attributed to the widespread practice of relegating African Americans to minority ranks.

Differences and similarities among employees are at the heart of the diversity debate in the workplace. "Diversity" is frequently used broadly, embracing concerns beyond those mandated by equal opportunity and anti-discrimination laws. To avoid workplace discrimination, similar employment laws have been enacted. Accepting and celebrating each individual's varied characteristics and histories is one definition of diversity. It includes a person's race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, ability, and sexual orientation, among other essential qualities. People's identities and worldviews are only two examples of how diversity can be interpreted broadly (Powe, 2020). Given the current economic position and the changing demographics of the U.S.,

this finding demonstrates that diversity is a moral obligation and an economic opportunity (Garcia, 2019). Diversity, as indicated, requires accepting and respecting everyone, fostering an environment conducive to learning at work, and taking the time to learn from those who are different from oneself (Fujimoto et al., 2022; Hasan, 2022; Romansky et al., 2021). Despite the preceding, diversity in the workplace is typically viewed through a limited lens, with a primary focus on racial or gender inequities and a connection to legislation offering protected status to specific groups (Roth, 2019; Scott, 2019).

Even though diversity initiatives have increased employees' knowledge and comprehension levels, managers and administrators of diverse workforces still have much work to do. Some progress has been made regarding companies providing their employees with fair and equitable working conditions, but much work still needs to be done (Moon & Christensen, 2020; Nkomo et al., 2019). Increased market segmentation based on demographic features is merely one of the several advantages of a diverse workforce. The preceding information implies that organizations that embrace change stand to gain a great deal, while those that stick to tried-and-true ways or employ none risk incurring severe consequences, such as fines (Skinner, 2020). Modern leaders must be skilled at diversity management since it will significantly impact their firm's future performance (Small & Pager, 2020). To accomplish this, organizations should provide an online forum where employees may engage and learn from one another's unique viewpoints and experiences. Then, the procedures should reflect leaders' and managers' recognition that diversity is crucial to long-term success (Bartscher et al., 2022; Cha & Roberts, 2019).

Managers and executives must now direct staff workers while catering to clients with increasingly different ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Roth, 2019; Scott, 2019). The U.S.'s

highly trained labor force is one of its most important resources, and it must be utilized effectively for the country to grow and maintain its competitive edge (Moon & Christensen, 2020; Nkomo et al., 2019). Everyone needs to contribute in a workplace where people of many races coexist. Businesses implementing this technique will succeed immediately (Bartscher et al., 2022; Cha & Roberts, 2019). By encouraging the participation of all employees in workplace activities, companies can serve as a model for creating best practices. As a result of the complexity of the modern global economy, managers and executives need to involve their entire staff in decisions that affect the bottom line (Agrawal & Singh, 2019). Companies that cultivate a diverse workplace may attract and retain the best employees. Without exceptional employees, the organization's end product or service will reflect its staff (Roth, 2019; Scott, 2019).

Management must be cognizant of these factors to create a productive workplace that considers the variety of its employees (Bonilla-Silva, 2019). According to a survey's findings, management's optimistic and realistic views on diversity initiatives in the workplace are also on the rise (Kharroubi, 2021). Businesses are continually coming up with new methods to handle their different staff. Based on the responses from other companies, there are certain areas where firms may and should make changes (Skinner, 2020). Some managers may be ill-equipped to handle diversity in the workplace due to their familiarity with inefficient management practices or the inherent challenges of the business itself. Due to managers' communication techniques, there is a lack of trust between management and staff. Managers generally approve of diversity in the workplace and its implementation, but they worry about its management (Kharroubi, 2021).

Cultural mentoring is one of the time-tested methods of preparing new and seasoned managers and employees to handle the workplace and their responsibilities (Sekerka &

Benishek, 2021). Companies can address the issue of managers' need for more knowledge regarding diversity management in the workplace by funding managers' attendance at relevant conferences and training sessions. Additionally, managers must check in with their teams more often so workers have somewhere safe to vent their frustrations. Managers should be flexible enough to adjust the way their businesses operate if the diversity management strategies they have implemented are not working, but only after they have shared their plans for doing so with their staff (Suresh & Dyaram, 2020). Managers should also use some change management principles as a framework for making decisions during transitions. Steps include continually improving the company's strategy and vision and choosing a prominent leader for growth. Finally, the organization should provide tangible benefits to management and staff for adopting the change (Roth, 2019).

The literature's best practices shed light on why diversity models are so widely needed in the workplace (Bouty & Drucker-Godard, 2019). Realizing that many businesses still need diversity programs forces everyone to consider the potential costs of a lack of strategic planning. Every individual and every organization has a role to play in adapting to the nation's shifting demographics. Given globalization's impact on borders, the takeaway is that businesses of all sizes need to actively foster a diverse workforce to survive in the long run (Seijts & Milani, 2022). Provided their varied skill sets, African Americans should be encouraged to apply for positions at all levels of an organization and given equal access to decision-making opportunities regardless of where they are placed (Blanck et al., 2020; Collins et al., 2021).

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

This chapter described the proposed study's research methodology and design characteristics. It began with an overview and a restatement of the research questions. The research questions were re-stated to elucidate for the reader the focus of the proposed study. Chapter 3 also described the proposed study's research methodology, focusing on defining the characteristics of Delphi method research. The population and sampling strategy for the study was also included, where the importance of implementing a purposive sampling approach is described. In addition, the chapter described the method of obtaining permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for human subjects and ethical considerations as holding critical value in the proposed study. The chapter then described data collection and the analysis stages required when implementing Delphi method research. This chapter's research design and methodology discussion served as the plan for collecting and analyzing data.

Restatement of the Research Questions

African Americans continue to experience overt and hidden forms of racial discrimination. For instance, 72% of African American professionals, a higher number than any other ethnic group tested, reported encountering racial prejudice at work (Chatterjee et al., 2020). Eliminating implicit and explicit biases when hiring and promoting individuals from different backgrounds is rare, if not impossible, despite managers frequently asserting the contrary (Cox, 2022). Organizations' difficulty in eliminating racist practices in hiring and promoting activities is a critical problem because the only way to reap the full benefits of diversity is to consistently push toward a more inclusive workplace for the entire team. It is easier for inclusive businesses to hire individuals from all walks of life. Regardless of their identity category, many job searchers highly value a diverse and inclusive workplace (Gould et al., 2020). However,

assembling a diverse group of staff is only the beginning. A friendly workplace is essential for retaining a good team and has numerous other benefits.

The proposed study sought to determine the critical factors for senior management to build healthy workplace cohesiveness among African American professionals. Much of the current research indicates that these professionals encounter much discrimination despite their credentials. However, more is needed to know about the factors that can promote positive workplace cohesion for African American professionals. The researcher investigated what senior management can do to establish and maintain a diverse workforce, a characteristic that can result in several advantages for a business. By understanding these variables, firms with a diverse workforce can strengthen cohesion, and African American professionals can feel included in the organization's operations.

This chapter described the research methods that were applied to achieve the objectives of this study, which was to answer the following research questions:

- RQ1: What are the critical factors that have facilitated the advancement of African American professionals to senior management positions?
- RQ2: Can a theoretical model be developed for the critical factors that facilitate the advancement of African American professionals to senior management positions?

Research Design

The Delphi Method

This study will include a Delphi process to support the development of an understanding of the factors that facilitate and hinder positive workplace cohesion for African American professionals. The Rand Corporation created the Delphi method in the 1950s for military forecasting (Dayé, 2018). In their seminal 1950 study on qualitative research methods, RAND

Corporation researchers utilized the Delphi technique extensively (Shelton et al., 2018).

According to Dayé (2018), the Delphi method's objective was to reduce the range of viewpoints within a small group so that they could more readily establish a consensus. Prior research using the Delphi method supported the use of the framework in the proposed study as field experts were consulted through an iterative process of questioning, receiving responses, and presenting analyses (Loo, 2019). The proposed research included senior managers assuming their position was a characteristic of personal lived experience supporting their intimate knowledge so they could provide expert responses to the Delphi survey.

The first round determines the diversity of viewpoints, while the second provides each expert anonymous feedback from their peers (Jetha et al., 2022). During the first round, each specialist evaluated their perspective and those of the other group members. The technique was repeated until sufficient survey results were collected. After the iterations, those replies that continued to depart from the group were examined as prospective future scenarios. According to Loo (2019), this technique is used to accomplish long-term goals within the constraints of a specified overall strategic plan. When information is scarce, the Delphi method can manage structured group communication procedures to get insight into current or potential problems (Beiderbeck et al., 2021). Therefore, it has widespread use in several fields, including business intelligence and environmental science. Probability, consequence, and desirability of occurrence in quantitative evaluations are just some aspects. Ingenuity, promptness, and practicality are only a few additional attributes. Personal data, such as a person's self-assurance or expertise, might also be collected. Expert consensus is often measured in medical and therapeutic research using Delphi studies, rank-order questions, rating scales, and open-ended inquiries (Pastores et al., 2019).

History of the Delphi Method

This study employed a Delphi approach in addressing the proposed research questions. The Delphi method is used by researchers who wish to organize and summarize several responses from subject experts to generate group decisions that represent the overall perspectives of this panel of experts (Harteis, 2022). The Delphi method uses several rounds of questions, with each expert able to review other panel members' responses and can revise their answers. The panel's answers are all anonymous, but each member will be able to evaluate all solutions. Using the Delphi method, the researcher observed patterns and themes within the overall panel's responses and determined the panel's consensus regarding the survey questions. General Henry Arnold first developed this method during the Cold War as a means for reporting on future abilities to use technology against their enemies (Custer et al., 1999). Later, Helmer and Rescher (1959) expanded this method into quantitative models through a theoretical approach.

Generally, the Delphi method is applied with participants given feedback on the group's consensus after each round of debate on the same set of hypotheses (Harteis, 2022). This multi-step process can be done manually or with the help of dedicated tools. After each round, the panelists can reconsider the findings considering new quantitative and qualitative evidence. According to Harteis (2022), this moderated group conversation is intended to be more precise than traditional opinion polling methods by encouraging convergence or divergence of opinions. By minimizing expert sensitivity and potentially harmful group dynamics, the Delphi approach has advantages over in-person methods, such as group talks and brainstorming sessions (Stave et al., 2019). While a Delphi survey's findings can stand independently, scenario analytics is generally used in tandem with the survey's findings to help with brainstorming, synthesis, and evaluation.

General Application of the Delphi Process

Despite its emphasis on communication, this approach is typically perceived as restricted to data collection (Malik et al., 2021). In the first place, as an iterative feedback mechanism, it encourages introspection, leading to a deeper comprehension of the issue at hand (Brown, J., 2018). The main advantage is that it helps people agree even when there are different points of view and more information is needed. Obtaining consent relies heavily on participants' ability to maintain their anonymity, which allows them to speak openly about their experiences without worrying about repercussions from others' judgments (Heath et al., 2018). The three main features of the Delphi technique are iteration, which encourages participants to think about and adjust their initial opinions, controlled feedback, which gives them information about the group's views so that they can clarify or alter their position; and statistical analysis, which allows for a quantitative presentation of the group's opinions (Wang et al., 2022).

Considering the previous use of this method, researchers noted that when dealing with challenging topics, a lack of factual data, or insufficient knowledge of the issue or phenomenon, the Delphi technique is frequently employed to choose the most credible view of a group (Gilmore, 2021). Alongside the more traditional forecasting approach, the discovery and development of a collection of concepts and the categorization design have become vital application domains. The maturity model is an example of a conceptual framework. Maturity models serve as a manager's guide and an educational encyclopedia in a particular industry, transforming large amounts of knowledge into the tactical actions required for a company to grow and improve (Drljevic et al., 2022). They presume that organizations participate in diverse activities based on their market competence and level of maturity. These pictures demonstrate a natural or predictable progression from childhood to adulthood. Managers adopted maturity

models as soon as they were introduced at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s due to their clear value (Pernell, 2020). Experts in numerous industries began developing maturity models, particularly project and process management.

Appropriateness of the Delphi Process

Participation of stakeholders has a substantial effect on evaluation results making this technique appropriate for this study. As a consensus-building methodology, the Delphi method is aligned with the study's research questions as it supports involving individuals in the evaluation-framing process (Karakikes & Nathanail, 2020). The Delphi technique collects more diverse perspectives than possible in a meeting or one-on-one situation, increasing buy-in and emphasizing the relevance of each participant's knowledge (Stave et al., 2019). Despite the physical distance, the Delphi technique's facilitation, response, and iteration phases enable in-depth and fruitful dialogues between decision-makers (Bathke et al., 2022). The Delphi method of analyzing research issues has gained popularity during the past two decades. Several theorists are responsible for developing the standards, increasing the rigor of this form of inquiry, and outlining the steps involved in the process (Johnson et al., 2020). This gave researchers and administrators faith that their results were generalizable to other studies and that the data produced could be trusted.

The maturity model classifies an individual's organizational skills along a continuum ranging from total immaturity, disorder, and chaos to repeatability, standardization, organization, monitoring, conscious management, and continuous progress (Alharthi, 2022). Each successive stage must make sense concerning the previous one, and distinct characteristics characterize each growing level of maturity. According to Alharthi (2022), this is represented as a hierarchy, with each maturity level precisely specified by the features of acceptable solutions regarding

strategies, structures, systems, processes, techniques, and instruments. Each subsequent level is a logical continuation of the previous one, introducing additional obstacles and complexities as you progress. It is optional to attain the peak of maturity in the future, as there is rarely a universally applicable pattern of practice in a single business, in this instance, reputation management. However, business executives can utilize maturity models to evaluate which abilities their organization already possesses, which it does not, and which it must cultivate to be successful in a particular industry (Asdecker & Felch, 2018).

Potential Application of Delphi for Consensus Building

At the commencement of the Delphi process, survey questions are delivered to the group of experts who were initially selected. Frequently, a factual description of the context is provided alongside the questionnaire, and rarely, one or more scenarios establish characteristics that respondents should take as given. If more information is offered at this stage, panelists can develop a consensus on important terminology and assumptions before completing the questionnaire. Given that it is suggested to allow at least a month for this initial phase to finish, this could save time in subsequent rounds.

Three criteria guide the second stage of the Delphi technique. They include the finding of opinions, the determination of the most significant topics, and the management of the views (Harteis, 2022). If the initial round of data analysis is comprehensive, the researcher will conduct fewer rounds. A standard Delphi survey would consist of four rounds in the past, although today, only two or three are typically employed (Veugelers et al., 2020). The ultimate goal is to identify areas of consensus within the questionnaire, where responses cluster tightly around the mean with low variance. The researcher should be conversant with the decision-making criteria to assist with the analysis phase. Numerous individuals employ diverse definitions of "consensus"

to explain this phenomenon. Some believe a majority vote, or 51%, indicates agreement. Others have claimed that the pattern of votes in successive rounds is a better indicator of understanding than a single percentage.

