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Strategies to Increase the Number of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) Employees in Senior-Level Positions

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2025

Abstract

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Renée Michele Collins

MBA, Indiana State University, 2022

BS, Indiana State University, 2020

Research Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Ineffective strategies to increase the number of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) employees in senior-level positions can negatively impact financial performance. Some business leaders lack strategies to increase the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions and positively impact financial performance, which could increase risk of business instability. Grounded in multidimensional cultural competency framework; equity, diversity, and inclusion theory; and change management theory, this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was conducted to identify and explore effective strategies business leaders use to increase the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions and positively impact financial performance. The participants were eight business leaders who have implemented effective strategies to increase the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions and to positively impact financial performance. Data were collected using semistructured interviews, public websites, and public documents. Using thematic analysis, four themes were identified: (a) systematic talent acquisition and pipeline development, (b) inclusive leadership development and representation, (c) authentic self-advocacy empowerment, and (d) comprehensive cultural adaptation. Business leaders should implement integrated talent pipeline systems that coordinate sourcing, assessment, development, and retention functions into cohesive advancement ecosystems. The findings of this research could have implications for positive social change in that communities served by the businesses could benefit from tax revenues due to organizational presence and commitment to local BIPOC talent and customer base.

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Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral research project to my late mother (Janelle E. McKenzie) and late father (Eric M. Black, Sr.) for their love, wisdom and values which continues to guide me through each day; to our recently departed daughter (Euzahn Collins) who lived life to the fullest and remained my biggest cheerleader throughout this journey; to my aunt and godmother (Michele E. McKenzie) who has provided extraordinary lessons supporting lifelong educational growth and continued career success; to my amazing husband (Nathaniel Collins) for his unwavering support throughout my educational victories; to my children (Ivan, Seth, and Tayler) who boldly embrace their lives while fearlessly supporting mine; to my friends in the insurance industry who have always encouraged me to take one more step forward—I thank you all.

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To everyone who has helped me, in one way or another, to complete this doctoral research project, I am forever grateful. There are too many to mention individually but know that I could not make it this far without you.

Special acknowledgment to my husband and best friend, Nathaniel, my most dedicated supporter in this endeavor. Thank you for all the late-night meals and quiet time to devote to my research. We did this together!

I would like to acknowledge the participants who granted my request to share their personal and professional experiences as business leaders who have implemented effective strategies to increase the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions and positively impact financial performance. Without the extensive data they provided, this research project would not have been possible.

I acknowledge my cherished committee chair, Dr. Kim Critchlow, for believing that every academic dream can be reached with the right team, support, and commitment. I would not be at the finish line without your unwavering mentorship and support to complete this doctoral research project.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the entire Walden University family including my second committee chair Dr. Walter McCollum, DBA program director Dr. Gail Miles, professors, library staff, academic advisory team, and fellow Critchlow Scholars. The resources and rigorous process helped me to complete the ultimate educational milestone in my doctorate achievement to emerge as an expert in business administration leadership.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Section 1: Foundation of the Project

Background of the Problem

Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) encounter systemic and structural barriers in the workplace, which are the result of a historic adoption and continuation of colonialism in the United States (Akbar & Parker, 2021). The systemic and structural barriers today impact individual, organizational, political, and legal realms and support the advocacy challenges and the need for change (Akpapuma et al., 2020). In 2005, studies showed racial bias in the business leader pattern, and they highlighted historically underrepresented minority groups where African Americans and Latinx Americans made up less than 3% of Fortune 500 CEO positions, with a slight increase in representation by 2015 with 1% and 3.4%, respectively (Rosette et al., 2008, as cited in Ubaka et al., 2022). Progress has been made by underrepresented BIPOC leaders in predominantly White corporate America since the civil rights movement and the struggles associated with individual determination and striving for equality; however, more work is required to achieve further increases in representation (Ruffin, H., III, 2021). The general business problem is that some business leaders do not know how to increase the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions, negatively impacting the organizational financial performance and corporate profits from less committed and disengaged employees' reduced efficiency and performance. In this research project, I explored strategies to increase the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions.

Business Problem Focus and Project Purpose

The specific business problem is that some business leaders lack strategies to increase the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions and positively impact financial performance. Therefore, in this qualitative pragmatic inquiry, I identified and explored effective strategies that some business leaders have used to increase the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions and positively impact financial performance.

The targeted population consisted of business leaders in North America who have implemented effective strategies to increase the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions and positively impact financial performance. I used purposive sampling to select 6-8 participants and gained access to them through professional and social associations and networks. To collect the data, I used (a) semistructured interviews, (b) government documents, (c) public records and archived reviews, and (d) available related artifacts. The composite conceptual framework for this research project included Sue's (2001) multidimensional cultural competency (MDCC) framework, Akbar and Parker's (2021) equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) theory, and Kotter's (1996) change management theory.

Research Question

What effective strategies have business leaders used to increase the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions and positively impact financial performance?

Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are ideas, positions, or concerns found throughout a research project that are taken for granted and considered reasonable and widely accepted (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). First, I assumed that the organizational actions are desirable, proper, and appropriate within the socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions regarding strategies that support the sustainability of their business operations for diversity, equity, and inclusion. Second, I assumed that organizational leaders' actions align with organizational norms, values, beliefs, and definitions; they are involved in the strategic processes and initiatives to increase the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions and positively impact financial performance. Third, I assumed that participants would be open and honest in responding to the interview questions. Fourth, I assumed that identifying and exploring effective strategies would support leader and organizational initiatives to increase the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions.

Limitations

Limitations are weaknesses closely associated with research design, model and funding constraints, or other factors out of a researcher's control and may impact results and the research project's conclusion (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). The potential limitations of this project included a lack of data on diversity practices captured and made available for organizations (Manoharan et al., 2021). There could have also been limited access to business leaders who have focused on increasing the number of BIPOC

employees in senior-level positions to positively impact organizational financial performance, as well as barriers to finding business leaders who have documented this experience.

Transition

In this research project, I aimed to identify and explore effective strategies that some business leaders have used to increase the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions and positively impact financial performance. Section 1 comprised the background of the problem, the business problem focus, the overarching research question, and the assumptions and limitations of the project. In Section 2, I reviewed and provided a critical analysis and synthesis of the professional and academic literature about the conceptual and supporting frameworks. I provided a critical analysis and synthesis of the literature about the potential themes and phenomena of the research project and compared and contrasted different viewpoints and the project's relationship to previous research and findings. In Section 3, I discussed the project ethics, nature, population, sampling, participants, data collection activities, data analysis, and organization techniques, introduce the interview questions, and address reliability and validity. In Section 4, I present findings, business contributions, recommendations for professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for further research, and a conclusion.

Section 2: The Literature Review

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

Literature Review Opening Narrative

This research project included an in-depth review of professional and academic literature, including critical analysis and synthesis, which are essential components of this research project. The academic literature review significantly contributed to the research project with perspective and critical analysis from a theoretical and conceptual framework perspective through a rigorous process to obtain valid and reliable results (Dodgson, 2021). Additionally, a systematic literature review helped identify themes, trends, and patterns and provide credibility to the complexity of the research topic (Rahman et al., 2023). I explored and identified purported familiar and unfamiliar data in the literature and used the knowledge and understanding of the research to analyze strengths, weaknesses, deficiencies, contradictions in theories and concepts, and patterns across purpose, population, and setting to finalize this research project.

The MDCC framework (Sue, 2001), equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) theory (Akbar & Parker, 2021), and Kotter's (Kotter, 1996)-eight-step change model comprised the composite conceptual framework to ground my research project. A composite conceptual framework encapsulates theoretical and conceptual models where a complete framework with true sustainability and benchmarking focus has yet to be realized (Tasdemir et al., 2020). Analyzing these theories and frameworks enables further development of a refined conceptual framework and provide further theoretical contribution (Saunders et al., 2019). Sue's MDCC Framework and EDI Theory are

complementary and offer constructs that business leaders may view as considerations vital to effective strategies to increase the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions, which can positively impact financial performance. The EDI Theory addresses dimensions of profound cultural change related to racial disparities regarding leadership efforts, making it applicable to this research project. Following the rationale for the EDI framework allows organizational leaders to reflect and respond to the lack of diversity within the organizational structure to improve the professional experience in BIPOC communities (Akbar & Parker, 2021). Kotter's eight-step change model also provides complementary elements through an outline of forces that enable successful organizational transformational change, supporting expanded markets with fewer barriers anchoring to new approaches for a more inclusive workplace culture (Kotter, 1996).

I explored organizational approaches to talent advancement and strategies leaders can leverage to increase the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions and positively impact financial performance. Racialized structures have disproportionately challenged BIPOC individuals, reinforcing behaviors that prevent access to senior-level roles within large corporations (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2020). Organizations continue to adopt these racialized structures due to factors that exclude BIPOC individuals from opportunities for capital, field experience, network and contacts both early and throughout life (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2020). Leadership actions influence organizational culture and impact how businesses conduct themselves, connecting diversity to a crucial component of growth strategy toward sustainable competitive advantage and success (Hakovirta et al., 2023).

A comprehensive and systematic literature review was performed to first address the conceptual framework, including a critical analysis of supporting theories. I conducted a critical analysis and synthesis review of scholarship quality literature on a potential theme relating to the research project's purpose. This review allowed me to identify and explore effective strategies that business leaders have used to increase the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions and positively impact financial performance. The research project includes a comparison and contrast of different perspectives and an evaluation of the relationship of my research project to prior research and findings. Through this process, I aimed to provide a robust, substantiated review of the professional and academic literature related to my research on strategies to increase the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions and positively impact financial performance.

The approach to my literature review included developing a search using keywords and phrases including BIPOC employment experience, minoritized group employment experience, senior-level leadership, diverse leadership, job satisfaction, communication, employment tenure, company commitment, team leadership, diversity and leadership, leadership ethics, competitive advantage, equality, diversity, and inclusion theory, and leader-member exchange theory. Other topics researched include diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging strategies, voluntary turnover, management-employee relationships, employee performance, engagement, empowerment, organizational culture, corporate culture, advancement, intention to leave, toxic employees, toxic managers or supervisors, and organizational bias. Online databases

were utilized, including ABI/INFORM Complete, Business Source Complete, Academic Search Complete, ProQuest, eBook Collection (EBSCOhost), Emerald Management Journal, Elsevier, SAGE Journals, SAGE Premier, Pearson Education, and Science Direct. Supplemental search efforts included using Google Scholar to identify additional relevant information and access gained through the Walden University Library. I ensured that at least 85% of the reference sources are of scholarship quality, peer-reviewed, and within 5 years of my anticipated doctoral research project completion date. The remainder of the professional and academic literature are related to my research project's conceptual framework and seminal sources that may exceed 5 years beyond my anticipated doctoral research project completion date. Table 1 provides a visual breakdown of the resources used for the research project, with the majority anticipated to be peer-reviewed to ensure data reliability.

Table 1

Literature Review Sources

Source	Total	n < 5 years old	% < 5 years old
Peer-reviewed journal articles	51	46	90.20%
Non-peer-reviewed journal articles	4	3	75.00%
Books	2	0	0.00%
Total references	57	49	85.96%

Application to the Applied Business Problem

Conceptual Framework

The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to identify and explore effective strategies that business leaders have used to increase the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions and positively impact financial performance. The

composite conceptual framework of this research project included the MDCC framework, EDI theory, and Kotter's change management theory and an eight-step process to collectively provide a diverse view of effective strategies that some business leaders used to increase the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions and positively impact financial performance. My chosen composite conceptual framework, MDCC, EDI, and Kotter's leading change model, provides an eight-step process, which offered constructs that business leaders may use as considerations vital to impact financial performance positively.

Multidimensional Cultural Competency (MDCC) Framework

Sue's (2001) MDCC framework introduced a set of shared core principles focused on the foundation of a democratic and egalitarian society: inclusion, fairness, collaboration, cooperation, and equal access and opportunity. Sue's MDCC framework proposed the importance of cultural competence and that implementing guidelines had been hindered by the differences that often-defined cultural competence where a lack of conceptual framework for organizing multifaceted dimensions was recognized (Sue, 2001). Sue's MDCC offered three primary dimensions of the multicultural competence approach on race and cultural-specific attributes of cultural competence, components of cultural competence, and foci of cultural competence based on a 3x4x5 model, each cell representing a confluence of the three central dimensions (Sue, 2001). The factorial combination of the 3x4x5 model is based on 3 (Awareness, Knowledge, and Skills) x 4 (Individual, Professional, Organizational, and Societal) x 5 (African American, Asian American, Latino/Hispanic American, Native American, and European American) as the

MDCC framework invites the use of cultural competence in various areas to be systematically identified and used in education, training, practice, and research (Sue, 2001).

The central tenets of Sue's MDCC framework posited that each culture may have different interpretations of reality or maintain different perspectives on the nature of what is standard compared to what is abnormal (Sue, 2001). A tripartite framework of personal identity was applied in the MDCC framework to include the universal level of homo sapiens; the group level to evaluate similarities and differences; and the individual level to evaluate uniqueness based on the belief that individuals are in some respects like all other individuals (Sue, 2001). MDCC's tripartite framework at the universal level analyzed everyday life experiences, biological and physical similarities, self-awareness, and the participants' ability to incorporate symbols. In contrast, the group-level variables included gender, race, sexual orientation, marital status, religious preference, culture, disability, ethnicity, geographic location, age, and socioeconomic status. The individual level focused on genetic endowment and nonshared experiences (Sue, 2001).

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Theory

Sue's MDCC framework influenced Akbar and Parker's (2021) EDI framework, which expanded research to champion EDI to serve as a critical lens to drive strategic priorities, measure the magnitude of impact, and maximize the impact of EDI efforts. The rationale for the EDI framework dates to the 1960s when grassroots activism groups challenged the American Psychological Association (APA) to improve oppressive structures within the organization and profession (Akbar & Parker, 2021). Akbar and

Parker's EDI framework represents the substantive work over several decades to create a systemic approach to organizational EDI needs and to intentionally engage all areas of organizations by incorporating an EDI lens. The EDI lens engages with equity, equality, diversity, and inclusion problems that impact marginalized groups, such as Indigenous people and racialized minorities, in a generalized workplace climate (Arora & Wolbring, 2022).

The tenets of the EDI framework focus on leadership and infrastructure, psychological safety, inclusive policies and practices, cultural and emotional intelligence, and access and equity (Akbar & Parker, 2021). EDI framework proposes that openness to diversity widens access to the best talent, and inclusion allows engagement with talent effectively, enabling fair outcomes to enhance innovation, creativity, productivity, reputation, engagement, and business results (Akbar & Parker, 2021). The EDI model suggests that the continuum of access and equity, cultural and emotional intelligence, psychological safety, and inclusive policies and practices incorporating practice, education, advocacy, and science are vital components of leadership and infrastructure (Akbar & Parker, 2021).

Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model

The change management modeling introduced by Kotter (1996) in the book Leading Change is an eight-step change model focused on the people involved in a change process and their psychology. The change model is divided into the following eight steps: (a) creating a sense of urgency, (b) creating a guiding coalition, (c) creating a vision for change, (d) communicating the vision, (e) removing obstacles, (f) create short-

term wins, (g) build on the change, and (h) anchor the change in corporate culture to enhance organizational competitive advantage (Kotter, 1996). Kotter's model is a framework that proposes that organizations must change to survive (Phillips & Klein, 2023). Changes are complex and require collaboration from various stakeholder groups that focus on the approach through a sense of urgency, a guided coalition, strategic vision, and initiatives, enlisting help, removing barriers, generating short-term wins, sustained acceleration, and instituting change (Graves et al., 2023).

Kotter outlined that increased growth in organizational change initiatives to reduce costs, increase productivity, create growth opportunities, and improve the quality of products and services driven by shifting conditions within organizations led to common errors and subsequent consequences that leaders face (Kotter, 1996). The eight-step change model expands from common errors that could be costly for organizations moving quickly, impacting stability and transformational goals to create competitive advantage (Kotter, 1996). The consequences of common errors toward competitive advantage could slow down initiatives, create resistance and frustrations with employees, creating barriers to needed organizational change, which can be significant for some business leaders that aim to implement strategies to increase the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions and positively impact financial performance (Kotter, 1996).