Additional surveys are created and sent after reviewing the initial survey's results. In this round, the panelists receive an updated survey and information regarding the findings of the initial questionnaire. Depending on the specified criteria for consensus and the scheduled rounds, these procedures may be repeated throughout the research.

Assumptions of the Delphi Method

Using the Delphi method will enable the researcher to establish a consensus from a panel of subject experts to approach answering the posed research questions (Barrett & Heale, 2020). This method is used as a forecasting process with a structured communication framework established through a series of questionnaire questions being answered. There are several assumptions to consider using the Delphi method:

- Cooperating experts need a history of sufficient communication.
- Experts should constitute diverse backgrounds concerning experience or expertise.
- Disputes are serious or politically displeasing.
- Using their insight and experience, well-informed individuals are better equipped to predict the future than theoretical approaches or extrapolations of trends.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Delphi Method

The anonymity necessary for the research process is one of the main strengths of the Delphi approach (Nasa et al., 2021). Participants are encouraged to think independently and, as a result, to generate ideas gradually. This anonymity also helps to ensure that participants' responses are not impacted by bias against another individual in situations when many

participants are members of hostile or competing organizations. The Delphi method is highly acclaimed for its ability to structure and organize group communication. It is beneficial when individual judgments are needed to address a lack of consensus or an incomplete state of information (Gilmore, 2021). The Delphi method is also inexpensive and accessible in practice. Researchers can reach panelists who would be unavailable using conventional qualitative methods because the surveys can be administered electronically anywhere in the world.

A Delphi study's panel members can give honest feedback if the study's procedures, such as maintaining anonymity, are followed to the letter. When a Delphi conference is used, participants can meet at their convenience to convene and contribute to discussing a given topic and its resolution (Belton et al., 2019). Among these benefits is the opportunity for people with the proper background knowledge to bring their unique views and skills to bear on the parts of a complicated problem that directly apply to those areas of expertise (Franklin & Hart, 2007). This affords people more leeway in how they approach challenging challenges and where they look for solutions.

Researchers must adhere strictly to the guidelines of any Delphi study to ensure that the group's subject matter experts can provide helpful feedback (Saihi et al., 2023). The researcher also needs time to recreate the survey between rounds to ensure reliable results. Due to these flaws and restrictions, a poorly planned and implemented Delphi survey will yield either insufficient data or incorrect information. To avoid these difficulties, Delphi researchers must maintain an open mind, avoid bias, and be willing to devote the necessary time to the study.

Modified Delphi Methodology

This study used a modified Delphi technique which consisted of four steps. The first step was to generate an initial list of critical factors through a comprehensive literature review, with

several factors coming from the researcher's professional background. After generating the list, the researcher selected an expert panel to participate in the survey. The third step was to complete round one and, finally, complete round two. Interested network participants were administered two rounds of a modified Delphi procedure using an online survey.

The list of significant items was compiled after a review of the relevant studies on diverse workforces. From there, a group of experts was then selected. The first round of Delphi processes began with creating the first instrument. This tool utilized a seven-point Likert scale, with one anchor functioning as *unimportant* (1) and the other as *tremendously important* (7). To ensure the validity of this approach, precautions were taken to ensure that expert participation was as consistent as possible and that the questionnaire was completed on time.

Procedural Steps in the Delphi Process

Using the Delphi method enabled the researcher to establish a consensus from a panel of subject experts to approach answering the posed research questions (Barrett & Heale, 2020). This method is used as a forecasting process with a structured communication framework established through a series of questionnaire questions being answered. The Delphi method aims to establish a group opinion based on surveying a full expert panel's response to questions and, in turn, finding answers through this consensus to the research questions. The collected perspectives from a selected panel of experts with consensus provided comprehensive solutions to the research questions in this study. The two different and separate questionnaires shared with the experts ask questions that, when summarized, will provide the necessary responses for these questions. The second round of questionnaires allows the experts to revise, restate, or edit previous answers. Using a Delphi study permits the expert to reevaluate and reflect on their perspectives while comparing them to the contribution of the other experts (Barrett & Heale,

2020). Key traits of the Delphi method include the anonymity of the experts, the ability to structure the information flow, and provisions for receiving regular feedback based on the whole of the panel's responses.

Implementing the Delphi process includes selecting a panel of subject experts with the experience and expertise to respond intellectually to the questionnaires. The experts will be asked the questions during the first round, then review the entire panel's anonymous answers and reevaluate their answers from the first round. During the second round, the experts can revise their responses to reflect further their opinions.

Participation Selection

Panel of Experts

The panel of experts was selected from a highly knowledgeable population regarding diversity in organizational environments and effectiveness. These experts were in the business or government sector and upper management positions. Additionally, they had experience with diversity and executive leadership. The expert panel was made up of participants who understood the problems of issues within an organizational culture based on bias. The criteria used to determine the selection of individuals for the panel included the following:

- they must have at least 10 years of experience with organizational leadership,
- they must have served in a senior management role,
- they are consultants with an established pedigree as senior managers, and
- they worked in a company with an employee population between 10 and 500.

Sampling Frame

A purposive sampling approach was used for the collection of data. The researcher used LinkedIn (<https://www.linkedin.com>) by applying key search words such as “diversity” and

“African American leadership.” Purposive sampling techniques target individuals with appropriate qualities that adhere to the definitions or parameters of a developed study (Andrade, 2021). The purposive sampling technique was suitable for selecting individuals who held appropriate characteristics (discussed below) that would respond to the questions supplied during data collection procedures (Andrade, 2021).

Criteria for Inclusion

Several characteristics of participants were included in the study as inclusion criteria. These characteristics had their experience level, position, and job responsibilities—measures comprised of their availability and whether they fit the study’s inclusion benchmarks.

- They must have at least 10 years of experience in the field.
 - This criterion was necessary to ensure that individuals included in the study held the appropriate previous experiences in their field to reflect on questions about the research questions, such as the critical factors for senior management to foster positive workplace cohesion for African American professionals. Additionally, participants must have at least 10 years of experience in the field as this is considered a necessary characteristic to have experienced, implemented policies, and directed change that may aid in providing information for evaluating if a theoretical model for senior management to foster positive workplace cohesion for African American professionals. Adhering to this criterion was critical to supplying information (based on past professional and personal experiences) that addressed both RQ1 and RQ2.
- Must have served as a senior manager or above.

- Individuals who served as senior managers or above were selected to complete this study. Their positions ensured they were previously or currently involved in decision-making processes, policy implementation, and a complete understanding of the critical factors necessary for senior management to foster positive workplace cohesion for African American professionals. Further, the researcher's experience as an executive allowed participants to share their experiences regarding developing a theoretical model for senior management to foster positive workplace cohesion for African American professionals. Thus, supplying information would directly address RQ1 and RQ2, defining the purpose of the study.
- Consultants with an established pedigree as senior managers.
 - Participation in this study included consultants with an established pedigree as senior managers. The inclusion criteria delineated those individuals, and based on this previous experience, they were directly providing information that contributed to addressing both RQ1 and RQ2 and the study's purpose, which references understanding critical factors for senior management to foster positive workplace cohesion for African American professionals. The participants' experiences as a consultant with an established pedigree as senior managers ensure the individual's previous professional experience, allowing them to address the supplied questions and provide information based on their last consultancy experience and knowledge.

Criteria for Exclusion

The criteria for exclusion were as follows, with a preference given to:

- those who are not available during the study period,
- anyone who has not led a team of African American professionals,
- anyone with tenure of fewer than five years in the field,
- anyone who does not speak adequate English, and
- anyone who does not volunteer.

This approach selected participants based on their availability during the study.

Criteria for Maximum Variation and Sample Size

The intended panel size was a minimum of 25 participants. If more than 25 people confirmed their participation, the researcher used a method that maximized variance. The technique to maximize variance included ensuring that participants followed the preceding criteria to provide a sample of individuals that were not biased by primarily consisting of one characteristic, such as including participants that would be only male, for example. The researcher attempted to include 50% composition of male and 50% composition of female participants if 20 people confirmed their participation. Criteria considered for maximum variation were pre-selected as follows:

- gender, defined as female, male,
- ethnicity,
- employment history,
- region of the U.S.,
- urban and Suburban localities, and
- company size (vis-à-vis number of employees ranging from < 10, 11-100, 101-500, 500 >)

Protection of Human Subjects

When researching human subjects, it is crucial to offer the safeguards indicated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Subjects (Arifin, 2018). The Belmont Report described the ethical considerations involved in research involving human subjects, where respect for persons, beneficence, and justice must be characteristics of the design. IRB holds responsibility for ensuring that the treatment of human subjects is consistent with those outlined in the Belmont Report. These ethical considerations are compatible with the IRB standards in the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University.

Due to the inclusion of unprotected adult human subjects in this study's interview pool, an IRB application was required. The study included responses from people around the U.S. who operate in varied settings, either as employees or consultants. Aside from the time commitment involved, no dangers were seen for these participants. This research was approved to move forward because it fell within an exception described in Section 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) of the Human Subjects Protection Regulations issued by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Pepperdine University's IRB received a waiver request.

In addition to the consent form, all study participants received written information on the study's goals, methods, potential risks, benefits, the security of their data, and other details. The informed consent form provided details regarding this voluntary inclusion within the study and their ability to leave at any point. All participants in the study signed the informed consent form to acknowledge their understanding of their rights. The subjects had full access to any study-related materials necessary. The identities of all participants remained confidential. Confidentiality was maintained using pseudonyms that replaced the participants' names and any personal identifiers. Participants were aware of the use of confidentiality measures, including

pseudonyms, upon entering the study voluntarily. Information was gathered via a Qualtrics survey that required a password to access it. Qualtrics was considered an appropriate means of collecting data as it has a secure encrypted service for researchers to collect data. Thus, Qualtrics is suitable for gathering data through an encrypted service, ensuring the confidentiality of participants included in the study. The data analysis was also done digitally and kept on a machine accessible to the researcher via password and encryption. Raw data will be erased three years after the study, protecting participants' privacy.

Instrument Design

This study used surveys that were distributed to respondents in different phases. After conducting a thorough analysis of the existing literature, a preliminary set of essential keywords and phrases was generated.

Initial List of Critical Items

A list of critical factors that facilitated the advancement of African American professionals to senior management positions, according to the literature review in Chapter 2, were as follows:

- **Career Development:** African American workers, particularly those at the beginning of their careers, want safe workplaces where they may learn, grow, and experience real failures and successes without becoming entangled in racist beliefs (Coenders & Verhoef, 2019; McGee, 2021).
- **Inclusivity:** An inclusive work environment for African Americans includes authenticity, teamwork, a sense of worth, safety, and participation in workplace choice (Collins et al., 2021; Kohon, 2018).

- Relationship Building: The ability to build solid and trustworthy teams and relationships with people is shaped by one's experiences with others, whether positive or negative (Winter et al., 2019).
- Representation: They are also subjected to diversity fatigue due to being selected to represent their demographic in various industries and positions, necessitating constant participation in task forces, training, and discussions about race. Leaders of color often struggle with a sense of insincerity on the job (Brown, J., 2019).

Likert Scale

The data set was utilized to create a survey using a 7-point Likert scale. This Likert scale's anchors were *not important* (1) or *critically important* (7). Using Likert scales to gather a wide range of responses to a question or statement is common practice to collect a consensus or perspective towards statements supplied to participants (Chakrabarty, 2020).

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Likert Scale

With their widespread use, Likert scales benefit from being intuitive to their users. These scales have also been employed in a wide variety of different contexts (Chakrabarty, 2020). One of the shortcomings of the Likert scale is that an “in-between” (e.g., discrete categories vs. continuous variable) rating cannot be taken into consideration. For example, a person's rating may fluctuate between *moderately important* and *very important*, which the scale cannot account for, which may result in unanticipated changes to the data. Similarly, different individuals may have unique personal definitions of the word “very.” Knowing any potential ambiguity in the scale before halting the data was vital. As such, at the end of each section, a space was provided in which participants could provide additional details, clarifications, and any ambiguity identified in question responses.

Validity and Reliability

Identifying consensus in the Delphi survey includes reliability consideration using a co-researcher (Veugelers et al., 2020). After the initial analysis, a secondary researcher or assistant would review the research to ensure the validity and credibility of the analysis procedures used to identify consensus within the questionnaires. Alternatively, other methods of developing consensus may include the presentation of group agreement through percentage categories. In this process, the researcher would illustrate consensus through each survey round as represented by percentages of group agreement on survey responses. This process also furthers the transparency of the Delphi method and data collection for researchers (Harteis, 2022).

Reliability – Pilot Testing

The first section was composed of inclusivity and consisted of six questions. The first section, critical factors, includes factors from the study's theoretical framework. Questions 1 and 2 referenced the importance of understanding the socioeconomic problem of organizational support and other resource inequities that African American professionals experience. Survey questions included knowing resource inequities that African American professionals experience and the ability to foster a supportive and stress-free workplace that encourages inclusivity. Researchers indicated the importance of understanding diversity and inclusion with a holistic understanding of the AI theory framework. The AI theory informed the development of these questions, not by directly supplying information to ask the participants but by appreciating the process in which questions are asked in a manner that will allow for further interpretation, improvement, and gathering of substantial information from participants (Cooperrider & Fry, 2020). Questions 3-6 were informed by the optimal distinctiveness theory, in which previous researchers explored an understanding of inclusivity, uniqueness, and belongingness. These

questions emphasized the importance of accepting diversity, acknowledging uniqueness, and offering a space where inclusivity can flourish (Abosag et al., 2020; Sassonko, 2020; Seering et al., 2018).

The second section considered career development and support and comprised Questions 7-13, which focused on the organizations' importance in enhancing African American engagement and inclusion in the workplace by ensuring developmental opportunities that needed improvement. The questions included the ability to provide a safe and positive workplace and the implementation of policies designed to address underrepresentation and lack of representation among African American professionals. Peer-reviewed sources revealed the importance of providing equality in the workplace that supports their advancement, reduces hostility and isolation, and supports a stress-free environment that encourages career development (Graham, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Taani et al., 2020). As such, these studies were used to further the development of the career development questions. Questions 7-10 were developed based on literature regarding career development, the importance of providing feedback, and fostering positive and stress-free environments to ensure African American professionals are advancing alongside their white counterparts (Cadenas et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2022; Marshall et al., 2020). Questions 11-13 emphasized the importance of policy, practices, and organizational approaches that emphasize representation, support anti-discrimination, and foster non-hostile environments that accept diversity (Brown, J., 2019; Sellers, 2019; Wilson et al., 2020).