MDCC and EDI Complementarity. Research studies show that MDCC and EDI theories complement and provide a comprehensive view of performance and competitive advantage focused on diversity and inclusion when organizations change (Phillips &

Klein, 2023). The theoretical elements of competitive advantage and EDI align as diverse employees can be leveraged to maximize positive outcomes related to workforce diversity linked to significant financial performance within organizations (Manoharan et al., 2021). The significant positive relationship between MDCC and EDI includes a range of policies and practices that consider and acknowledge the reality of the impact on individuals and groups based on the denial of equal opportunities in the workplace (Sue, 2001). The significant positive relationship between MDCC and EDI is recognized when organizational leaders possess the knowledge, skills, and abilities to foster cultural acceptance in the work environment and support multiculturalism and diversity (Akpapuna et al., 2020). Integrating the elements of MDCC and EDI with Kotter's eight-step change model can impact effective strategies that some business leaders have used to increase the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions and positively impact financial performance.

Fitzsimmons and Callan (2020) examined the continued lack of diversity among corporate leaders in organizations across the globe and highlighted gaps in leadership development and concepts deemed significant in organizational structures. The researchers found that organizations penalized or ostracized individuals in minority classes from accumulating skills considered valuable for progressing and being promoted into senior leadership roles (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2020). The injustice related to racism and inequality in business, higher education, and society was deemed to correlate training financial opportunities, recruiting and retention of talent, and career progression for diverse individuals was examined by Akpapuna et al. (2020). The researchers offered

steps that organizations could implement through training mentorship, professional engagements, and coaching opportunities to address racism built into the systems of higher education and organizations across society (Akpapuna et al., 2020).

Scholarly Perspectives Supporting the Research Project

This section included scholarly perspectives as they relate to strategies to increase the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions and positively impact financial performance. Specifically, contributing causes and resulting issues, strategies, and benefits to increase the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions and positively impact financial performance are highlighted. By analyzing these aspects, I aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of the challenges and opportunities organizations face when working to increase BIPOC representation in senior-level positions. This analysis serves as a foundation for developing practical and effective strategies and outlining possible benefits to the process of increasing the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions and positively impacting financial performance.

Contributing Causes and Resulting Issues

Several factors contribute to the paucity number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions. This research focused on three key factors: bias in the interview and skills assessment processes, inadequate leadership competencies in establishing inclusive cultures, and failure to embrace differences in people. These issues collectively disadvantage BIPOC candidates and employees, hinder their advancement opportunities, and perpetuate disparities in leadership. Addressing these interconnected problems is

imperative to increase BIPOC representation in senior-level roles and foster a more equitable workplace.

Bias in the interview process creates barriers for BIPOC individuals seeking advancement into senior-level positions, despite candidates' qualifications and leadership potential. Holladay et al. (2023) developed an 8-step structured interview process to address barriers faced by BIPOC individuals seeking advancement into senior-level positions. Their approach aimed to mitigate bias in the interview process and improve opportunities for BIPOC candidates. Their process included updating policies, improving interview panel composition, training interviewers, and implementing candidate screening. They introduced structured interview guides, mandated diverse interview slates, and conducted thorough finalist assessments. Lastly, they developed a program for new leaders to follow to continue change management behaviors. This comprehensive approach addressed multiple aspects of the hiring process where bias can occur. By standardizing procedures, diversifying panels, and increasing awareness among interviewers, the method aimed to mitigate the tendency for hiring leaders to select candidates like themselves. The standardized approach addressed the systemic nature of interview biases that disenfranchise BIPOC candidates. Including post-hiring support for new leaders, it further reinforced the commitment to organizational change. Implementing such structured processes can lead to increased BIPOC representation in senior-level roles, enhancing organizational diversity. Increasing diversity in senior-level roles improves equity within the company and could boost competitive advantage and financial performance (Holladay et al., 2023). As organizations strive for more inclusive

leadership, adopting similar strategies could be crucial in creating sustainable change in workplace diversity.

Clear communication strategies are crucial for organizations to reduce bias in skills assessment and promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, particularly benefiting BIPOC employees. Olenick and Somaraju (2024) examined organizational communication strategies and their impact on DEI initiatives and career advancement. They found that organizations without formal communication strategies for DEI initiatives risk the misinterpretation of diverse life and work experiences as valuable credentials. This research highlighted the importance of structured communication in supporting organizational procedures and reducing bias. Organizations can address questionable assumptions and create a more inclusive environment by clearly defining DEI concepts and distinguishing between structural issues and personal experiences. Leaders who effectively communicate DEI initiatives help ensure fair skills assessment that recognizes diverse backgrounds, ultimately leading to a better appreciation of unique perspectives within the company. Implementing these communication strategies not only supports BIPOC employees but also transforms organizational structures, potentially revolutionizing talent evaluation and selection methods. Enhanced communication with leaders maximizes the benefits of diversity, positively impacting team performance and creating a more equitable work environment (Olenick & Somaraju, 2024). As organizations strive for greater inclusivity, clear communication emerges as a key tool in promoting fair and objective assessment procedures, ultimately supporting the advancement of BIPOC individuals in the workplace.

Systemic changes are necessary to remove bias in interview and skills assessment processes, promote diversity in leadership roles, and positively impact organizational performance. Holladay et al. (2023) developed an 8-step structured process for organizations to increase BIPOC representation in senior-level positions. Olenick and Somaraju (2024) provided a practical framework to enhance knowledge of leadership diversity through communication, addressing skills assessment bias. Both studies emphasized strategies to remove systemic barriers and biases. They advocated for fair treatment in interviews and skills assessments and equal access to training and development opportunities (Holladay et al., 2023; Olenick & Somaraju, 2024). The research highlighted the importance of creating culturally sensitive leadership to support these processes, which can help BIPOC employees feel valued and supported. Organizations can address workplace inequality and create more inclusive environments by implementing these strategies. The synthesis of these sources revealed a comprehensive approach to promoting diversity in leadership roles. By combining structured organizational processes with effective communication strategies, companies can work towards removing bias, increasing BIPOC representation in senior positions, and potentially improving financial performance (Holladay et al., 2023; Olenick & Somaraju, 2024). This approach not only benefits individual employees but also contributes to creating more equitable and high-performing organizations overall.

Leadership competencies in establishing culture can contribute to the paucity of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions. Inadequate leadership competencies can derail organizational goals impacting performance, leadership management, and

adjustment in diverse organizational settings. Cultural intelligence (CQ) is a critical leadership competency that, when lacking, contributes to the scarcity of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions. CQ can be an indicator of leadership capacity to effectively relate, respond, and work in culturally diverse situations. Pauic (2021) explored how leaders use CQ as a core competence to foster inclusive leadership and drive organizational change. They found that leaders develop CQ through strategies focusing on motivation, knowledge acquisition, and action. CQ is directly linked to multinational leadership and global management and can be a primary facilitator of inclusive leadership. Leaders with higher CQ create higher performance within organizations. In research findings, Pauic (2021) determined impact to companies led by culturally intelligent leaders are 35% more likely experience to experience greater performance. Leaders demonstrate CQ through three key strategies: drive, knowledge, and action. Drive strategy manifests in a leader's ability to adapt to multicultural contexts. Knowledge strategy involves understanding of cultural differences and similarities. Action strategy emerges when leaders take appropriate steps in intercultural situations. By incorporating these skill sets, leaders achieve CQ as a leadership competency, directly impacting performance, leadership management, and adjustment in diverse organizational settings. As organizations strive for greater diversity and inclusion, developing CQ in leadership becomes an essential skill for creating an environment where BIPOC employees can advance to senior-level positions (Pauic, 2021). This approach can address the current scarcity of BIPOC employees in top roles but also contribute to improved organizational performance and culture in multicultural settings.

Cultural and racial identity suffers in the workplace when BIPOC individuals experience emotional work exhaustion and a lack of psychological safety. Leaders who lack the competencies to foster and promote an inclusive workplace can fail to recognize the damage that results from discrimination. BIPOC individuals who anticipate the impact of discrimination in the workplace use coping mechanisms when they feel the need to transition between inclusive and un-inclusive situations. Raddatz et al. (2024) addressed the coping mechanism that BIPOC employees use when interacting with leaders who have different cultural and racial perspectives. They focused on code-switching as a coping mechanism that BIPOC employees use in the workplace. Code-switching occurs when an individual feels the need to assimilate with the majority group when they are the minority (Raddatz et al., 2024). They introduced a conceptual model to address code-switching as a coping mechanism. Their model includes six propositions highlighting the importance of cultivating an inclusive workplace for BIPOC employees. The propositions showed a positive association with the anticipation of racial discrimination leading to work exhaustion and loss of psychological safety. They showed that BIPOC employees use code-switching to mediate the anticipation of discrimination and the taxing effects that occur over time, leading to work withdrawal. They underscored the critical role leaders play in fostering diversity and inclusion in the workplace. They determined that when leaders fail to promote an inclusive environment, they inadvertently cause underrepresented employees to anticipate discrimination. Raddatz et al. conceptual model provided a framework for understanding the dynamics of the anticipation of discrimination and actual discrimination and offers potential

intervention methods. The intervention methods could serve in organizations where BIPOC employees face the challenges of a noninclusive workplace. By understanding the factors that lead to anticipated discrimination and subsequent code-switching, organizations can develop more effective strategies to create inclusive workplaces (Raddatz et al., 2024). The approach to developing more effective strategies not only benefits BIPOC employees by reducing psychological stress and emotional exhaustion but also potentially improves overall workplace productivity and retention. As companies strive for greater diversity and inclusion, addressing the underlying issues becomes crucial for creating a more equitable work environment.

Leadership competencies in establishing inclusive cultures can contribute to organizations increasing the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions. Pauic (2021) presented CQ as a crucial leadership competency to foster inclusion, whereas Raddatz et al. (2021) investigated the reactive behaviors of BIPOC employees in response to noninclusive environments. Pauic (2021) outlined drive, knowledge and action as three strategies of cultural intelligence that would aid leaders to foster inclusion in the workplace. Raddatz et al. (2024) examined code-switching as a coping mechanism used by BIPOC employees and provided a six-proposition conceptual model to address the impact. Both studies emphasized the importance of creating inclusive work environments and link behaviors to organizational performance and employee well-being. The synthesis of these sources revealed that leadership competencies play a significant role in creating inclusive workplace environments for BIPOC employees. Pauic (2021) advocated for developing culturally intelligent leaders to improve organizational

performance, Raddatz et al. (2024) highlighted the need to reduce adverse outcomes associated with anticipated discrimination. While both studies addressed leadership's role in creating inclusive workplaces, the different angles focused on leadership development (Pauic, 2021) and understanding employee response to discrimination (Raddatz et al., 2024) are equally beneficial. The strategies from both perspectives can be applied broadly to various workplace settings with the opportunity to impact global and multinational contexts. By combining these approaches, organizations can develop more comprehensive strategies to create inclusive cultures, increase BIPOC representation in senior-level roles and improve overall organizational performance.

Embracing diversity and recognizing the value of differences can support organizations in increasing BIPOC representation in senior-level positions and positively impact financial performance. Acknowledging employees' differences and embracing their skill set as a strategy can support inclusive culture within organizations. Manoharan et al. (2021) focused on transparent strategies to support organizations embracing differences through diversity statements. Six themes were identified as diversity statements that aim to provide the level of transparency that was deemed important for organizational change. The six themes in diversity statements that provide a transparent strategy to embrace differences include: (a) management practices, (b) organizational culture, (c) core values, (d) diversity and inclusion, (e) diversity dimensions and value, and (f) support for external stakeholders. These themes encompass communication about hiring, recruitment, training, development, and retention of diverse employees, as well as statements on fairness and opportunities for advancement (Manoharan et al., 2021). The

management practice's theme incorporated communication about hiring, recruitment, training, development, and retention of diverse employees. The organizational culture theme included communication statements on fairness and opportunity for employees to learn, grow, and thrive through advancement. Organizational core value statements communicate their intent to attract the best talent while valuing and leveraging differences. The diversity and inclusion theme served as a fundamental step in achieving business goals, while the diversity dimension's theme can be used to attract talent while adhering to compliance regulations. The final theme extended the commitment to diversity to external stakeholders, creating a broader inclusive ecosystem. These themes cover various aspects of organizational communication which can be used to communicate their commitment to diversity, from hiring practices to creating an inclusive culture (Manoharan et al., 2021). By acknowledging employees' differences and embracing their skill sets, companies can establish a cultural basis for diversity.

Organizations can support goals to increase the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions and positively impact financial performance by valuing differences in the workplace. Implementing a comprehensive diversity and inclusion (D&I) program to augment workplace effectiveness to support leaders in valuing differences of others can be additive. Wadhwa and Aggarwal (2023) provided insights into challenges organizations face when D&I initiatives fail to attract and retain diverse talent. They focused on the D&I framework as a strategy to ensure fair treatment and equal opportunities in the workplace and community. They identified key strategies for effective D&I programs, including prioritizing employee belonging, enhancing

performance, and creating talent acquisition guidelines. They emphasized the importance of engaging individuals in personal growth and emotional intelligence activities while considering their upbringing, culture, and societal guidelines. They suggested that D&I programs can be more impactful when organizations implement strategies to reduce prejudice and stereotypical behavior while promoting an inclusive environment. Wadhwa and Aggarwal proposed several key approaches: enhancing employee engagement to improve job satisfaction, considering employee contribution as a benefit, creating enriching talent acquisition practices, fostering a culture of innovation, and improving decision-making through a pooled approach. These strategies aimed to create a workplace that values individual differences and promotes creativity and innovation. By combining these strategies, organizations can complete a comprehensive D&I program that not only augments workplace effectiveness but also provides benefits from a culture of creativity and innovation. This approach has the potential to give organizations a competitive advantage, positively impacting productivity and financial performance (Wadhwa & Aggarwal, 2023). As companies strive for greater diversity in leadership roles, implementing such comprehensive D&I programs becomes crucial in creating an environment where BIPOC employees can thrive and advance to senior-level positions.

Allyship and workplace advocacy can impact employees' sense of belonging. Racial allyship can create systemic parity and help organizations increase BIPOC representation in senior-level positions, as well as positively impacting financial performance. Hinger et al. (2023) examined how White allyship centered on the BIPOC experience can support racial justice efforts in the workplace. They suggested

organizations create focus groups that engage in interpersonal processes to build trust, promote antiracist actions, and expand awareness and accountability. They identified effective allyship as demonstrating knowledge of power, privilege, and oppression, while practicing humility and respecting boundaries of minority individuals. Hinger et al. emphasized that addressing systemic disparities through allyship can support healing for BIPOC employees who often carry unjust burdens when these issues remain unaddressed. Hinger et al. suggested that effective allies should engage in self-reflection to prevent perpetuating racism while leveraging their power and privilege to reduce oppression and trust. This approach involved intentionally challenging and engaging in antiracist work while standing in solidarity with BIPOC individuals and communities. Organizations can use allyship as a strategy to impact the positionality of BIPOC employees and enhance their ability to advance (Hinger et al., 2023). By promoting alignment with cultural goals through leadership accountability and leveraging allyship expectations to support racial justice efforts, organizations can create an environment conducive to increasing the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions. This comprehensive approach to allyship not only addresses immediate workplace disparities but also contributes to long-term organizational change and improved diversity in leadership roles.

Strategies to embrace differences are needed to increase BIPOC representation in senior-level positions and improve organizational performance. Recent studies by Manoharan et al., (2021), Wadhwa and Aggarwal (2023), and Hinger et al. (2023) offer complementary strategies to increase BIPOC representation in senior-level positions and improve organizational performance. Each focused on different aspects of diversity and

inclusion and he importance of creating an inclusive workplace culture and the need for organizations to embrace and value diversity. Manoharan et al. (2023) proposed six themes for diversity statements, focusing on communication strategies to align organizational leadership. Wadhwa and Aggarwal (2023) examine comprehensive D&I programs, suggesting multiple strategies to effect organizational change. Hinger et al. (2023) concentrated on White allyship, emphasizing interpersonal processes and self-reflection in supporting racial justice efforts. All three studies focused on the importance of creating an inclusive workplace culture and the need for organizations to embrace and value diversity. Organizational communication, broad D&I practices and allyship to support BIPOC employees addressed cultural bias and healing work to address systemic disparity (Manoharan et al. (2021); Wadhwa and Aggarwal (2023) and Hinger et al., 2023. While these three studies aimed to improve BIPOC representation and organizational performance, they approach the issue from different angles. Combining the unique insights could offer a more holistic approach to diversity and inclusion in the workplace. By integrating these strategies from communication, comprehensive D&I programs, and allyship, organizations can create more effective and inclusive environments. This multifaceted approach has the potential to not only support BIPOC advancement to senior-level positions but also positively impact financial performance. The collective approach can provide strategies to address both ethical and business imperatives of diversity and inclusion in the modern workplace.