The third section reviewed diversity implementation, composed of Questions 14-19. It focused on diversity implementation, policies, procedures, and skills used by senior management to foster the support and inclusion of African American professionals in the workplace. The questions in the third section vary from the ability to assess diversity policies adopted throughout

the organization to the importance of diversity and leadership when developing diversity initiatives. Data from this section drew from information specific to understanding how diversity implementation if effectively employed, could provide a genuine approach to inclusivity and diversity. Questions 14-16 examined the senior manager's perception of how policies are implemented, adopted, and assessed to consider their appropriateness for improving environments for African American professionals (Neblett, 2019; Stanley et al., 2019). Questions 17-19 focused on identifying effective diversity policies, considering when such policies failed, and reflecting on how diversity and leadership are essential when developing such practical approaches for the workplace. These survey questions were based on the peer review literature regarding diversity initiatives, challenges, and opportunities for change that can foster positive workplace cohesion for African American professionals (Cunha et al., 2022; Li et al., 2023; Nkomo et al., 2019).

The final section was on employee spaces and culture, composed of Questions 20-23. Questions 20-23 allowed participants to reflect on workplace space and culture. Questions in the final section vary from the ability to foster a workplace culture that accepts inclusivity and avoids hostility or racism to the ability to allow employees a space to express concerns regarding diversity and workplace culture. Previous researchers emphasized the importance of actively hiring employees aligned with anti-racism, creating positive space, and encouraging feedback (Bartscher et al., 2022; Cha & Roberts, 2019; Roth, 2019; Scott, 2019). Such methods are considered approaches that improve upon diversity initiatives; thus, these questions were supplied to offer an opportunity to consider how the space and culture of the workplace are aligned with anti-racism and to support the positive cohesion of African American professionals in the workplace.

Subsequent Round Instrument Modification

Emphasis was placed on completing the research, resulting in more accurate data with consistent participation. It is vital to ensure that each response is complete to ensure validity. Conversely, if answers are complete, it is clear whether the participants finished their responses or did not have a chance to complete the survey. Preliminary surveys would introduce bias that would not provide the desired information for the study. Thus, [participants were provided with access to two essential resources. The panel was initially given a document containing a list of all relevant and significant definitions. Second, participants were provided detailed instructions on the Likert scale to facilitate mutual understanding. This document also included definitions for each metric along the scale to ensure that all panelists understood the distinction between not at all important and critically important.

Data Collection

Using the recruitment script, all selected individuals were contacted through email to obtain volunteers. If a person did not have an online email address, they were approached through LinkedIn Messenger or InMail as it is called. The researcher requested a contact email to receive the recruitment script if no email was listed. A consent form was also sent to the participant during the first round for coherence. After the third email, all participants with no response were removed.

Electronic Survey Consideration

The self-administered surveys for each round of the modified Delphi method were developed and disseminated using an online survey software platform. Electronic surveys dominate traditional surveys, including a depletion in price and analysis proficiency (McPeake et al., 2013). The importance of surveys is to ensure the confidentiality of the information provided.

Without the consideration of concealment, it is possible that information can be stolen or research can be tarnished.

Follow-Up Communication

The first questionnaire was sent out as soon as the researcher finalized the list of participants that were considered. If no response was received within five days, another request was sent. A second request was issued, and if no response was received, a third request was sent with a deadline of three days after the email was sent for the participant to respond. If the individual did not answer, they were removed from consideration. Those who responded and agreed to participate were instructed to begin the first questionnaire.

Multi Round Communication

The core research team selected many essential background studies and made them available to all participants. For the first round, respondents had approximately two weeks to complete the survey. Before the second round, a summary of each statement and the median score of each item were calculated. Based on these findings, round two was formed and only included those items with a consensus from the previous round. The second survey was administered with a two-week turnaround time, and participants were provided with the results again. An additional survey was supplied depending on the consensus rate.

Statement of Personal Bias and Lived Experiences

As an African American professional, this study had a significant meaning. Due to personal experiences and associations with other African American professionals, there was a level of bias that was considered in terms of the interpretation of answers given during the interview process. With those biases in mind, no interrater dependability was used because the research was established on the existing literature rather than the researcher's own experience,

providing the problem's starting context. Design characteristics of the Delphi method also supported the objectivity of the study. The research remained objective, in part, based on the reliance on quantitative elements of the study. Specifically, the dependence on the frequency of responses was a characteristic where consensus was valuable toward successful analysis.

Bracketing

Bracketing and epoche is a captivatingly easy term grounded in an utterly compound idea. Structurally, bracketing is an experimental procedure where a researcher forfeits or detains in abeyance their speculation, biases, and assumptions (Shelton et al., 2018). Giorgi (1998) advocates limiting bracketing to the analysis phase. In his view, bracketing should not take place while interviewing, as engagement with the participant takes precedence over holding preconceptions in abeyance. To avoid bracketing, the researcher used journaling to write down any biases, preconceived thoughts, or ideas. This will be important to ensure it is not placed within the study.

Data Analysis

A Delphi procedure entails identifying the regions of agreement before returning the areas of disagreement to the participants with additional context and information. Also recommended are stakeholder checks to improve the data's veracity, as was done in this study when the round one summary was presented before round two.

Literature on Item Stability

Between rounds of the Delphi method, compiling and updating data is necessary. Consequently, it is vital that personal prejudice was not a part of that procedure. An inductive approach allows for mitigating personal bias through grounding analysis within the raw data obtained from participants rather than pre-developed categories or codes. Inductive coding

includes preparing the data, thoroughly examining the text, defining categories, overlaying coded and uncoded information, and continuously modifying and improving the category system (Pentland et al., 2020).

Literature on Consensus in Delphi

The study's data analysis phase and the Delphi technique both rely on the ability to define consensus precisely (Niederberger et al., 2021). Although this is only sometimes the explicit objective in a Delphi survey, many researchers have selected agreement as a stopping point during the study process. This phase, specified by hierarchical stopping criteria, examines level agreement only once a stable solution has been created. More than half (50%) of the votes cast were required for a majority, while a plurality necessitated at least a more significant portion of the results but not more than 49%. However, if the participant's answers are inconsistent, the group's agreement would be inconsiderate, so people mustn't be the only ones driving the process of reaching an agreement. To respond satisfactorily to this consensus discussion, a firm grasp of the criteria determining the consensus before beginning the data analysis is necessary.

Calculating and Reporting Item Stability in Each Round

The median, mean, and IQR were determined upon completion of the initial survey round. The IQR was utilized to determine an indicator's stability over time. In the combined data from the Delphi study, items were deemed stable and consensus-based if their IQR was 20% or less. An IQR of 20% or less is considered inappropriate for determining a consensus between a group of data, such as the responses to the Delphi surveys in this proposed study (Harteis, 2022). After completing this method for each question, a round one summary was compiled and distributed to respondents before round two.

- Median Stability Index (MeSI): Less than 10% of the remaining items demonstrate no movement or change in the median value from round one to round two, suggesting that when the median rating from the previous round is deducted from the median rating in the correct round, the difference for each item is zero which indicates that the object did not move, indicating its stability.
- Modal Stability Index (MOSI): Less than 10% of the remaining items demonstrate no movement or change in mode value from round one to round two, meaning that the mode rating from the previous round is subtracted from the mode rating in the current round, resulting in a difference of zero which signifies that the object did not move, indicating its stability.
- IQR Stability Index (IQRSI): Less than 10% of the remaining items demonstrated no change in IQR from round one to round two, indicating that, for each item, the IQR rating from the previous round is subtracted from the IQR rating from the right round, resulting in a difference of zero, indicating that the object did not move, showing its stability.

Determining Final Consensus

When the final consensus has been achieved, the data is summarized and sorted according to the median and IQR available within Chapter 4. Third-round procedures would be repeated if consensus still needed to be attained. A fourth or fifth round will not be completed if consensus is achieved during the previous rounds. The researcher will make a note of consensus based on the prescribed data analysis plans and will not proceed with further rounds of questions based upon the achieved consensus.

Coding and Interrater Reliability

Interrater reliability was used to assess if a theoretical framework could be constructed to identify critical factors promoting the workplace cohesion of African American professionals. Interrater reliability is when two or more coders agree on how to code the themes present in each text (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). In this section of the study, there were four coding steps.

- The researcher examined a small group of crucial items with codes that the Delphi analysis determined was stable.
- Two peer reviewers received the results. Two professionals with knowledge in qualitative research and coding served as peer reviewers. The reviewers were asked if they concurred with the allocated codes and my overarching themes. If the reviewers did not concur, the dissertation committee shall be asked for additional advice.
- The researcher added codes to the remaining critical elements using the reviewers' comments as a guide.
- The reviewers were shown the remaining codes to get their approval. The dissertation committee added more information if a compromise could not be reached.

The coding results were included and presented as results in Chapter 4 using bar charts.

Chapter Summary

A Delphi technique uncovered the elements that promote healthy workplace cohesiveness for African American professionals. The requirement to design a structure showcasing program strengths to support the formation of future workplace cohesion for African American professionals made this method relevant in the context of this study. The Delphi approach also promotes participant anonymity and can give access to a broader range of participants. As a result, the study's scope was expanded to include relevant information for people across the

country. The Delphi method is an interactive, textual technique that employs a group of identified experts to reach a consensus on prepared items (Olsen et al., 2021). A crucial feature of the Delphi method is using rounds to provide input on outcomes to the panel of experts, who then use this feedback while reviewing subsequent rounds of questions. The board of experts was selected based on the criterion that they were experts from leadership organizations with a compassionate mission. Potential participants were discovered through a literature review and a LinkedIn search. The welfare of the study's human participants was a significant element of the research considered in the design of the study's data collection and analysis characteristics. Before completing the questionnaires, each participant supplied informed consent, and an application was submitted to a global review board. The electronic storage of all participant data on a password-protected computer, which will be deleted three years after its initial acquisition, further assures the anonymity and security of all participants. After each round of the Delphi study, data analysis was conducted. To establish an agreement, the median was determined using the interquartile range. When the IQR was 20% or less, it was considered that a consensus was reached. The data analysis was described in full in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter discussed the data collection and analysis section. A modified Delphi methodology was utilized to examine RQ1, and coding was used for RQ2.

Recruitment of Participants

The researcher received their CITI certificate after passing the necessary human subjects training (see Appendix A). Next, the researcher submitted the study proposal to Pepperdine University's IRB and received approval on February 28, 2023 (see Appendix B). To enlist participants, an initial audit was conducted of the existing literature. The keywords found in the literature allowed the researcher to find and invite those individuals who have matriculated in their careers to senior-level leadership. Secondly, LinkedIn was used to find participants who fit the inclusion criteria. For a participant to be considered eligible, the individual had to be an African American professional, male or female, with at least 10 years of experience and held a role of a senior manager or higher.

An initial list of 40 individuals was constructed. A total of 30 individuals were then contacted, based upon obtaining their contact email (see Appendix C), which resulted in 75% of the initial list of potential participants. The informed consent form (see Appendix D) and first survey (see Appendix E) were sent to the initial 30 participants. For those who still needed to complete the survey, a follow-up reminder was sent five days after the initial request. A final reminder was then sent one day before the first survey deadline.

Delphi Phase One

Distribution of Survey One

Phase One comprised of a survey that included a total of 60 critical items uncovered through the literature. (See Appendix F). Qualtrics was used to detain the survey, and the link

was dispensed to participants via the recruitment script. Participants were requested to indicate their perception of the importance of critical factors that have facilitated the advancement of African American professionals to senior management roles. A 7-point Likert scale was used. Participants were given definitions for each point within the Likert scale, as noted in Table 1.

Table 1

Likert-Scale Values and Definitions

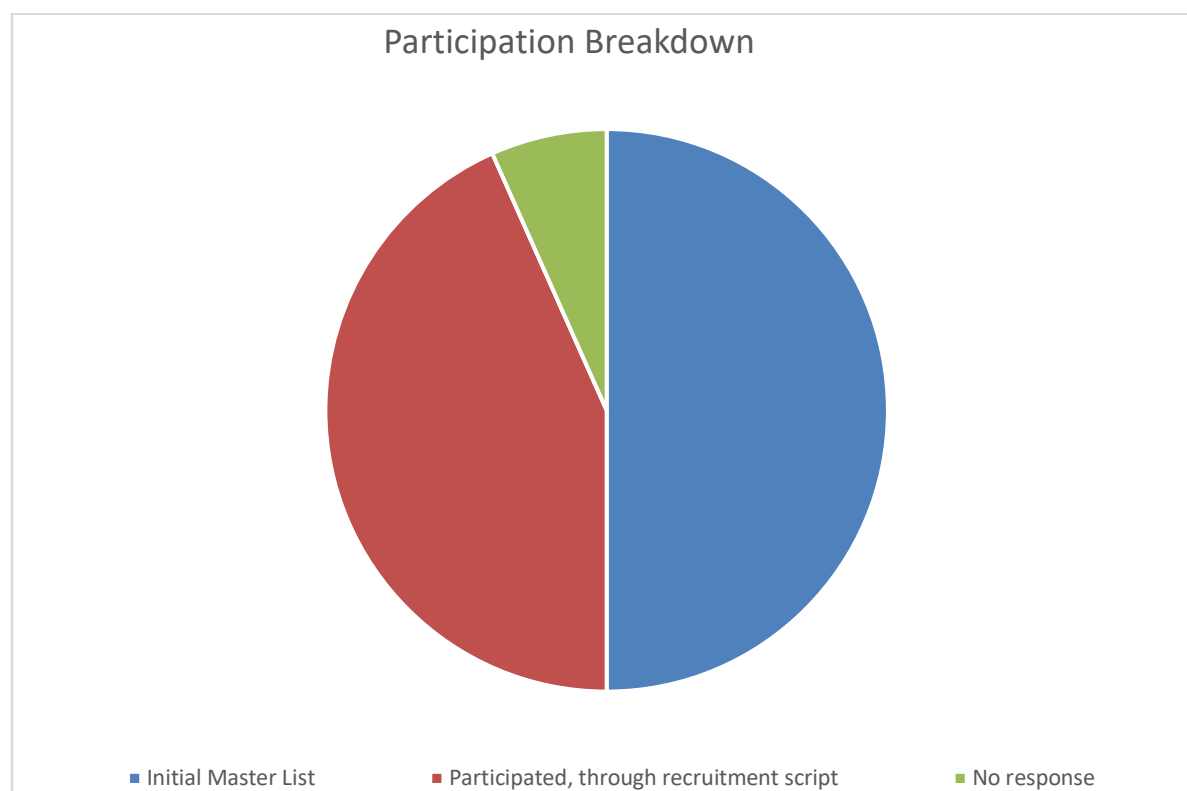
Likert-Scale Value	Definition
Not at all Important (1)	This item is not detrimental to professional growth and advancement.
Low Importance (2)	This item is not beneficial but could be detrimental to professional growth and advancement.
Slightly Important (3)	This item is somewhat beneficial to growth and advancement; however, it would not impede success for professional growth and advancement if it did not exist.
Neutral (4)	No strong feelings or experience on this item.
Moderately Important (5)	This item is beneficial to a professional, however, it would not completely impede success for professional growth and advancement.
Very Important (6)	This item is beneficial and not having it would impede success for professional growth and advancement.
Critically Important (7)	This item is necessary and critical, not having it would impede success for professional growth and advancement.