Strategies and Benefits

Organizations seeking to address the paucity of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions can implement several identified strategies. These strategies address three key factors: bias in the interview and skills assessment processes, inadequate leadership competencies in establishing inclusive cultures, and failure to embrace differences in people. Collectively, these strategies serve as resources to address the disadvantages that BIPOC candidates and employees experience when seeking advancement opportunities and address disparities perpetuated by leadership in the workplace. Holladay et al. (2023) and Olenick and Somaraju (2024) call for systemic changes necessary to remove bias in interview and skills assessment processes. They argued that diversity in leadership roles can positively impact organizational performance. Pauic (2021) and Raddatz et al. (2024) highlighted the importance of leadership competencies in creating inclusive workplace environments for BIPOC employees. They collectively advocated for developing culturally intelligent leaders to improve organizational performance and reduce adverse outcomes associated with anticipated discrimination. Manohoran et al. (2021), Wadhwa and Aggarwal (2023), and Hinger et al. (2023) proposed strategies to increase BIPOC representation in senior-level positions and improve organizational performance by embracing the differences of others. They suggested that aligning communication strategies with comprehensive D&I programs and effective allyship can improve organizational representation in leadership roles. Addressing the interconnected problems of bias in the interview and skills assessment process, inadequate leadership competencies in establishing inclusive cultures, and failure to embrace differences in

people could create meaningful change to increase BIPOC representation in senior-level roles and foster a more equitable workplace.

Transition

In Section 2, I reviewed professional and academic literature significant to the applied business problem. I provided a critical analysis and synthesis of the literature about the potential themes and phenomena of the research project. I included comparing and contrasting viewpoints and the project's relationship to previous research and findings. In Section 3, I discuss the project ethics, nature, population, sampling, participants, data collection activities, data analysis, and organization techniques, introduce the interview questions, and address reliability and validity. In Section 4, I present findings, business contributions, recommendations for professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for further research, and a conclusion.

Section 3: Research Project Methodology

Project Ethics

Researchers must maintain rigor and credibility in data collection. They systematically gather suitable data to address research questions, observe participants, and analyze and summarize results while applying theoretical frameworks (Busetto et al., 2020; Mwita, 2022; Niemczyk & Rónay, 2023). As the researcher, I was the primary data collection instrument and used semistructured interviews to collect primary data. I have no relationship with the topic or research area beyond being a BIPOC woman, and nor I do have a relationship with the research project participants.

Ethical concerns can arise when designing, planning, collecting, analyzing, and managing data (Saunders et al., 2019). Conflict-affected contexts, such as personal significance in post-crisis or post-conflict situations in workplace racial trauma, can also raise ethical issues (Bentele & Herzog, 2023; Leahy, 2022). I take responsibility for ethical accountability and adhered to the Belmont Report protocol. The Belmont Report's principles help incorporate boundaries between practice and research involving human subjects (Siddiqui et al., 2021). I maintained respect for participants, practice beneficent actions to prevent harm while maximizing benefits, and ensure justice through thorough risk-benefit assessment with participants' consent (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects in Biomedical and Behavior Research ([NCPHSBBR], 1979).

Following IRB protocols, I obtained informed consent. I utilized semistructured interviews to gather detailed data from participants. I followed the ethical obligations

outlined by the IRB and invited participants through introduction communication, including the informed consent form (Appendix A). The IRB approval number for this research project is 09-12-24-1181385. The consent form was reviewed with potential participants to ensure they understood the process before consenting or declining to participate. After obtaining informed consent from each subject, I scheduled participant interviews to collect data. I provided clear and comprehensive information to the participants about their roles, responsibilities, and expectations. This transparency fosters trust and ensures that participants comprehensively understand their role in the research project. Participants can voluntarily join the research project. They can withdraw at any time by communicating their decision to do so through verbal or written notification. I have protected the privacy of individuals involved in the research project. To safeguard their identities, I assigned pseudonyms to each participant, guaranteeing the confidentiality of their real names in any documentation or discussions.

Engagement and openness to share life experiences in the research process are critical to transferring knowledge and establishing credibility for research output (Morris & Paris, 2022). To increase participation commitment, I established open dialogue and built a trusted relationship by adequately preparing participants for the interview, explaining the informed consent process, and reviewing the interview protocol. After the participants were invited to join the research, I followed up to answer any remaining questions regarding the informed consent or the interview protocol to ensure they have a clear understanding of the process.

I have securely stored all collected data, restricting access only to authorized individuals involved in the research process. I used encryption methods and restricted access protocols to store all data securely. I will maintain this securely stored data for 5 years following the completion of my research, thus guaranteeing the ongoing protection of participant confidentiality. During presentations or discussions, I spoke in general terms, avoiding any specifics that could potentially reveal the identity of the participants. To further protect participants' confidentiality, I will store research data securely for 5 years in a locked document box for which I will be the only one with a key. These practices demonstrate my commitment to upholding the confidentiality of those who have entrusted me with their participation in my research project. By adhering to these ethical practices, I aimed to uphold the trust placed in me by the individuals who participated in my research project and safeguard their privacy and rights.

Nature of the Project

I used the qualitative research method to address the research question of what effective strategies business leaders have used to increase the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions and positively impact financial performance. The qualitative research method is appropriate for this project because participants' reflective experiences allow a researcher to seek a deep understanding of the subject with various nuanced and sensitive standards of evidence (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). I implemented a pragmatic research design. The use of a pragmatic inquiry research design enabled the strategic combination and leverage established qualitative methods for social progress to meet a study's needs, guided frameworks, detailed research, and practice change goals

(Sorrell, 2013). Qualitative pragmatic inquiry appropriately supports business research to address organizational problems beyond prior research techniques (Holdo, 2023). I used the pragmatic qualitative research process to utilize principles to make more significant progress, emphasize actionable knowledge, recognize connections between experiences, and develop strategic best practices.

Population, Sampling, and Participants

I targeted a population of business leaders who have implemented effective strategies to increase the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions and positively impact financial performance. I selected participants based on three eligibility criteria: (a) they must be business leaders, (b) they must be located in North America, and (c) they must have demonstrated effective strategies to increase BIPOC employees in senior-level positions. These criteria ensured that participants' experiences remain within the boundaries of the research question's context (Tomaszewski et al., 2020).

I used purposive sampling to select up to eight participants from the targeted population of business leaders and gain access to them through professional and social associations and networks. This sampling method allows a researcher to achieve a manageable amount of data by matching samples to align with the research objectives (Ames et al., 2019; Campbell et al., 2020). To align with the research strategy, I focused on credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as vital components of purposive sampling. I reached data saturation by continuing data collection activities until I gained few or no new insights or information on the research topic.

Data Collection Activities

The researcher coordinated all aspects of the research process to ensure adequate data collection and applicable data to respond to the research question (Busetto et al., 2020). I collected the data using (a) semistructured interviews, (b) government documents, (c) public records and archived reviews, and (d) related available artifacts such as awards and published articles. I conducted semistructured interviews using open-ended questions following an interview guide. Semistructured interviews are used to gain insight into the participants' experiences, opinions, and motivations (Busetto et al., 2020).

I utilized the semistructured interview method and follow an interview protocol (See Appendix B) to maintain consistency in my research approach with participants. The interview protocol is useful to gain insider perspective, minimize bias that could compromise the research quality, and encourage relevant data sharing to support the research question findings (Junnier, 2024; Saunders et al., 2019). I audio-recorded and transcribed the semistructured interview responses to establish procedural trustworthiness. I designed my qualitative research to be flexible, open, and responsive to the context of the research question. I aligned and iteratively reviewed the data collection and analyzed until I achieved data saturation, which Busetto et al. (2020) described as an effective process. I completed data collection systematically, basing it on logical relationships and participants' experiences as they relate to the research question, and drawing from various resource sources.