The initial recruitment script was sent to a total of 30 participants. A total of 26 individuals ($N = 26$) consented to their participation and completed the survey by the deadline. Four individuals failed to respond after additional attempts were made before the survey

deadline. Figure 1 showed the participation breakdown with those who participated and those who did not respond. Based on requirements from Turoff (2002), this was sufficient for participants to move ahead without additional recruitment or a need for maximum variation. All participants completed the survey in its totality.

Figure 1

Participation Breakdown



Round One Analysis

After retrieving the results, each item's median, IQR, and mode were calculated individually. Every item was considered in consensus if the IQR was less than or equal to 15% of the range. Out of 60 items, 48 reached a consensus. This meant that 80% of the total items had reached consensus, leaving 20% remaining as “no consensus.” The calculations below are shown in Table 2 and arranged based on the lowest to highest IQR.

Table 2*Round One Results*

Item #	Items	Median	IQR	Mode	Decision
25	Ability to convey experience-based knowledge.	6.00	0.00	6	Consensus
31	The implementation of multiple diversity strategies until an effective approach supplies effective results for African American professionals.	6.00	0.00	6	Consensus
34	An understanding of how diversity policies are implemented within the organization.	6.00	0.00	6	Consensus
37	Being able to manage conflict as it relates to racial, bias, or prejudice discrimination.	7.00	0.00	7	Consensus
45	Understanding company metrics in measuring diversity.	6.00	0.00	6	Consensus
54	Feel motivated by the organization's mission.	6.00	0.00	6	Consensus
2	Having knowledge of resource inequities that African American professionals experience.	6.00	1.00	7	Consensus
4	Acknowledging that organizations play a role in supplying a space for individuals to express themselves while also belonging to a group.	6.00	1.00	6	Consensus
6	The ability to foster a supportive and stress-free workplace that encourages inclusivity.	7.00	1.00	7	Consensus
7	Having knowledge of being culturally aware.	6.00	1.00	6	Consensus
8	Willingness to be part of a team.	6.00	1.00	6	Consensus

Item #	Items	Median	IQR	Mode	Decision
9	Training that includes inclusivity.	7.00	1.00	7	Consensus
11	Have company values reflect inclusivity.	7.00	1.00	7	Consensus
12	Having a diverse Executive team.	7.00	1.00	7	Consensus
13	Having a diverse Executive team.	6.00	1.00	6	Consensus
15	Having the ability to raise concern at work without being judged.	7.00	1.00	7	Consensus
16	The ability to supply African American graduates with career development that is accountable to white counterparts.	7.00	1.00	7	Consensus
17	The ability to supply African American graduates with career development that is accountable to white counterparts.	7.00	1.00	7	Consensus
18	Implementation of policies that foster career development for African American employees.	6.00	1.00	6	Consensus
19	Succinct and effective feedback is supplied to encourage the development and advancement of African American professionals.	6.00	1.00	6	Consensus
20	The ability to ensure the support of African American professionals in the workplace via management and policies.	7.00	1.00	7	Consensus
22	The importance of providing a work environment that encourages inclusivity to avoid fostering hostile environments.	6.00	1.00	6	Consensus
23	Having clear career goals within the organization.	6.00	1.00	6	Consensus

Item #	Items	Median	IQR	Mode	Decision
26	Ability to interact with people of different cultures.	6.00	1.00	6	Consensus
27	Ability to have a team-oriented culture.	6.00	1.00	6	Consensus
30	Being able to oversee projects, tasks, and teams.	6.00	1.00	6	Consensus
32	The implementation of multiple diversity strategies until an effective approach supplies effective results for African American professionals.	6.00	1.00	6	Consensus
33	An understanding of how diversity policies are implemented within the organization.	6.00	1.00	6	Consensus
35	The ability to identify effective diversity policies.	6.00	1.00	6	Consensus
36	The understanding of the importance of diversity and leadership when developing diversity initiatives.	6.00	1.00	6	Consensus
38	Being able to measure the success of organizational diversity efforts.	6.00	1.00	6	Consensus
39	Having diverse input within your organization's policies and procedures.	6.00	1.00	6	Consensus
40	Bringing in outside resources to train and develop diversity knowledge.	6.00	1.00	6	Consensus
41	Facilitation of panel interviews on diversity leaders and topics.	6.00	1.00	6	Consensus
43	Track and share retention and representation KPIs as it relates to Diversity.	6.00	1.00	6	Consensus
44	Work/Life balance	7.00	1.00	7	Consensus

Item #	Items	Median	IQR	Mode	Decision
46	The ability to foster a workplace culture that accepts inclusivity and avoids hostility or racism.	7.00	1.00	7	Consensus
47	Employees feel they have a safe space to share their unique identities.	7.00	1.00	7	Consensus
49	The ability to allow employees a space to express concerns regarding diversity and workplace culture.	6.00	1.00	6	Consensus
50	Accountability taken when workplace culture is violated.	7.00	1.00	7	Consensus
51	Leadership team displaying the importance of workplace culture.	6.00	1.00	6	Consensus
53	Having a culture that celebrates success.	6.00	1.00	6	Consensus
55	Having a sense of Belonging at work.	6.00	1.00	6	Consensus
56	Knowing your work directly contributes to the organization's mission.	6.00	1.00	6	Consensus
57	Psychological safety at work.	7.00	1.00	7	Consensus
58	Organizational culture is important.	6.00	1.00	6	Consensus
59	Being acknowledged and valued for contributions.	6.00	1.00	6	Consensus
60	Transparency from leaders.	7.00	1.00	7	Consensus
10	Giving Inclusivity priority in the workplace.	6.00	1.25	7	No Consensus
14	Organization participating in underrepresented activities outside of work.	5.00	1.25	5	No Consensus

Item #	Items	Median	IQR	Mode	Decision
42	Mentorship programs.	6.00	1.25	6	No Consensus
52	Special events to celebrate the representation of diverse groups.	6.00	1.25	6	No Consensus
3	The understanding of the importance of shared membership amongst groups and the desire for self-expression and individuality.	6.00	1.75	6	No Consensus
5	Having knowledge of the importance of individuals belonging to a group and safely expressing their individuality.	6.00	2.00	6	No Consensus
21	Implementation of policies designed to address underrepresentation and lack of representation among African American professionals.	6.00	2.00	7	No Consensus
24	Having global riveting opportunities.	5.00	2.00	6	No Consensus
29	Being technologically challenged.	5.00	2.00	4	No Consensus
48	The ability to engage with staff surveys which provide an opportunity to review policies and actions.	6.00	2.00	6	No Consensus
1	Having knowledge of the socioeconomic problem of organizational support.	6.00	3.00	6	No Consensus
28	Ability to work outside of the country.	4.00	3.00	4	No Consensus

Table 3 demonstrates the elements that reached consensus, classified by the magnitude of importance as decided by the panel of experts. The level of significance was determined by the median score, with seven displaying a critical level of importance and one demonstrating not at all important. These 48 items that reached consensus were excluded from future surveys.

Table 3*Consensus Items From Round One*

Item #	Items	Median	IQR	Mode
6	The ability to foster a supportive and stress-free workplace that encourages inclusivity.	7.00	1.00	7
9	Training that includes inclusivity.	7.00	1.00	7
11	Have company values reflect inclusivity.	7.00	1.00	7
12	Having a diverse Executive team.	7.00	1.00	7
15	Having the ability to raise concern at work without being judged.	7.00	1.00	7
16	The ability to supply African American graduates with career development that is accountable to white counterparts.	7.00	1.00	7
17	The ability to provide a safe and positive workplace.	7.00	1.00	7
20	The ability to ensure the support of African American professionals in the workplace via management and policies.	7.00	1.00	7
37	Being able to manage conflict as it relates to racial, bias, or prejudice discrimination.	7.00	0.00	7
44	Work/Life balance	7.00	1.00	7
46	The ability to foster a workplace culture that accepts inclusivity and avoids hostility or racism.	7.00	1.00	7
47	Employees feel they have a safe space to share their unique identities.	7.00	1.00	7
50	Accountability taken when workplace culture is violated.	7.00	1.00	7

Item #	Items	Median	IQR	Mode
57	Psychological safety at work.	7.00	1.00	7
60	Transparency from leaders.	7.00	1.00	7
2	Having knowledge of resource inequities that African American professionals experience.	6.00	1.00	7
4	Acknowledging that organizations play a role in supplying a space for individuals to express themselves while also belonging to a group.	6.00	1.00	6
7	Having knowledge of being culturally aware.	6.00	1.00	6
8	Willingness to be part of a team.	6.00	1.00	6
13	Human Resources hiring underrepresented candidates.	6.00	1.00	6
18	Implementation of policies that foster career development for African American employees.	6.00	1.00	7
19	Succinct and effective feedback is supplied to encourage the development and advancement of African American professionals.	6.00	1.00	6
22	The importance of providing a work environment that encourages inclusivity to avoid fostering hostile environments.	6.00	1.00	6
23	Having clear career goals within the organization.	6.00	1.00	6
25	Ability to convey experience-based knowledge.	6.00	0.00	6
26	Ability to interact with people of different cultures.	6.00	1.00	6
27	Ability to have a team-oriented culture.	6.00	1.00	6

Item #	Items	Median	IQR	Mode
30	Being able to oversee projects, tasks, and teams.	6.00	1.00	6
31	The implementation of multiple diversity strategies until an effective approach supplies effective results for African American professionals.	6.00	0.00	6
32	The ability to assess diversity policies is adopted throughout the organization.	6.00	1.00	6
33	An understanding of how diversity policies are implemented within the organization.	6.00	1.00	6
34	Having the ability to assess if targeted or group diversity initiatives are appropriate and will be effective for creating a positive work environment to support cohesion for African American professionals.	6.00	0.00	6
35	The ability to identify effective diversity policies.	6.00	1.00	6
36	The understanding of the importance of diversity and leadership when developing diversity initiatives	6.00	1.00	6
38	Being able to measure the success of organizational diversity efforts.	6.00	1.00	6
39	Having diverse input within your organization's policies and procedures.	6.00	1.00	6
40	Bringing in outside resources to train and develop diversity knowledge.	6.00	1.00	6
41	Bringing in outside resources to train and develop diversity knowledge.	6.00	1.00	6
43	Track and share retention and representation KPIs as it relates to Diversity.	6.00	1.00	6
45	Understanding company metrics in measuring diversity.	6.00	0.00	6

Item #	Items	Median	IQR	Mode
49	The ability to allow employees a space to express concerns regarding diversity and workplace culture.	6.00	1.00	7
51	Leadership team displaying the importance of workplace culture.	6.00	1.00	6
53	Having a culture that celebrates success.	6.00	1.00	6
54	Feel motivated by the organization's mission.	6.00	0.00	6
55	Having a sense of Belonging at work.	6.00	1.00	7
56	Knowing your work directly contributes to the organization's mission.	6.00	1.00	6
58	Organizational culture is important.	6.00	1.00	6
59	Being acknowledged and valued for contributions.	6.00	1.00	6

Delphi Phase Two

Distribution of Survey Two

Delphi phase two comprised a survey totaling 12 critical items. These 12 items were uncovered through survey round one and were items that reached a non-consensus. Once again, the survey was created on Qualtrics, and the link was distributed to participants via the subsequent recruitment script. Furthermore, participants were asked to indicate their perspective on the importance of each critical item related to the advancement and growth of African American professionals. In addition, the preceding median response from survey one was incorporated next to the critical items (for example, "Having knowledge of the socioeconomic problem of organizational support; median = 6). Participants were questioned to assess each

remaining element, contemplate the panel's median rating in collation to individual rating, and amend if appropriate. In addition, participants were also given the opportunity via an open-ended question to contribute any supplemental insights.

All 26 participants from survey one were emailed the second survey. They were given five days to complete it. A final reminder was sent one day before the deadline if the survey needed to be completed. Of the 26 participants, 23 individuals completed the second survey.

Round Two Analysis

Once all results were retrieved, the median, IQR, and mode were calculated for each remaining individual item. The item was deemed to reach individual consensus if the IQR was less or equal to 15% of the range. Of the items, all 12 achieved a consensus. This means that for round two, there was a 100% consensus reached. Table 4 shows the median, IQR, mode, and decision calculations.

Table 4

Round Two Results

Item #	Items	Median	IQR	Mode	Decision
1	Having knowledge of the socioeconomic problem of organizational support.	5.50	1.00	6	Consensus
3	The understanding of the importance of shared membership amongst groups and the desire for self-expression and individuality.	6.00	1.00	6	Consensus
5	Having knowledge of the importance of individuals belonging to a group and safely expressing their individuality.	6.00	1.00	6	Consensus
10	Giving Inclusivity priority in the workplace.	6.00	1.00	6	Consensus

Item #	Items	Median	IQR	Mode	Decision
14	Organization participating in underrepresented activities outside of work.	6.00	1.00	6	Consensus
21	Implementation of policies designed to address underrepresentation and lack of representation among African American professionals.	6.00	1.00	6	Consensus
24	Having global riveting opportunities.	5.00	1.00	5	Consensus
28	Ability to work outside of the country.	4.00	1.00	4	Consensus
29	Being technologically challenged.	5.00	1.00	5	Consensus
42	Mentorship programs.	6.00	1.00	6	Consensus
48	The ability to engage with staff surveys which provide an opportunity to review policies and actions.	6.00	1.00	6	Consensus
52	Special events to celebrate the representation of diverse groups.	5.50	1.00	5	Consensus

Table 5 featured the items that have reached consensus, classified by the degree of importance, as determined by the panel of experts ($N = 23$). The level of importance was set by the median score, with seven illustrating a critical level of significance and one portraying no importance. The consensus was reached on all items after round two.

Table 5*Consensus Items From Round Two*

Item #	Items	Median	IQR	Mode
3	The understanding of the importance of shared membership amongst groups and the desire for self-expression and individuality.	6.00	1.00	6
5	Having knowledge of the importance of individuals belonging to a group and safely expressing their individuality.	6.00	1.00	6
10	Giving Inclusivity priority in the workplace.	6.00	1.00	6
14	Organization participating in underrepresented activities outside of work.	6.00	1.00	6
21	Implementation of policies designed to address underrepresentation and lack of representation among African American professionals.	6.00	1.00	6
42	Mentorship programs.	6.00	1.00	6
48	The ability to engage with staff surveys which provide an opportunity to review policies and actions.	6.00	1.00	6
1	Having knowledge of the socioeconomic problem of organizational support.	5.50	1.00	6
52	Special events to celebrate the representation of diverse groups.	5.50	1.00	5
24	Having global riveting opportunities.	5.00	1.00	5
29	Being technologically challenged.	5.00	1.00	5
28	Ability to work outside of the country.	4.00	1.00	4

After completing round two, 100% of the items reached consensus based on the IQR score. As noted, the final consensus is only achieved if 85% of the items have reached individual consensus. As a result, a stability analysis was conducted. This analysis compared the differences in median, mode, and IQR scores on the non-consensus items from round one and the item results from round two. Table 6 exhibits the stability report and variations from round one to round two.

Table 6

Stability Round Two Analysis

Items	Decision	Diff in Median	Diff in IQR	Diff in Mode
Having knowledge of the socioeconomic problem of organizational support.	Consensus	0.50	2.00	0.00
The understanding of the importance of shared membership amongst groups and the desire for self-expression and individuality.	Consensus	0.00	0.75	0.00
Having knowledge of the importance of individuals belonging to a group and safely expressing their individuality.	Consensus	0.00	1.00	0.00
Giving Inclusivity priority in the workplace.	Consensus	0.00	0.25	1.00
Organization participating in underrepresented activities outside of work.	Consensus	-1.00	0.25	-1.00
Implementation of policies designed to address underrepresentation and lack of representation among African American professionals.	Consensus	0.00	1.00	1.00
Having global riveting opportunities.	Consensus	0.00	1.00	1.00
Ability to work outside of the country.	Consensus	0.00	2.00	0.00

Items	Decision	Diff in Median	Diff in IQR	Diff in Mode
Being technologically challenged.	Consensus	0.00	1.00	-2.00
Mentorship programs.	Consensus	0.00	0.25	0.00
The ability to engage with staff surveys which provide an opportunity to review policies and actions.	Consensus	0.00	1.00	0.00
Special events to celebrate the representation of diverse groups.	Consensus	0.50	0.25	1.00

At the finale of the stability analysis, all items had reached a consensus. The Median Stability Index (MeSI) percentage of remaining items that the median altered from round one to round two was 0%. IQR Stability Index (IQRSI) percentage of remaining items that the Interquartile Range changed from round one to round two was 0%. The third stability index, the Modal Stability Index (MoSI), remaining percentage of items that the mode changed from round one to round two was 0%. All indexes fell below the 10% threshold for stability, validating the study had reached final stability and consensus, requiring no additional round of Delphi analysis. The stability criteria was showcased in Table 7.

Table 7

Stability Round Two Criteria

% of unstable items as total # of items =	0%
Stability Criteria 1 (> 85% of total items stable) =	100%
Stability Criteria 1 (MeSI < 15%) =	0%
Stability Criteria 2 (IQRSI < 15%) =	0%

% of unstable items as total # of items =	0%
Stability Criteria 3 (MoSI < 15%) =	0%

Final Consensus

After both surveys, all 60 critical items reached individual consensus. After each section of the questionnaire, participants could answer open-ended questions. However, no additional items were recommended from the open-ended question items. Table 8 shows all items that reached consensus, sorted by the level of importance from the highest to the lowest median score and the parallel Likert-scale ranking.

Table 8

Final Consensus Items

Item #	Items	Median	IQR	Likert-Scale Rating
37	Being able to manage conflict as it relates to racial, bias, or prejudice discrimination.	7.00	0.00	Critically Important
6	The ability to foster a supportive and stress-free workplace that encourages inclusivity.	7.00	1.00	Critically Important
11	Have company values reflect inclusivity.	7.00	1.00	Critically Important
12	Having a diverse Executive team.	7.00	1.00	Critically Important
15	Having the ability to raise concern at work without being judged.	7.00	1.00	Critically Important
16	The ability to supply African American graduates with career development that is accountable to white counterparts.	7.00	1.00	Critically Important

Item #	Items	Median	IQR	Likert-Scale Rating
17	The ability to provide a safe and positive workplace.	7.00	1.00	Critically Important
20	The ability to ensure the support of African American professionals in the workplace via management and policies.	7.00	1.00	Critically Important
46	The ability to foster a workplace culture that accepts inclusivity and avoids hostility or racism.	7.00	1.00	Critically Important
47	Employees feel they have a safe space to share their unique identities.	7.00	1.00	Critically Important
50	Accountability taken when workplace culture is violated.	7.00	1.00	Critically Important
60	Transparency from leaders.	7.00	1.00	Critically Important
44	Work/Life balance.	7.00	1.25	Critically Important
9	Training that includes inclusivity.	7.00	1.75	Critically Important
57	Psychological safety at work.	7.00	2.25	Critically Important
25	Ability to convey experience-based knowledge.	6.00	0.00	Very Important
31	The implementation of multiple diversity strategies until an effective approach supplies effective results for African American professionals.	6.00	0.00	Very Important
34	Having the ability to assess if targeted or group diversity initiatives are appropriate and will be effective for creating a positive work environment to support cohesion for African American professionals.	6.00	0.00	Very Important

Item #	Items	Median	IQR	Likert-Scale Rating
45	Understanding company metrics in measuring diversity.	6.00	0.00	Very Important
54	Feel motivated by the organization's mission.	6.00	0.00	Very Important
2	Having knowledge of resource inequities that African American professionals experience.	6.00	1.00	Very Important
3	The understanding of the importance of shared membership amongst groups and the desire for self-expression and individuality.	6.00	1.00	Very Important
4	Acknowledging that organizations play a role in supplying a space for individuals to express themselves while also belonging to a group.	6.00	1.00	Very Important
5	Having knowledge of the importance of individuals belonging to a group and safely expressing their individuality.	6.00	1.00	Very Important
7	Having knowledge of being culturally aware.	6.00	1.00	Very Important
8	Willingness to be part of a team.	6.00	1.00	Very Important
10	Giving inclusivity priority in the workplace.	6.00	1.00	Very Important
13	Human Resources hiring underrepresented candidates.	6.00	1.00	Very Important
14	Organization participating in underrepresented activities outside of work.	6.00	1.00	Very Important
18	Implementation of policies that foster career development for African American employees.	6.00	1.00	Very Important

Item #	Items	Median	IQR	Likert-Scale Rating
19	Succinct and effective feedback is supplied to encourage the development and advancement of African American professionals.	6.00	1.00	Very Important
21	Implementation of policies designed to address underrepresentation and lack of representation among African American professionals.	6.00	1.00	Very Important
22	The importance of providing a work environment that encourages inclusivity to avoid fostering hostile environments.	6.00	1.00	Very Important
23	Having clear career goals within the organization.	6.00	1.00	Very Important
26	Ability to interact with people of different cultures.	6.00	1.00	Very Important
27	Ability to have a team-oriented culture.	6.00	1.00	Very Important
30	Being able to oversee projects, tasks, and teams.	6.00	1.00	Very Important
32	The ability to assess diversity policies is adopted throughout the organization.	6.00	1.00	Very Important
33	An understanding of how diversity policies are implemented within the organization.	6.00	1.00	Very Important
35	The ability to identify effective diversity policies.	6.00	1.00	Very Important
36	The understanding of the importance of diversity and leadership when developing diversity initiatives.	6.00	1.00	Very Important
39	Having diverse input within your organization's policies and procedures.	6.00	1.00	Very Important
40	Bringing in outside resources to train and develop diversity knowledge.	6.00	1.00	Very Important

Item #	Items	Median	IQR	Likert-Scale Rating
41	Facilitation of panel interviews on diversity leaders and topics.	6.00	1.00	Very Important
42	Mentorship programs.	6.00	1.00	Very Important
43	Track and share retention and representation KPIs as it relates to diversity.	6.00	1.00	Very Important
48	The ability to engage with staff surveys which provide an opportunity to review policies and actions.	6.00	1.00	Very Important
49	The ability to allow employees a space to express concerns regarding diversity and workplace culture.	6.00	1.00	Very Important
51	Leadership team displaying the importance of workplace culture.	6.00	1.00	Very Important
53	Having a culture that celebrates success.	6.00	1.00	Very Important
56	Knowing your work directly contributes to the organization's mission.	6.00	1.00	Very Important
58	Organizational culture is important.	6.00	1.00	Very Important
59	Being acknowledged and valued for contributions.	6.00	1.00	Very Important
38	Being able to measure the success of organizational diversity efforts.	6.00	1.25	Very Important
55	Having a sense of belonging at work.	6.00	2.25	Very Important
1	Having knowledge of the socioeconomic problem of organizational support.	5.50	1.00	Moderately Important/ Very Important

Item #	Items	Median	IQR	Likert-Scale Rating
52	Special events to celebrate the representation of diverse groups.	5.50	1.00	Moderately Important/ Very Important
24	Having global riveting opportunities.	5.00	1.00	Moderately Important
29	Being technologically challenged.	5.00	1.00	Moderately Important
28	Ability to work outside of the country.	4.00	1.00	Neutral

Coding

RQ2 asked, Can a theoretical framework be developed for critical factors that facilitate the advancement of African American professionals to senior management positions, intercoder reliability was employed to conduct a thematic analysis. This task began with coding the items that obtained consensus into themes. Once an initial code was produced, two peer reviewers were asked to examine the codes to reach unanimity (Bernard et al., 2016). After receiving 60 items with consensus, they were coded into five categories:

- Leadership: Item deals with aligning people within their created and collective directions, then motivating and inspiring that achievement.
- Empowerment: Item deals with enabling people and their rights to represent their interests in a responsible, manageable, and self-reliant way.
- Growth: Item deals with gaining skills, experience, knowledge, and expertise to help reach career goals.
- Organizational Culture: Item deals with a diversified, equitable, and inclusive environment focusing on belonging.

- Safety: Item deals with the absence of interpersonal fears in response to advocating ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes.

Although these critical items could be interchangeable, the codes allocated were determined to be reciprocally exclusive of one another. After sharing the initial coding and categories with two peer reviewers, both reviewers were third-year doctoral students with forward comprehension of qualitative research and coding. The peer reviewers were informed to decide whether they concurred with my general themes and assigned codes and needed to be made aware of each other. Upon their assessments, both peer reviewers agreed with my designated code, and a united decision on the coding was gained. The themes and their assigned critical items can be found in Table 9. These items were all incorporated beginning of the first round, no supplementary items were appended from the open-ended query in round two.

Table 9

Consensus Items and Codes

Consensus Items	Code
The ability to supply African American graduates with career development that is accountable to white counterparts.	Empowerment
Implementation of policies designed to address underrepresentation and lack of representation among African American professionals.	Empowerment
Implementation of policies that foster career development for African American employees.	Empowerment
The implementation of multiple diversity strategies until an effective approach supplies effective results for African American professionals.	Empowerment

Consensus Items	Code
Having the ability to assess if targeted or group diversity initiatives are appropriate and will be effective for creating a positive work environment to support cohesion for African American professionals.	Empowerment
The ability to identify effective diversity policies.	Empowerment
Being able to measure the success of organizational diversity efforts.	Empowerment
Having diverse input within your organization's policies and procedures.	Empowerment
The ability to engage with staff surveys which provide an opportunity to review policies and actions.	Empowerment
The understanding of the importance of shared membership amongst groups and the desire for self-expression and individuality.	Empowerment
Ability to convey experience-based knowledge.	Growth
Having knowledge of resource inequities that African American professionals experience.	Growth
Willingness to be part of a team.	Growth
Training that includes inclusivity.	Growth
Having global riveting opportunities.	Growth
Ability to work outside of the country.	Growth
An understanding of how diversity policies are implemented within the organization.	Growth
Understanding company metrics in measuring diversity.	Growth

Consensus Items	Code
Knowing your work directly contributes to the organization's mission.	Growth
Having clear career goals within the organization.	Growth
Ability to interact with people of different cultures.	Growth
Being able to oversee projects, tasks, and teams.	Growth
Being technologically challenged.	Growth
The ability to ensure the support of African American professionals in the workplace via management and policies.	Leadership
The understanding of the importance of diversity and leadership when developing diversity initiatives.	Leadership
Being able to manage conflict as it relates to racial, bias, or prejudice discrimination.	Leadership
Bringing in outside resources to train and develop diversity knowledge.	Leadership
Facilitation of panel interviews on diversity leaders and topics.	Leadership
Mentorship programs.	Leadership
Track and share retention and representation KPIs as it relates to diversity.	Leadership
Leadership team displaying the importance of workplace culture.	Leadership
Transparency from leaders.	Leadership

Consensus Items	Code
Succinct and effective feedback is supplied to encourage the development and advancement of African American professionals.	Leadership
Organization participating in underrepresented activities outside of work.	Organizational Culture
Having knowledge of the socioeconomic problem of organizational support.	Organizational Culture
Acknowledging that organizations play a role in supplying a space for individuals to express themselves while also belonging to a group.	Organizational Culture
The ability to foster a supportive and stress-free workplace that encourages inclusivity.	Organizational Culture
Having knowledge of being culturally aware.	Organizational Culture
Giving inclusivity priority in the workplace.	Organizational Culture
Have company values reflect inclusivity.	Organizational Culture
Having a diverse Executive team.	Organizational Culture
Human Resources hiring underrepresented candidates.	Organizational Culture
The importance of providing a work environment that encourages inclusivity to avoid fostering hostile environments.	Organizational Culture
Ability to have a team-oriented culture.	Organizational Culture
The ability to assess diversity policies is adopted throughout the organization.	Organizational Culture
Work/Life balance.	Organizational Culture

Consensus Items	Code
The ability to foster a workplace culture that accepts inclusivity and avoids hostility or racism.	Organizational Culture
Having a culture that celebrates success.	Organizational Culture
Feel motivated by the organization's mission.	Organizational Culture
Having a sense of belonging at work.	Organizational Culture
Organizational culture is important.	Organizational Culture
Being acknowledged and valued for contributions.	Organizational Culture
Special events to celebrate the representation of diverse groups.	Organizational Culture
Having the ability to raise concern at work without being judged.	Safety
The ability to provide a safe and positive workplace.	Safety
Employees feel they have a safe space to share their unique identities.	Safety
The ability to allow employees a space to express concerns regarding diversity and workplace culture.	Safety
Accountability taken when workplace culture is violated.	Safety
Psychological safety at work.	Safety
Having knowledge of the importance of individuals belonging to a group and safely expressing their individuality.	Safety

Chapter Summary

To answer RQ1, a Delphi analysis was administered to discover critical factors that have facilitated the advancement of African American professionals to senior management positions. The Delphi analysis consisted of two rounds. Round one consisted of 60 critical items and 26 participants. After analyzing the first survey, 48 items reach individual consensus, leaving 12 items on a no-consensus basis. All 12 essential items reached consensus in round two, having 23 participants take the survey. This resulted in a 100% consensus rate, with a MeSI score of 0%, an IQRSI score of 0%, a MoSI score of 0%, and the IQR yielding stability.