I enhanced the reliability and validity of my data collection instrument by using member checking. Through member checking, I ensured my interpretation of the

interviewee's responses were checked for accuracy with the interviewee (de Loyola González-Salgado et al., 2024). Once the interviewee confirmed the accuracy of my interpretations of their responses, the interview was considered complete (Coleman, 2021). Throughout this process, I accurately documented and interpreted all of information.

Interview Questions

Semistructured interviews were conducted to collect data through the following interview questions:

1. What strategies have you used to increase the number of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) employees in senior-level positions?
2. How have you aligned these strategies to impact financial performance positively?
3. What resources do you use to incorporate strategies to sustain BIPOC employees in senior-level positions?
4. What techniques do you and your leadership employ to ensure there is responsiveness to skillset development opportunities for BIPOC employees?
5. Are there specific techniques to increase career advancement opportunities for BIPOC employees?
6. What challenges have you encountered with skillset and career advancement opportunities for BIPOC employees?
7. How have the challenges encountered been advanced and overcome?

8. How do you or have you measured success regarding implementing and enforcing strategies to increase in the number of BIPOC employees and positively impact financial performance?
9. What other information would you like to share regarding increasing the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions that has not been discussed in this interview?

Data Organization and Analysis Techniques

I used a systematic method to track, organize, and analyze qualitative data, revealing rich interconnections in my research. I arranged the data for easy identification and pattern recognition which Pratt et al. (2022) identifies as an effective method. To ensure confidentiality and participant well-being is considered, I used a password-protected Excel literature review matrix. I conducted a systematic literature review to identify theme, trends, and patterns. This approach supported the formulation of an overall interpretation of the findings and added credibility to the complex research topic (Coleman, 2021; Rahman et al., 2023). To enhance transparency, I used the literature matrix to index and organize research data, including peer-reviewed journals, interview transcripts, tables, visual artifacts, and analyzed findings (Cloutier & Ravasi, 2021).

I applied thematic analysis for this pragmatic inquiry. I used NVivo computer software and manual classifications to complete a qualitative data analysis to include coding, mind-mapping and identifying themes. I narrowed objectives and summarized, compared, and contrasted prior research to outline a detailed account of the findings. I used a narrative sequence approach, allowing participants to discuss experiences that

have influenced their development overtime as recommended by Kim & Carlin (2022). This approach helped me to analyze data and produce a descriptive conclusion.

I adopted a reflexivity approach to correlate the themes identified with the literature and my composite conceptual framework. This process guided my research through self-examination, considering attitudes, experiences, and interaction with study participants (Nikidehaghani et al., 2023). This approach brought insider knowledge of cultural practices impacting the workplace, which is valuable to the research project findings. To protect the raw data of the research, I will securely store it for at least 5 years. This structured approach ensured that I conduct a thorough, transparent, and ethical research process, from data collection through analysis and storage.

Reliability and Validity

As I embarked on this research journey, I recognized the critical importance of addressing threats to the reliability and validity of my observational data. I was committed to fostering an open and transparent relationship with the participants, creating an environment of trust and authenticity throughout the research project. My approach to reliability was grounded in Saunders et al.'s (2019) guidance, aiming to produce findings that other researchers can replicate. Simultaneously, I focused on validity by ensuring that measurements accurately captured the intended data. This dual focus helped to ensure the robustness of my research outcomes. To fortify the reliability and validity of my research project, I developed a multi-faceted strategy. First, I accurately transcribed all semistructured interviews. This process allowed me to create reliable and valid actionable knowledge from the rich experiences shared by participants. As I engaged

with the participants, I remained vigilant, carefully watching for noninformative or contradicting responses. This technique, recommended by Krawczyk et al. (2019), helped me to maintain data integrity and insights. Throughout the analysis phase, I approached the data with both rigor and sensitivity. I committed to interpreting, explaining, and concluding the analysis correctly and appropriately. This careful handling of the data, as emphasized by Coleman (2021), is crucial for protecting the reliability and validity of my research. By implementing these measures, I aimed to conduct a high-quality research project that not only met academic standards but also genuinely reflected the experiences of the participants. This rigorous approach enabled me to contribute meaningful, trustworthy findings to the field, advancing understanding of the research topic in a substantive way.

Reliability

To ensure reliability in my research, I focused on producing consistent findings and maintaining transparency from raw data through my data collection techniques. I conducted semistructured interviews with detail and transparency, adhering to the interview protocol (Coleman, 2021). Throughout this process, I empowered participants to share honest, open, and robust responses while carefully avoiding unintended consequences that could misrepresent research findings (Rose & Johnson, 2020; Satchell et al., 2023). To further bolster research reliability, I maintained a dependable account of the entire research process. The process included clear documentation of the background and purpose of this project. I also kept detailed records of the semistructured interviews, government documents, public records archived reviews, and related available artifacts at

each stage. By documenting every step, I aimed to create a comprehensive record that would allow others to understand my research process, evaluate the final research project, and replicate the methodology if desired. Through these rigorous strategies, I strived to conduct a transparent and replicable research project that contributes valuable insights to business leaders.

Validity

In my pursuit of robust research validity, I employed a multifaceted approach. I practiced continuous reflexivity to support credibility, transferability, and confirmability, as recommended by Saunders et al. (2019). My focus on internal validity ensured that findings stem from interventions rather than research design flaws, and I addressed external validity by generalizing results to demonstrate contextual relevance. To maintain credibility, transferability, and confirmability, I conducted multiple participant checks, provided interview transcripts, ensured consistent data interpretation, and completed triangulation. I also involved participants in categorizing answers, a strategy Krawczyk et al. (2019) suggest can boost credibility. To achieve data saturation, I continued collecting data through semistructured interviews until no new insights or themes emerge. This comprehensive approach enhanced the overall validity of my research project, ensuring that my findings accurately reflect the phenomena under investigation and contributed meaningful insights to the field. By implementing these strategies, I aimed to produce a research project that not only met rigorous academic standards but also provided valuable, trustworthy results that can inform future research and practice in this area.

Transition and Summary

In section 3, I discussed the project ethics, nature of the project, population, sampling, participants, data collection activities, data analysis, and organization techniques. I introduced the interview questions and addressed reliability and validity. In Section 4, I present findings, business contributions, recommendations for professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for further research, and a conclusion.

Section 4: Findings and Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to identify and explore effective strategies that business leaders used to increase the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions and positively impact financial performance. This research project addressed three key factors that contribute to the paucity number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions through rigorous data analysis to include (a) bias in the interview and skills assessment processes, (b) inadequate leadership competencies in establishing inclusive cultures, and (c) failure to embrace differences in people. The analysis revealed four primary themes as effective strategies business leaders have used to increase BIPOC representation in senior leadership positions. The four primary themes represent effective strategies that business leaders used to increase BIPOC representation in senior-level positions. These themes directly corresponded to the identified key factors: BIPOC talent acquisition and pipeline development to address impartiality in the interview and skills assessment processes; leadership development and representation to address adequate leadership competencies in establishing inclusive cultures; BIPOC self-advocacy and authenticity to address successfully embracing differences in people; and cultural adaptation and workplace environment operated as a cross-cutting factor spanning across all three areas. These findings provided from business leaders were evidence-based strategies to increase BIPOC senior-level representation while enhancing financial performance.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question was: What effective strategies have business leaders used to increase the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions and positively impact financial performance? I constructed a composite conceptual framework in this research project integrating Sue's (2001) MDCC framework, Akbar and Parker's (2021) EDI theory, and Kotter's (1996) change management theory. Semistructured interviews with open-ended questions served as the primary data collection method. The semistructured format enabled methodical inquiry while maintaining flexibility to pursue emerging themes and insights during participant interaction. This qualitative approach facilitated in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, perspectives, and motivations of this topic (see Table 2).