To examine RQ2, intercoder reliability was used in identifying if a theoretical framework or model can be established from the findings. The 60 critical items that attained consensus were coded into five themes: leadership, empowerment, growth, organizational culture, and safety. After the codes and themes were examined by two peer reviewers, a united agreement was achieved in the first review.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

In the U.S., African American employees experience discrimination in the workplace that hinders their ability to achieve higher leadership positions. Researchers emphasize the importance of addressing racism in the workplace through various hiring and promoting activities to ensure diversity and inclusivity, and address inequality in the workplace (Chatterjee et al., 2020; Cox, 2022; Gould et al., 2020). The proposed study aimed to determine the critical factors for senior management to build healthy workplace cohesiveness among African American professionals. Two research questions were proposed to address the purpose of this study:

- RQ1: What are the critical factors that have facilitated the advancement of African American professionals to senior management positions?
- RQ2: Can a theoretical model be developed for the critical factors that facilitate the advancement of African American professionals to senior management positions?

In Chapter 5, the researcher discussed the findings of the Delphi study. First, the study's conclusions were reviewed, focusing on the results and relevance to the research questions. The researcher also discussed the application of the findings in terms of importance to the purpose of the study, areas lacking consensus, and elements of notable importance. Details were given regarding recommendations for future research and purpose. Chapter 5 concluded with a summary of the most salient topics discussed throughout the chapter.

Summary of the Study

The Delphi study method assessed factors that facilitate and hinder positive workplace cohesion for African American professionals. The researcher followed the recommendations of Dayé (2018) regarding the appropriate means of conducting a Delphi method to address the

purpose of the study. Senior management supplied their perspectives through their experiences regarding factors that facilitate and hinder positive workplace cohesion for African American professionals. Participants included in the study were African American, male or female, and held a minimum of 10 years as a senior manager or higher. A total sample of 26 participants was included in the final study who supplied responses to two rounds of the Delphi survey for data collection purposes. Thematic analysis was conducted to assess survey responses and identify a theoretical framework. The researcher reviewed the findings relevant to each Delphi phase and research question.

Findings

The first round of Delphi survey distribution was composed of 60 critical items relevant to the reviewed literature. A discussion of the survey development was discussed in both Chapter 2 and Chapter 3. A 7-point Likert scale was used to distribute the survey items. Of the 60 items, 48 reached a consensus, with 20% of the questions leaving no consensus. The importance level, determined by the median score, was demonstrated among 48 items across the first survey distribution for the Delphi study method. Phase two consisted of 12 critical items, distributed again via surveys using a Likert-style distribution. A total of 23 participants completed the second round of the Delphi survey, of which all 12 items reached a consensus. In sum, 100% consensus was reached upon the round two analysis of the Delphi method. After the second round, survey distribution was completed due to a 100% consensus being reached in the second round.

After both surveys concluded, all 60 critical items received individual consensus. The final consensus items ranged from the lowest median score and parallel Likert-scale rating. Subsequently, coding was completed to address RQ2, in which the researcher considered if a

theoretical framework could be developed for critical factors that facilitate the advancement of African American professionals to senior management positions. The findings of the research questions were discussed in the following sections. Thus, the results that addressed each research question were provided.

Research Question One

RQ1 attempted to develop an understanding of the critical factors that could facilitate the advancement of African American professionals to senior management positions. The Delphi method elucidated these critical factors by a consensus reached through the 26 final survey respondents and two total Delphi survey rounds. A 100% consensus rate was reached with a MeSI score of 0%, an IQRSI score of 0%, a MoSI score of 0%, and the IQR yielding stability. The researcher reviews the items that obtained 100% consensus in the current study while reviewing relevant empirical literature. The development of a theoretical model to address RQ2 is discussed in the preceding sections.

Key Factors

The following items were considered critically important factors for facilitating the advancement of African American professionals to senior management positions. Items that reached consensus included managing conflict as it relates to racial bias or prejudice discrimination, the ability to foster a supportive and stress-free workplace that encourages inclusivity, and the importance of company values that reflect inclusivity which was seen in Table 8 in the previous chapter. These items are also relevant in prior empirical research demonstrating the importance of managing conflict without racial bias or prejudice among workers and leaders. Researchers corroborated the importance of stress-free work environments that can also emphasize inclusivity based on the practices and policies implemented by leaders

(Dubinko et al., 2021; Gomez & Bernet, 2019; Sukalova & Ceniga, 2020; Zhou et al., 2019). For example, researchers such as Zhou et al. (2019), the management of conflict must be through adaptable policies that are effective for individuals in the workplace. Dubinko et al. (2021) also emphasized that diversity commitment is ideally handled through inclusion policies that are effectively documented and established. The items found in this study indicated that there is a need for policies and practices that are set with the aim of reducing conflict.

Other critical factors that reached consensus included the importance of a diverse executive team, the ability to raise concern at work without being judged, and the ability to supply African American graduates with career development that is accountable to white counterparts. The Delphi method also identified consensus regarding the ability to provide a safe and positive workplace, the importance of supporting African American professionals using management and policies, and the importance of a workplace culture that accepts inclusivity and avoids hostility or racism. Critical factors also included the importance of accountability when workplace culture is violated, transparency from leaders, work-life balance, training for inclusivity, and psychological safety at work.

The identified critical factors, which reached 100% consensus, are also relevant elements in empirical research reviewed thoroughly in Chapter 2. The factors identified throughout the empirical research, which reached consensus in the current study, demonstrated the importance of understanding the factors that aid African American professionals in advancing to senior management (Bartscher et al., 2022; Cha & Roberts, 2019; Moon & Christensen, 2020; Nkomo et al., 2019; Small & Pager, 2020; Winter et al., 2019). According to Moon and Christensen (2020), recognizing hard work is important so employees feel respected in the workplace, while Nkomo et al. (2019) found that policies amplifying diversity, engage employees. Thus, the

policies and practices, when appropriately applied in the workplace, can include inclusivity and diversity while avoiding and rejecting any form of hostility or racism that may hinder the advancement of African American employees (Bartscher et al., 2022; Cha & Roberts, 2019; Moon & Christensen, 2020; Nkomo et al., 2019; Small & Pager, 2020; Winter et al., 2019).

Multiple items were also delegated as *very important* on the Likert scale based on the consensus reached amongst participants in the second round of the Delphi method. These factors ranged from implementing diversity strategies, understanding the importance of individuality, using organizational missions, and having clear career goals to facilitate the advancement of African American individuals. Factors related as very important, which reached 100% consensus, were also relevantly identified in empirical research. Practitioners and researchers emphasized that understanding appropriate inclusivity and diversity policies and practices required a coherent and cohesive understanding of these issues, as well as the economic and political factors hindering the ability of African Americans to gain equity in the workplace (Anthym & Tuitt, 2019; Mharapara & Staniland, 2020; Moon & Christensen, 2020; Schrage et al., 2021). For example, Anthym and Tuitt (2019) found that compassion, criticism, and feedback improve inclusivity while creating an open and transparent workplace. Schrage et al. (2021) also found that candor when providing feedback is critical to supplying an effective and open environment in which equality and diversity are fostered. Ultimately, leaders that can understand a socioeconomic issue, assess the factors that challenge opportunities for African Americans, and celebrate diversity, are more likely to experience positive outcomes in terms of inclusivity and diversity initiatives (van Niekerk, 2020; Fujimoto et al., 2022).

Factors related as *moderately important* to *very important* consisted of knowledge of socioeconomic problems, organizational support, and special events celebrating diversity, as

shown in Table 1. Elements rated as neutral were the ability to work outside of the country, being technologically challenged, and having riveting global opportunities. The consensus reached in the two rounds of the Delphi method was integral to developing the theoretical model, which also addressed the second research question. For this purpose, the items were coded to examine how a theoretical framework could be developed for critical factors that facilitate the advancement of African American professionals to senior management positions. An initial code was produced, in which two reviewers were asked to examine the codes to reach a consensus (Bernard et al., 2016). A total of 60 items achieved consensus, which was classified into five categories. The categories include leadership, empowerment, growth, organizational culture, and safety. Each of these categories is related to an associated consensus item. In the following subsections, each of these categories is reviewed in relationship to the theoretical framework and their importance in previous empirical research and the purpose of the study.

Critical Importance

Using the Delphi method, the researcher identified elements that reached 100% consensus and are ranked as critically important according to survey respondents. The consensus items ranked as critically important based on participant responses. The consensus items reflected the importance of managing conflict, supporting stress-free workplaces, and supporting company values that reflect inclusivity. Factors review that reach consensus illustrate the importance of inclusivity that focuses upon appropriate conflict management while ensuring that employees can present to leaders or organizations without fear of harassment or attack based upon their status as African American employees. Chen et al. (2021) found that social identity and fostering group behavior are crucial to creating inclusivity. Similarly, Waltz et al. (2019) argued that improving diversity policies requires creating a sense of common consensus and

social cohesion among workplaces. Thus, creating a sense of positive safety and psychological protection in the workplace is inherent to the empowerment and growth to facilitate senior management advancement among African Americans (Chen et al., 2021; Dover et al., 2020; Friant et al., 2020; Waltz et al., 2019).

Participants also found consensus regarding diverse executive teams and the ability to raise concerns at work without judgment. Other factors related to the importance of supplying African American graduates with career development that is accountable to White counterparts. Consensus items also found corroboration with previous empirical research, such as the importance of safe and positive workplaces, management policies that support diversity and reject hostility, and leaders' role in transparency and policies that support psychological safety. Researchers argued that workplace inclusivity while outwardly rejecting any form of racism or potential hostility towards minority employees (Collins et al., 2021; Kohon, 2018; Vesnic-Alujevic et al., 2020). Collins et al. (2021) argued that cultivating social justice in the workplace must require establishing a non-hostile workplace. Taani et al. (2020) found that recruiting and maintaining African American employees must require a diverse and supportive work environment. Regarding career development, researchers argued that companies and leaders must not only support African Americans but provide strategic policies and practices that retain, support, and allow for the growth of skills and practices important to African Americans to enhance their ability to reach senior positions (Coenders & Verhoef, 2019; Dayarathna et al., 2019; Graham, 2019; Piatt et al., 2019; Taani et al., 2020). Overall, the critical factors ranked as 100% consensus by survey respondents demonstrate the importance of inclusivity and diversity approaches that acknowledge the importance of safe workplaces, avoid harassment through

creating an inclusive workplace, and recognize the need for career development strategies that grow the skills and experiences of African American employees.

Of Importance

Items ranked as important included the ability to be culturally aware, the willingness to be a part of a team, and the implementation of policies and practices that may support the essential African Americans into leadership positions. Items ranked as important were also included within the theoretical framework, discussed in the subsequent sections of this chapter. Song et al. (2021) found that positive reinforcement in the workplace is based on the ability of leaders to establish African Americans in leadership positions. Cha and Roberts (2019) also indicated that workers' previous experiences with policies and practices may influence how they respond to senior management. Responses aligned with previous research demonstrating the importance of considering internal and external factors that may facilitate or potentially lead to the advancement of African Americans into senior management positions (Bonilla-Silva, 2019; Cha & Roberts, 2019; Julian McFarlane et al., 2022; Lewis & Shah, 2021; Song et al., 2021).

No Importance or Basis

No items were ranked as not important in the current study. However, the item ranked *neutrally* was the ability to work outside of the country. Additionally, three categories, items 1, 52, 24, and 29, were ranked as moderately important to very important; these factors included understanding socioeconomic problems, representing diverse groups through special events, having riveted global opportunities, and being technologically challenged. Dover et al. (2020) found that diversity initiatives are often ineffective due to needing more consideration of internal factors. Neblett (2019) argued that fostering effective change may require renewed training among employees and other leaders. As these elements were gathered from empirical research,

there is evidence that these may be important factors for consideration (Dover et al., 2020; Neblett, 2019). However, based on the Delphi method, they were labeled as something other than critical importance based upon the consensus of survey respondents. As discussed in the recommendations section of this chapter, future researchers may explore these topics further to corroborate empirical research and provide further data to support African Americans' ascension and senior management positions.

No Consensus

A total of 12 items were moved to the second round of the Delphi study due to a need for more consensus. These items should have been included in the survey. As a result, the total consensus was achieved after the second round of the Delphi study. The items that did not reach consensus included giving inclusivity priority in the workplace, an organization participating in underrepresented activities outside of the work, mentorship programs, special events, understanding the importance of shared membership, knowledge of the matter of individuals belonging, policies implemented to address underrepresentation, riveting global opportunities, being technologically challenged, the ability to engage with staff surveys, knowledge of socioeconomic problem organizational support, and ability to work outside of the country. While these items were excluded from the second survey round, they may be helpful for future research. The researcher recommended further research, discussed in subsequent sections, to address these items that could have achieved consensus in the first round of the Delphi survey. Regarding their relevance to the current study, the researcher implemented a second survey round which included items with median responses and could be potentially applicable to critical importance in the second survey round. As a result, these were included as 100% consensus based upon rewording and consideration from the respondents in the study.

Research Question Two

To address RQ2, intercoder reliability was used in identifying if a theoretical framework or model can be established from the findings. The 60 critical items that attained consensus were coded into five themes: leadership, empowerment, growth, organizational culture, and safety. After the codes and themes were examined by two peer reviewers, a united agreement was achieved in the first review. A consensus of 60 items was reached, combined into five categories, *leadership, empowerment, growth, organizational culture, and safety*. Next, these elements were discussed in relation to the theoretical framework developed to address RQ2.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework comprises five categories: leadership, empowerment, growth, organizational culture, and safety. *Leadership* refers to items that reach a consensus about the importance of ensuring people are aligned with their created and collective directions. Leadership should align people with their creative and collective directions and motivate and inspire them towards the desired achievement. Through leadership, African American professionals may be facilitated to advance senior management positions. In the relevant literature, leadership is a common theme regarding exploring effective and ineffective strategies previously used to support employee progress and growth. Butler et al. (2019) argued that effective strategies that support diversity are based on previous experience and training. Song et al. (2021) also agreed that motivation and alignment with the experiences of African Americans are key to their success in the organization. Similar to the consensus items reached in this Delphi study, researchers demonstrated that leaders hold a key role in ensuring the achievement of African American employees via inspiration, motivation, and creative alignment toward goals (Butler et al., 2019; Dover et al., 2020; Fine et al., 2020; Neblett, 2019; Song et al., 2021;

Stanley et al., 2019). Resultantly, the first leadership category provides unique insight regarding the items and key consensus which can foster effective policies and practices to support the advancement of African Americans into senior management positions.

The second category, *empowerment*, refers to factors relevant to enabling people and their rights to represent their interests in a responsible, manageable, and self-reliant way. In this category, leaders are directed to understand how allowing the individuals to seek their goals and pathways is more likely to experience employees who are responsible and capable of self-reliant approaches. The second category also demonstrates that African American personnel supported in terms of understanding, respecting, and supporting their rights in the workplace are more likely to feel a sense of empowerment. Empowerment is also a crucial factor identified in the reviewed literature. According to Dover et al. (2020) and Neblett (2019), empowerment can lead employees to recognize their worth, feel support from other employees, and overcome challenges in their career pathways. Research from Lewis and Shah (2021) also emphasized the importance of leadership practices and alignment with implemented policies and procedures. When considering empowerment amongst the critical factors for advancement, it is important to acknowledge the role that leadership and policies and practices play when ensuring the ability for African Americans to gain a part of equity and eventually advancement in senior management positions (Bonilla-Silva, 2019; Cha & Roberts, 2019; Julian McFarlane et al., 2022; Lewis & Shah, 2021; Song et al., 2021).

The third category refers to *growth*, in which individuals can reach their career goals by gaining appropriate skills, experiences, knowledge, and expertise. African American employees are more likely to have the opportunities to gain such skills, experience, and learning and are also more likely to reach their career goals. Thus, making growth a critical factor that facilitates the

advancement of African Americans to senior management positions. Butler et al. (2019) found that growth is supported through diversity initiatives while Stanley et al. (2019) corroborate the importance of growth, when fostered by organizations and leaders to help African American employees. Growth can be gained through various opportunities, skills, and expertise throughout their organizational role (Fine et al., 2020; Stanley et al., 2019). Growth will potentially allow for the advancement of African Americans into senior management positions as they are offering the means of gaining appropriate opportunities to succeed in the workplace and enter leadership positions (Chen et al., 2021; Friant et al., 2020; Noon & Ogbonna, 2021; Waltz et al., 2019).

The fourth category refers to *organizational culture*. Organizational culture is associated with an equitable, inclusive, and diversified environment. Within such a corporate culture, belonging is an essential factor in which individuals experience inclusivity and diversity and a sense of belonging based upon the policies and practices implemented within the organization's culture. Organizational culture substantially allows African American employees to advance to senior management positions (Cha & Roberts, 2019; Bonilla-Silva, 2019; Roth, 2019). Roth (2019) found that advancement to senior management positions must align with the needs and appropriate diversity structures employed. Previous researchers have defined organizational culture as impactful in terms of effective policies, improving upon diversity initiatives, and allowing opportunities for change and growth.

Furthermore, Stanley et al. (2019) found that policies often need to be more effectively implemented, leading to poor outcomes for African American employees. Researchers acknowledge that ineffective policies can hinder the advancement of senior management ascension by African American employees (Dover et al., 2020; Neblett, 2019; Stanley et al., 2019; Vesnic-Alujevic et al., 2020). Thus, organizational culture is a critical factor when

developing the theoretical model that frames the factors that facilitate the advancement of African American employees into senior management positions (Bouty & Drucker-Godard, 2019; Butler et al., 2019; Stanley et al., 2019).

The fifth and final category refers to *safety*. Safety includes an emphasis on the absence of interpersonal fears. Individuals need more confidence in advocating ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes. Creating an environment where individuals will feel safe to make mistakes and question policies and practices while initiating new ideas is ideal for African American professionals who advance this year's management positions (Garcia, 2019; Li et al., 2023). Previous research also acknowledges safety regarding the importance of developing effective policies and allowing for opportunities for ascension and leadership positions (Chan et al., 2019; Drake et al., 2019; Lang & Kahn-Lang Spitzer, 2020). Chan et al. (2019) found that the development of policies must align with the organizational structure. Drake et al. (2019) emphasized that policies that risk employees' psychological safety will be ineffective in their implementation. Researchers acknowledge that regardless of appropriate diversity and inclusion measures, safety must be in place to ensure employees can discuss mistakes, illustrate new ideas for the company, and feel comfortable exchanging ideas with fellow employees and leaders (Blanck et al., 2020; Brands & Rattan, 2020; Collins et al., 2021; Torres, 2022; Wikhamn et al., 2021). Safety is essential when considering the theoretical framework that models a potential for facilitating African American ascension to senior management positions.

Arriving at the framework was completed by considering both items that met consensus from the study data collection, a consideration of the guiding theoretical framework, and the reviewed empirical literature. The developed framework focuses on leadership, empowerment, growth, safety, and organizational culture. Each item was considered important based on the

consensus reached through the study data collection. Furthermore, previous literature elucidated these factors as considerably important in terms of the development of appropriate diversity and inclusivity measures (Blanck et al., 2020; Brands & Rattan, 2020; Collins et al., 2021; Torres, 2022; Wikhamn et al., 2021). Researchers such as Collins et al. (2021) and Torres (2022) argue that the development of appropriate policy should consider both the safety and growth of African American employees while assessing how the organizational culture could support such strategic developments. Furthermore, when developing the framework, it was important to determine the outcomes that would be achieved based upon the DEIB, which would ideally lead to the advancement of African Americans into senior leadership positions by creating a better organization and improved career trajectory.

According to research findings, the merger of all five notions (L.E.G.O.S.) operating in consensus with DEIB advanced individual growth amongst African American leaders within the organizational structure. Hypothetically, if organizations adopt this framework, it will facilitate career growth amongst African Americans into senior leadership roles while creating institutional fulfillment. Accelerating African Americans to senior-level roles also contributes to organizational development and progression. Figure 2 demonstrates the relationship between African American leaders and effective business practices and strategies within organizations. Accepting DEIB creates organizational awareness to ensure individual achievements, which leads to institutional and individual advancements.

Figure 2

Fountain's Theoretical Framework



Implications of the Study

The Delphi analysis of the research findings illustrated vital factors that facilitate the advancement of African American professionals to senior management positions. A 100% consensus rate was reached among the 23 participants that completed the survey. The second implication of the research findings is the theoretical model developed, which includes five themes leadership, empowerment, growth, organizational culture, and safety. Bacon census was reached via peer reviewers who assessed for consensus among codes, which was reached in the

first review of the thematic analysis procedures. The implications of the findings of the theoretical model demonstrate key factors that relate to the advancement of African American professionals to senior management positions. The development of the theoretical model allows for an understanding of the potential factors that facilitate the ascension of African Americans into senior management positions.

The empirical literature corroborates the categories of the theoretical model when assessing the appropriate strategies for ensuring African Americans are allowed to ascend to senior management positions without potential infringement of ineffective policies and leadership practices (Blanck et al., 2020; Brands & Rattan, 2020; Collins et al., 2021; Torres, 2022; Wikhamn et al., 2021). The current research expands upon the previous research by developing the theoretical model, which was elucidated through the 100% consensus achieved by the Delphi survey respondents. The theoretical model allows for a framework that considers various internal and external factors that facilitate the ascension of African Americans into senior management positions. The model also holds potential for practical application through applying leadership, growth, organizational culture, and empowerment to facilitate the ascension of African Americans into senior management positions. Ultimately, the theoretical model is a beneficial contribution to both practice and research in terms of considering the factors that can support African Americans, improve organizational cost culture, and empower the growth of these employees for the betterment of the individual and the business.

The Delphi study findings also offer the potential for implications regarding social change. The substantial challenges that African Americans face in the workplace require renewed efforts to understand facilitators for ascension into leadership positions (Chatterjee et al., 2020; Cox, 2022; Gould et al., 2020). Ultimately, overcoming inequality issues in the

workplace can create cohesion between employees and leaders (Stanley et al., 2019). Improved cohesion in the workplace benefits organizations in terms of productivity and profitability. Ascension of African Americans into leadership positions also fosters innovative new ideologies supporting business growth and individual success (Bouty & Drucker-Godard, 2019; Butler et al., 2019; Stanley et al., 2019). The implications of the study findings also demonstrate that multiple facilitators may foster change in terms of improving individual growth and ability to succeed in leadership positions while allowing organizations to promote success amongst employee populations that have previously experienced racism, harassment, and lacked support to reach the leadership positions desired (Bonilla-Silva, 2019; Cha & Roberts, 2019; Julian McFarlane et al., 2022; Lewis & Shah, 2021; Song et al., 2021). The research findings support both practice and research in allocating appropriate interventions to support the ascension of African Americans into senior management positions.

Recommendations for Future Research

Considering the development of the current study, it is essential to assess and evaluate the limitations of the current study. The Delphi method is limited in supplying information specifically from participants that must reach 100% consensus. As a result, the obtained information does not provide qualitative data, such as opinions, perceptions, or lived experiences, that may be useful to the research topic and intervention developments. Future researchers should expand upon this limitation using differing qualitative methodologies that may contribute unique information about issues that could have reached a 100% consensus. An additional limitation was the need for a 100% consensus, which is an essential factor of the Delphi method, but needs to supply a more profound conversation regarding items that did not

reach consensus. Future researchers should examine these items to obtain data useful for research and, potentially, practice.

The first recommendation for future research is an instrument designed to measure the constructs in the developed model. Five categories were identified based on the consensus reached across the Delphi method approach. These five categories were reached after receiving 60 items with consensus. The development of an instrument could be ideal for exploring the advancement of African American into senior management positions. However, future researchers should examine this model to assess the identified constructs for potential validity and reliability for instrumentation development. Exploring this avenue for future research may improve upon the current theoretical framework and offer the opportunity for a survey instrument designed to aid in addressing workplace factors that facilitate the ascension into senior management positions among African American employees.

In the current study, a consensus was reached regarding understanding the critical factors that facilitate the advancement of African American professionals to senior management positions. However, researchers may need to examine other factors, either internally or externally, that may hinder the advancement of African American professionals that should have been considered in this study. While consensus was reached regarding factors critical for advancement, it is also essential to expand the research topic to different organizational contexts, hierarchical designs, and geographical locations to understand factors that hinder or facilitate advance. Researchers are suggested to continue this topic outside while considering unique geographical or socioeconomic factors that may inhibit, or aid, the advancement of African Americans into senior management positions.

The researcher also recommends continued examination of factors that inhibit or aid the facilitation of African Americans into senior management positions based on the survey responses gained in the first round of Delphi surveys. During the first round of the Delphi analysis, twenty-six respondents reflected on a consensus regarding items supplied in the Likert-style survey. Future researchers may also examine elements that still need to achieve consensus. These elements may be helpful for researchers to consider in terms of future research to examine factors that aid or inhibit the ascension of African Americans into senior management positions. Supplying an improved understanding of items toward specific workplace culture, leadership styles, and geographic location may clarify which factors that did not reach consensus in the first round of this Delphi study may be applicable or not to another organization's context. Researchers should examine these topics to further the research for practical and research purposes.

The researcher also recommends continued qualitative research based on the responses of African Americans attempting to gain or who currently reside in senior management positions. Based upon the responses of the Delphi survey, multiple factors contribute to the facilitation of African Americans into senior management positions. However, gaining perspectives from African Americans in or attempting to enter these positions through qualitative interviews may further improve the theoretical model. Researchers may use African Americans' lived experiences and expertise in these positions to understand how such strategies have been effective or ineffective based on their lived experiences. From a qualitative perspective gaining data on the effectiveness of the proposed theoretical model may support both practice and research.

Conclusion

The proposed study aimed to determine the critical factors for senior management to build healthy workplace cohesiveness among African American professionals. Two research questions were proposed to address the purpose of the study, which include examining critical factors that facilitate the advancement of African American professionals to senior management positions and developing an associated theoretical model that may aid practitioners and researchers. The purpose of this study was addressed by a Delphi study, in which 100% consensus was obtained among twenty-three participants and sixty criterion items.

The findings demonstrated various critical, important, and moderate items, ranging from factors associated with the workplace, the individual, and leadership. Resultantly, a theoretical model which was developed for RQ2 was identified. The theoretical model included leadership, growth, organizational culture, and empowerment. Corroborating previous research, the theoretical model demonstrates the importance of internal and external factors that may facilitate the ascension of African Americans into senior management positions. The findings of this study demonstrated the importance of understanding appropriate interventions using empirical research, which can support the ascension of African Americans via growth, empowerment, leadership, and organizational culture. Ideally, practitioners and researchers could use the study's findings to address the inequity gap present in modern workplaces and allow for new methods to facilitate the attention of African Americans in senior management positions.

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APPENDIX A

CITI HSR Certificate

		Completion Date 29-Aug-2020 Expiration Date 28-Aug-2024 Record ID 38126144
This is to certify that:		
Michael Fountain		
Has completed the following CITI Program course:		Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.
CITI Conflicts of Interest (Curriculum Group) Conflicts of Interest (Course Learner Group) 1 - Stage 1 (Stage)		
Under requirements set by:		
Pepperdine University		
		
Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?webfa1723-8979-45c5-ad74-400276f6d3d9-38126144		

APPENDIX B

IRB Approval Notice

Pepperdine University
24255 Pacific Coast Highway
Malibu, CA 90263
TEL: 310-506-4000

NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

Date: February 28, 2023

Protocol Investigator Name: Michael Fountain

Protocol #: 22-09-1951

Project Title: Critical Factors for Senior Management to Foster Positive Workplace Cohesion for African American Professionals

School: Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Dear Michael Fountain:

Thank you for submitting your application for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We appreciate the work you have done on your proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations 45 CFR 46.101 that govern the protections of human subjects.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit an amendment to the IRB. Since your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite the best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete written explanation of the event and your written response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the IRB and documenting the adverse event can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* at community.pepperdine.edu/irb.

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval. Should you have additional questions or require clarification of the contents of this letter, please contact the IRB Office. On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

Judy Ho, Ph.D., IRB Chair

cc: Mrs. Katy Carr, Assistant Provost for Research

APPENDIX C

Recruiting Email



Dear [Name],

My name is Michael Fountain, and I am a doctoral student in the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University. I am conducting a research study to identify the critical factors for fostering a supportive work environment for African American professionals while also showing how diversity management improves organizational effectiveness and team cohesion and you are invited to participate in the study.

If you agree, you are invited to participate by completing a survey over the course of 3 distinct cycles that will have you answering questions and reviewing other participants' anonymous responses to these same questions. The survey is anticipated to take no more than 30 minutes for each cycle. Participation in this study is voluntary. Your identity as a participant will remain confidential during and after the study. Confidentiality will be maintained using a series of security measures, including password-protected email communication using university firewall protections, deidentification of data using pseudonyms as well as compartmentalization of the various data elements, and keeping all information separate. If you have questions or would like to participate, please contact me via email or phone.

Thank you for your participation,

Michael Fountain

Pepperdine University | Graduate School of Education and Psychology
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX D

IRB Informed Consent Form

PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPANT IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

IRB #: 22-09-1951

Formal Study Title: CRITICAL FACTORS FOR SENIOR MANAGEMENT TO CREATE POSITIVE WORKPLACE COHESION FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN PROFESSIONALS

Authorized Study Personnel:

Principal Investigator: Michael Fountain

Key Information:**If you agree to participate in this study, the project will involve:**

- (Males and Females) between the ages of (18-90)
- Procedures will include (Contacting participants using the recruitment script, informed consent, data collection via questionnaire, analysis of data, and documentation of findings)
- The completion of the questionnaire 3 times.
- The total time commitment of 90 minutes (30 minutes for each cycle).
- There is minimal risk associated with this study
- You will not be paid any amount of money for your participation
- You will be provided a copy of this consent form

Invitation

You are invited to take part in this research study. The information in this form is meant to help you decide whether or not to participate. If you have any questions, please ask.