Table 2

Participants Demographics

	Gender	Race	Sexual orientation	Marital status	Years of experience	Business sector	Role
P1	Male	White	Gay	Married	20	Insurance	VP, chief underwriting officer
P2	Male	Black	Gay	Single	29	Technology	VP, global head of data science & growth analytics
P3	Female	Black	Gay	Married	23	Insurance	AVP, claim operations
P4	Female	Black	Straight	Married	25	Legal	Sr. managing attorney
P5	Male	Black	Gay	Married	18	Nonprofit	Chief operating officer & executive director
P6	Female	Black	Straight	Single	29	Business consulting	Chief executive officer
P7	Male	Black	Gay	Single	30	Medical consulting	Consultant
P8	Male	Black	Straight	Married	37	Insurance	Chief claims officer
P9	Female	White	Straight	Single	34	Insurance	Chief commercial officer

Four primary themes address the research question: BIPOC talent acquisition and pipeline development; leadership development and representation; BIPOC self-advocacy and authenticity; and cultural adaptation and workplace environment. These themes encompass patterns of meaning in the data collected and align with those identified in Section 2 (see Table 3).

Table 3

Summary of Primary Themes

	n of participants who contributed data to theme (N = 9)	*n* of excerpts from data assigned to theme
Theme 1: BIPOC talent acquisition and pipeline development	8	42
Theme 2: Leadership development and representation	9	56
Theme 3: BIPOC self-advocacy and authenticity	9	40
Theme 4: Cultural adaptation and workplace environment	9	35

Theme 1: BIPOC Talent Acquisition and Pipeline Development

The data analysis revealed BIPOC talent acquisition and pipeline development as a critical theme encompassing effective strategies business leaders implemented to address impartiality in interview and skills assessment processes and to increase BIPOC representation in senior leadership positions, thereby enhancing financial performance. Strategic approaches to BIPOC talent acquisition and pipeline development served as essential mechanisms through which organizations developed high-quality leadership capacity, creating opportunities for improved organizational outcomes (Kamali et al., 2024). A multifocal approach to BIPOC talent acquisition initiatives facilitates the emergence of micro communities where individuals with shared identities and interests develop collective resources for professional advancement (Titanji et al., 2022).

This comprehensive talent acquisition framework operates through three interconnected processes that build systematically upon each other to create sustainable leadership pipelines. The data analysis revealed three distinct subthemes within this

strategic domain that function as an integrated system: (a) sourcing, recruiting, and pipeline development for diverse talent that establishes the foundational infrastructure for identifying potential candidates; (b) identifying and attracting BIPOC candidates that translates sourcing efforts into targeted recruitment strategies; and (c) inclusive skills and competency assessment methodologies that ensure equitable evaluation and selection processes (see Table 4). Together, these subthemes create a progressive framework that transforms talent acquisition from reactive hiring practices into proactive systemic approaches that consistently advance BIPOC professionals while driving enhanced organizational performance.

Table 4

Theme 1: BIPOC Talent Acquisition and Pipeline Development

Subthemes	*n* of participants who contributed data to subtheme (N = 9)	*n* of excerpts from data assigned to theme
Sourcing, recruiting, and pipeline development for diverse talent	8	18
Identifying and attracting BIPOC candidates	8	14
Inclusive skills and competency assessment methodologies	8	10
Compensation and pay equity	3	14
Measurements, metrics, and accountability	6	33

Sourcing, Recruiting, and Pipeline Development for Diverse Talent

Effective BIPOC talent acquisition begins before organizations post job openings, requiring intentional, sustained efforts to identify, connect with, and cultivate relationships within diverse talent communities. Traditional recruitment approaches often

perpetuate existing inequities by relying on networks and channels that historically exclude BIPOC professionals. Building robust pipelines for diverse talent demands a fundamental shift from reactive hiring to proactive community engagement and relationship building. This subtheme explores how organizational leaders can expand beyond conventional sourcing methods to tap into the pools of BIPOC talent that exist across business sectors. Successful pipeline development requires leaders to think strategically about talent cultivation and ongoing professional development opportunities that create clear pathways for BIPOC career advancement.

Eight participants identified intentional sourcing, recruiting, and pipeline development as critical components for increasing BIPOC representation in senior-level positions while positively impacting financial performance. Their diverse talent acquisition approaches encompassed five interconnected practices: prioritizing internal BIPOC talent identification, implementing targeted recruitment focused on specific skillsets, expanding recruitment beyond traditional channels, developing alternative talent sources, and broadening candidate pools to include diverse backgrounds. These integrated approaches create frameworks that maximize both internal capacity and external reach while establishing multiple pathways for discovering and cultivating BIPOC professionals. The resulting leadership pipelines drive organizational performance through cognitive diversity, expanded market insights, and strengthened community engagement while achieving measurable equity objectives and strategic business outcomes.

Systematic Internal Assessment and External Relationship Cultivation

The foundation of these approaches rests on systematic internal assessment frameworks combined with strategic external relationship cultivation. Participants demonstrated that effective diverse talent acquisition requires this dual methodology. P2 articulated: “The very first thing that is done is conducting internal assessment of talent to determine gaps in leadership, where BIPOC representation was lacking. That internal assessment informed the next steps of sourcing one’s network of professional individuals for BIPOC talent, which went beyond the corporate walls.” P4 reinforced external relationship cultivation as essential, describing sourcing and pipeline development as a “personal mission” requiring “connecting on common interests to build organic relationships” with leaders committed to increasing BIPOC representation. This methodology creates data-driven partnerships with human resources to develop targeted requisitions that attract qualified BIPOC candidates while establishing meaningful professional networks across organizational and community boundaries.

Leadership Accountability and Cultural Adaptation

Building upon this foundational dual approach, findings revealed that successful implementation necessitates leadership accountability and cultural adaptation across organizational contexts. P8 emphasized organizational responsibility, asserting that “the DNA of an organization starts at the top and the responsibility of senior leadership is to keep an organization vital”, while noting that diverse talent strategies “require a multi-layered approach to address an issue that is pretty rampant in corporate America.” P5 reinforced contextual adaptation principles, explaining that “the approach can vary from

organization to organization, department to department, and leader to leader", emphasizing that leaders must align approaches with "the culture you are seeking to build." Both participants confirmed that no universal approach guarantees success, requiring deliberate intentionality to "ensure qualified BIPOC talent was not washed out of an opportunity."

The analysis revealed that BIPOC talent acquisition and pipeline development constitute a foundational business imperative rather than a peripheral initiative. The synthesis of participant experiences demonstrates that these five interconnected practices function as an integrated system where internal assessment drives external relationship building, which in turn requires leadership accountability and cultural adaptation to achieve sustainable results. Leaders who implemented these approaches created sustainable leadership pathways that increased BIPOC representation in senior-level positions while driving enhanced organizational success through cognitive diversity, expanded market insight, and strengthened community engagement.

This integrated framework transforms BIPOC talent acquisition from reactive diversity hiring into proactive change that consistently brings diverse perspectives, experiences, and expertise into workforces at all levels. These findings underscore that when internal assessment, external cultivation, leadership accountability, and cultural responsiveness operate cohesively, BIPOC talent acquisition functions as a critical business strategy with measurable financial outcomes rather than serving as a simple diversity objective.

Identifying and Attracting BIPOC Candidates

Once robust pipelines are established, the critical next step involves strategically identifying qualified BIPOC candidates and creating compelling value propositions that attract them to organizations. Identification goes beyond demographic data, as leaders require understanding of where BIPOC individuals are excelling, what motivates career decisions and how they evaluate potential employers. Attracting BIPOC candidates requires business leaders to carefully assess and communicate their value proposition from a diversity, equity, and inclusion perspective. BIPOC professionals increasingly seek employers who demonstrate commitment to racial equity through concrete actions, beyond stated values. This subtheme examines how to craft recruitment messaging that resonates with BIPOC candidates' values and aspirations, while ensuring that attraction strategies are backed by substantive organizational change. Successful attraction strategies recognize that BIPOC talent has choices and seeks workplaces where they can thrive while advancing their professional goals.

Eight participants implemented strategic approaches to identifying and attracting BIPOC candidates to increase representation in senior-level positions while positively impacting organizational financial performance. Their methodologies encompassed four interconnected practices: internal talent identification, expanded sourcing networks, external relationship cultivation, and targeted recruitment practices. These integrated strategies create comprehensive frameworks that broaden talent pools and establish sustainable leadership pathways. The resulting organizational outcomes include enhanced

diversity representation, expanded market insights, and strengthened community connections that drive both equity and strategic business performance.