Why are you being asked to be in this research study?

You are being asked to be in this study because you are a leader in the business sector. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate.

What is the reason for doing this research study?

The purpose of this study is to determine will be to identify the critical factors for fostering a supportive work environment for African American professionals while also showing how diversity management improves organizational effectiveness and team cohesion.

What will be done during this research study?

You will be asked to complete a questionnaire for a total of 3 cycles. Each cycle will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. You will be asked a series of questions aimed at figuring out how industry experts perceive certain behaviors. While the research will take approximately 26 to 52 weeks, your participation will only take 90 minutes over the course of several weeks.

How will my data be used?

Your questionnaire responses will be analyzed and aggregated in order to determine the findings to the established research questions.

What are the possible risks of being in this research study?

This research presents minimal risk of loss of confidentiality, emotional and/or psychological distress because the questionnaire involves questions about your leadership practices. You may also experience fatigue, boredom, or anxiety as a result.

What are the possible benefits to you?

You are not expected to get any benefit from being in this study.

What are the possible benefits to other people?

The benefits to society may include better understanding of leadership strategies used within your industry. Other emerging leaders might also benefit from any additional recommendations that are shared through this process.

What are the alternatives to being in this research study?

Participation in this study is voluntary. There are no alternatives to participating, other than deciding to not participate.

What will participating in this research study cost you?

There is no cost to you to be in this research study.

Will you be compensated for being in this research study?

There will be no compensation for participating in this study.

What should you do if you have a problem during this research study?

Your welfare is the major concern of every member of the research team. If you have a problem as a direct result of being in this study, you should immediately contact one of the people listed at the beginning of this consent form.

How will information about you be protected?

Reasonable steps will be taken to protect your privacy and the confidentiality of your study data. The data will be de-identified and stored electronically through a secure server and will only be seen by the research team during the study and until the study is complete.

The only people who will have access to your research records are the study personnel, the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and any other person, agency, or sponsor as required by law. The information from this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but the data will be reported as group or summarized data and your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

What are your rights as a research subject?

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study.

For study related questions, please contact the investigator(s) listed at the beginning of this form.

For questions concerning your rights or complaints about the research contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB):

Phone: 1(310)568-2305

Email: gpsirb@pepperdine.edu

What will happen if you decide not to be in this research study or decide to stop participating once you start?

You can decide not to be in this research study, or you can stop being in this research study (“withdraw”) at any time before, during, or after the research begins for any reason. Deciding not to be in this research study or deciding to withdraw will not affect your relationship with the investigator or with Pepperdine University. You will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

Documentation of informed consent

You are voluntarily deciding whether or not to be in this research study. Signing this form means that (1) you have read and understood this consent form, (2) you have had the consent form explained to you, (3) you have had your questions answered and (4) you have decided to be in the research study. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

**Participant
Name:**

(First, Last: Please Print)

**Participant
Signature:**

Signature

Date

APPENDIX E

Round 1 Delphi Survey Instrument

Round 1 Survey

The proceeding survey regarding critical factors for senior management to create positive workplace cohesion for African American professionals. I want to thank you for your time and welcome you to the first round of the Delphi survey. I am a doctoral student at Pepperdine University within the Graduate School of Education and psychology. The proposed study aims to determine the critical factors for senior management to build healthy workplace cohesiveness among African American professionals. There are three total rounds of this survey which will be used to provide a consensus regarding the critical factors for senior management to build healthy workplace cohesiveness among African American professionals. Each round of these surveys should take approximately 10 to 20 minutes for total completion. With this survey link, you will have 5-7 days to complete and submit it to the researcher. A reminder e-mail will be sent to you one day before the submission deadline. There is little risk to you participating in this study. All personal identifiers will be removed, and your name will be replaced with a pseudonym to protect confidentiality. If you have any further questions, please contact the researcher directly via the original contact information you receive when completing the eligibility criteria.

Instructions

Below is a list of questions regarding critical factors for fostering a positive workplace among African American professionals by senior management. These questions were developed using information from multiple peer-reviewed sources. Citations and resources to create the survey were identified through peer-reviewed literature published within a time period of 2018 to 2023.

1. Evaluate each of the questions.
2. Provide an answer ranking from 1-7, dependent upon your response.
3. At the end of each section, a box is supplied if you have additional comments or clarifications. Only add information that you feel is directly related to the section.

II. Inclusivity

1. Having knowledge of the socioeconomic problem of organizational support.

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 – *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*
- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

2. Having knowledge of resource inequities that African American professionals experience.

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 – *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*
- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

3. The understanding of the importance of shared membership amongst groups and the desire for self-expression and individuality.

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 – *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*
- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

4. Acknowledging that organizations play a role in supplying a space for individuals to express themselves while also belonging to a group.

- 1 – *Not at all important*

- 2 - *Low Importance*
- 3 - *Slightly important*
- 4 - *Neutral*
- 5 - *Moderately important*
- 6 - *Very important*
- 7 - *Critically important*

5. Having knowledge of the importance of individuals belonging to a group and safely expressing their individuality.

- 1 - *Not at all important*
- 2 - *Low Importance*
- 3 - *Slightly important*
- 4 - *Neutral*
- 5 - *Moderately important*
- 6 - *Very important*
- 7 - *Critically important*

6. The ability to foster a supportive and stress-free workplace that encourages inclusivity.

- 1 - *Not at all important*
- 2 - *Low Importance*
- 3 - *Slightly important*
- 4 - *Neutral*
- 5 - *Moderately important*
- 6 - *Very important*
- 7 - *Critically important*

7. Having knowledge of being culturally aware.

- 1 - *Not at all important*
- 2 - *Low Importance*
- 3 - *Slightly important*
- 4 - *Neutral*
- 5 - *Moderately important*
- 6 - *Very important*
- 7 - *Critically important*

8. Willingness to be part of a team.

- 1 - *Not at all important*
- 2 - *Low Importance*
- 3 - *Slightly important*
- 4 - *Neutral*
- 5 - *Moderately important*

- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

9. Training that includes inclusivity.

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 – *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*
- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

10. Giving Inclusivity priority in the workplace.

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 – *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*
- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

11. Have company values reflect inclusivity.

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 – *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*
- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

12. Having a diverse Executive team.

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 – *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*
- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

13. Human Resources hiring underrepresented candidates.

- 1 – *Not at all important*

- 2 - *Low Importance*
- 3 - *Slightly important*
- 4 - *Neutral*
- 5 - *Moderately important*
- 6 - *Very important*
- 7 - *Critically important*

14. Organization participating in underrepresented activities outside of work.

- 1 - *Not at all important*
- 2 - *Low Importance*
- 3 - *Slightly important*
- 4 - *Neutral*
- 5 - *Moderately important*
- 6 - *Very important*
- 7 - *Critically important*

15. Having the ability to raise concern at work without being judged.

- 1 - *Not at all important*
- 2 - *Low Importance*
- 3 - *Slightly important*
- 4 - *Neutral*
- 5 - *Moderately important*
- 6 - *Very important*
- 7 - *Critically important*

In the space provided below, you may add additional skills related to inclusivity in organizational contexts.

II. Career Development and Support

16. The ability to supply African American graduates with career development that is accountable to white counterparts.

- 1 - *Not at all important*
- 2 - *Low Importance*
- 3 - *Slightly important*
- 4 - *Neutral*
- 5 - *Moderately important*

- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

17. The ability to provide a safe and positive workplace.

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 – *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*
- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

18. Implementation of policies that foster career development for African American employees.

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 – *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*
- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

19. Succinct and effective feedback is supplied to encourage the development and advancement of African American professionals.

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 – *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*
- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

20. The ability to ensure the support of African American professionals in the workplace via management and policies.

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 – *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*
- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

21. Implementation of policies designed to address underrepresentation and lack of representation among African American professionals.

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 – *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*
- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

22. The importance of providing a work environment that encourages inclusivity to avoid fostering hostile environments.

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 – *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*
- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

23. Having clear career goals within the organization.

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 – *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*
- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

24. Having global riveting opportunities.

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 – *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*
- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

25. Ability to convey experience-based knowledge.

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 – *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*

- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

26. Ability to interact with people of different cultures.

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 – *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*
- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

27. Ability to have a team-oriented culture.

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 – *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*
- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

28. Ability to work outside of the country.

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 – *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*
- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

29. Being technologically challenged.

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 – *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*
- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

30. Being able to oversee projects, tasks, and teams.

- 1 – *Not at all important*

- 2 - *Low Importance*
- 3 - *Slightly important*
- 4 - *Neutral*
- 5 - *Moderately important*
- 6 - *Very important*
- 7 - *Critically important*

In the space provided below, you may add additional skills and competencies regarding career development and support.

III. Diversity Implementation

31. The implementation of multiple diversity strategies until an effective approach supplies effective results for African American professionals

- 1 - *Not at all important*
- 2 - *Low Importance*
- 3 - *Slightly important*
- 4 - *Neutral*
- 5 - *Moderately important*
- 6 - *Very important*
- 7 - *Critically important*

32. The ability to assess diversity policies is adopted throughout the organization.

- 1 - *Not at all important*
- 2 - *Low Importance*
- 3 - *Slightly important*
- 4 - *Neutral*
- 5 - *Moderately important*
- 6 - *Very important*
- 7 - *Critically important*

33. An understanding of how diversity policies are implemented within the organization.

- 1 - *Not at all important*

- 2 - *Low Importance*
- 3 - *Slightly important*
- 4 - *Neutral*
- 5 - *Moderately important*
- 6 - *Very important*
- 7 - *Critically important*

34. Having the ability to assess if targeted or group diversity initiatives are appropriate and will be effective for creating a positive work environment to support cohesion for African American professionals.

- 1 - *Not at all important*
- 2 - *Low Importance*
- 3 - *Slightly important*
- 4 - *Neutral*
- 5 - *Moderately important*
- 6 - *Very important*
- 7 - *Critically important*

35. The ability to identify effective diversity policies.

- 1 - *Not at all important*
- 2 - *Low Importance*
- 3 - *Slightly important*
- 4 - *Neutral*
- 5 - *Moderately important*
- 6 - *Very important*
- 7 - *Critically important*

36. The understanding of the importance of diversity and leadership when developing diversity initiatives.

- 1 - *Not at all important*
- 2 - *Low Importance*
- 3 - *Slightly important*
- 4 - *Neutral*
- 5 - *Moderately important*
- 6 - *Very important*
- 7 - *Critically important*

37. Being able to manage conflict as it relates to racial, bias, or prejudice discrimination.

- 1 - *Not at all important*
- 2 - *Low Importance*
- 3 - *Slightly important*
- 4 - *Neutral*

- 5 – *Moderately important*
- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

38. Being able to measure the success of organizational diversity efforts.

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 – *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*
- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

39. Having diverse input within your organization's policies and procedures.

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 – *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*
- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

40. Bringing in outside resources to train and develop diversity knowledge.

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 – *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*
- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

41. Facilitation of panel interviews on diversity leaders and topics.

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 – *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*
- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

42. Mentorship programs.

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 - *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*
- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

43. Track and share retention and representation KPIs as it relates to Diversity.

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 - *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*
- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

44. Work/Life Balance

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 - *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*
- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

45. Understanding company metrics in measuring Diversity.

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 - *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*
- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

In the space provided below, you may add additional skills or competencies required for effective diversity initiatives.

IV. Employee Spaces and Culture

46. The ability to foster a workplace culture that accepts inclusivity and avoids hostility or racism.

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 - *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*
- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

47. The knowledge that employees expect for diversity and inclusion practices and feel they have a safe space to share their unique identities.

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 - *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*
- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

48. The ability to engage with staff surveys which provide an opportunity to review policies and actions.

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 - *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*
- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

49. The ability to allow employees a space to express concerns regarding diversity and workplace culture.

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 - *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*
- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

50. Accountability taken when workplace culture is violated.

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 - *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*
- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

51. Leadership team displaying the importance of workplace culture.

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 - *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*
- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

52. Special events to celebrate the representation of diverse groups.

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 - *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*
- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

53. Having a culture that celebrates success.

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 - *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*
- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

54. Feel motivated by the organization's mission.

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 - *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*

- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

55. Having a sense of Belonging at work.

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 – *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*
- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

56. Knowing your work directly contributes to the organization's mission.

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 – *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*
- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

57. Psychological safety at work.

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 – *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*
- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

58. Organizational culture is important.

- 1 – *Not at all important*
- 2 – *Low Importance*
- 3 – *Slightly important*
- 4 – *Neutral*
- 5 – *Moderately important*
- 6 – *Very important*
- 7 – *Critically important*

59. Being acknowledged and valued for contributions.

- 1 – *Not at all important*

- 2 - *Low Importance*
- 3 - *Slightly important*
- 4 - *Neutral*
- 5 - *Moderately important*
- 6 - *Very important*
- 7 - *Critically important*

60. Transparency from leaders.

- 1 - *Not at all important*
- 2 - *Low Importance*
- 3 - *Slightly important*
- 4 - *Neutral*
- 5 - *Moderately important*
- 6 - *Very important*
- 7 - *Critically important*

In the space provided below, you may add additional information or comments regarding this section:

APPENDIX F

Keywords From Literature

Strengths/Best Practices	Challenges	Measures of Success	Existing Recommendations
Culture of inclusion	Unconscious bias	Workforce representation	Culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion
Diverse workforce representation	Conscience bias	Engagement	Connection to business strategy, initiatives, and goals
Inclusive policies, practices, and programs	Bias in feedback	Retention	Culture of belonging
Clear diversity vision, mission, purpose	Bias in decision making	Promotion and advancement	High psychological safety
Belonging	Lack of transparency	Recruitment Efforts	Intentional focus on inclusive practices, policies, and programs
Connection	Lack of clear measures and metrics	Corporate Social Responsibility Strategy	Diversity recruitment strategy
Trust	Leader influence	Communication Strategy	Diverse candidate slates
Authenticity	Disparate treatment	Balanced scorecard	Equipped leaders
Social Identity	Disparate impact	Measures throughout the employee lifecycle	Eliminate bias in hiring
Clear and transparent communication	Fear	Turnover	Supporting systems and processes
Inclusive leadership	Lack of connection	Diversity activities and initiatives	Bias elimination in technology
Uniqueness	Workplace Tension	Training engagement & impact	Cultural integration
Engagement	Dismissive	Program metrics	Gap identification in existing policies where bias may exist
Community	Leader Mindset	Level of employee and leader involvement & engagement	Inclusive development
Meaning	Lack of inclusion	Leader commitment and accountability	Inclusive leadership
Purpose	Adverse treatment	Employee attitudes toward organization treatment of workforce	Leader awareness and transparency
Psychological Safety	Isolation	Disengagement of workforce	Access to development
Access	Intent to harm	Examination or organizational discrimination	Equal access to opportunities and work goals