Internal Foundation and Credibility Building

The foundation for effective external attraction begins with comprehensive internal assessment frameworks that recognize existing organizational capacity and potential. Participants demonstrated that internal representation creates the credibility necessary for external recruitment success. P9 emphasized that leadership representation should reflect "general population trends, demographics, and communities that we live and work in," requiring understanding of organizational composition and building relationships beyond traditional pipeline circles to comprehend career aspirations as "a vital component to shape leadership discipline." P1 reinforced this internal foundation, emphasizing that candidate attraction begins with a comprehensive internal talent review, noting that "new talent won't emerge if the existing talent is not being taken care of." Both participants demonstrated that equitable internal representation creates foundational conditions for external attraction, with P1 explaining that "fair and adequate representation of BIPOC leadership in key roles is vital to attracting BIPOC candidates" and significantly contributes to organizational results.

External Relationships Cultivation and Cultural Bridge-Building

Building on this internal foundation, participants established that successful external relationships cultivation requires strategic engagement across professional networks and cultural bridge-building initiatives. P6 implemented expanded sourcing approaches targeting niche industries and specialized skillsets, emphasizing that

leadership engagement with trade associations creates visibility and expands attractiveness to previously overlooked sectors. P7 operationalized cultural bridge-building by connecting BIPOC candidates with leaders possessing hiring authority, observing that bridging cultural knowledge "takes time and a gradual approach," with leaders serving as intermediaries to prevent cultural identity erasure. P6 noted that developing senior leadership pathways requires leaders to "know the talent in the market," while P7 articulated that organizational entry requires bidirectional work to bridge cultural gaps while organizations focus on attracting qualified BIPOC talent.

The data analysis reveals that identifying and attracting BIPOC candidates functions as an integrated system where internal capacity building enables external credibility, which in turn strengthens attraction capabilities. The synthesis of participant experiences demonstrates that internal development and external relationship cultivation operate as complementary forces where strong internal representation provides authentic foundations for external outreach, while expanded external networks inform and enhance internal development strategies. This interconnected approach creates sustainable pathways for BIPOC advancement by establishing organizational credibility through demonstrated internal equity while simultaneously building external relationships that expand talent access. When internal assessment, external relationship building, and cultural bridge-building operate cohesively, organizations transform from reactive recruitment to proactive talent ecosystems that consistently attract and develop BIPOC individuals for senior-level roles. These findings underscore that identification and attraction strategies achieve optimal results when they function as complementary

components of a talent development framework rather than independent recruitment activities.

Inclusive Skills and Competency Assessment Methodologies

Traditional assessment methodologies often contain embedded biases that can disadvantage BIPOC candidates, despite their qualifications and potential for success. These biases may manifest through overemphasis on specific cultural references that favor dominant group experiences, or evaluation criteria that conflate conformity with competence. Developing inclusive assessment methodologies requires organizations to critically examine their current processes and redesign them to accurately measure job-relevant skills while removing barriers that disproportionately impact BIPOC talent. Inclusive competency assessment focuses on what candidates can do rather than where they learned to do it, recognizing that expertise and skillsets can be developed through diverse pathways. This subtheme explores methodologies that ensure fair and comprehensive evaluation of BIPOC candidates' capabilities to ensure leaders' assessment practices become gateways for talent rather than barriers to entry, which ultimately strengthens their ability to identify and select the best BIPOC candidates for their teams.

Eight participants implemented inclusive skills and competency assessment methodologies to increase BIPOC representation in senior-level positions while enhancing organizational performance. Their strategies focused on five interconnected practices: current skillset assessment, acknowledging diverse backgrounds and experiences, creating stretch assignments to build competencies, leveraging individual

development plans, and establishing leadership accountability for BIPOC employee success. These evaluation frameworks recognize diverse talents and cultural contributions, provide opportunities for skill demonstration beyond traditional roles, and create development pathways supported by leadership commitment to ensure equitable assessment and advancement of BIPOC professionals.

Holistic Evaluation Frameworks

The foundation of inclusive assessment begins with evaluation frameworks that recognize career potential and talent analysis beyond traditional metrics. Participants established that effective assessment requires this expanded perspective. P1 articulated assessing career potential by starting "from where the individual is versus how they have been assessed in past evaluations," acknowledging that "BIPOC individuals have been treated like they are behind the eight ball, thus keeping career progression not on par with their peers." P4 reinforced this approach, noting that: "Interaction, knowledge, and experiences from different backgrounds are essential to ensure cookie cutter representation is avoided…BIPOC individuals bring forward unique skills and strengths that may be displayed outside of their current role, therefore a complete assessment provides a more holistic view of talent." Both participants emphasized that leaders must look beyond traditional metrics, with P1 asserting that "leaders need to be extraordinarily intentional in supporting individuals on their career progression journey to ensure full capabilities are recognized."

Systematic Development Opportunity Creation

Building upon comprehensive evaluation frameworks, findings reveal that successful implementation requires development opportunity creation and accountability structures. P5 implemented stretch assignments and external opportunities, explaining that "BIPOC individuals who are well qualified and accomplished still don't get opportunities to shine professionally beyond their current roles." P8 complemented this through mandatory individual development plans, noting that "the IDP is a resource that helps employees identify short-term and long-term goals" and creates accountability through measurement. P5 developed processes that incorporated experiences like "opportunities to serve as moderators, speak on panels as subject matter experts, volunteering for community-based leadership roles" that "serve as safe ways to build confidence while highlighting different skills." P7 emphasized leadership partnership as essential, observing that "senior leaders often have not mastered how to structure programs that support skills and competency development, and assumptions are made that BIPOC employees will develop key competencies on their own."

Cultural Competency Recognition

The integration of comprehensive evaluation and structured development opportunities necessitates recognition of cultural competencies and transferable skills often overlooked in traditional assessments. Participants demonstrated that inclusive assessment must acknowledge these broader capabilities. P6 identified that focusing on "transferable skills not exercised in current roles" provides "opportunities for leaders to bridge competency gaps, enabling BIPOC individuals to be recognized and utilized in

expanded capacities." P2 reinforced this cultural competency recognition, articulating that: "BIPOC individuals may have different skillsets and competencies stemming from their background and cultural experiences that have not been recognized professionally." This cultural competency recognition requires leaders to align "intentional support from managers, human resources, and peer support systems" for inclusive development discussions. P6 emphasized that "building a strong culture of manager feedback as a tactical process enhances BIPOC individuals' opportunity to receive inclusive evaluation."

The analysis reveals that inclusive skills and competency assessment functions as an integrated system where holistic evaluation frameworks enable targeted development opportunities, which in turn require cultural competency recognition to achieve sustainable transformation. The synthesis of participant experiences demonstrates that bias recognition drives the creation of expanded evaluations frameworks, which then inform structured development opportunities that leverage previously unrecognized cultural competencies and transferable skills. This interconnected approach transforms assessment from barrier-creating processes to talent-developing systems that consistently identify and advance BIPOC capabilities. When evaluation, development, and cultural competency recognition operate cohesively, organizations move beyond traditional performance metrics to create sustainable pathways for BIPOC advancement while enhancing organizational performance through recognition and utilization of previously untapped talent. The findings underscore that inclusive assessment methodologies achieve optimal results when they function as complementary components of a talent

development framework that addresses historical inequities while maximizing organizational capacity through expanded talent recognition.

While effective sourcing, identification, and inclusive assessment methodologies establish the foundation for attracting BIPOC talent, sustainable pipeline development requires compensation and pay equity practices that not only compete for top candidates but also retain and advance BIPOC individuals throughout their organizational tenure. The data analysis demonstrates that BIPOC talent acquisition and pipeline development served as a foundational framework with effective strategies that business leaders used to increase the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions while positively impacting organizational performance. Through strategic sourcing and pipeline building, organizational leaders established approaches to expand and diversify candidate pools. By implementing targeted identification strategies that bridged cultural gaps while leveraging both internal and external networks, business leaders created pathways for attracting qualified BIPOC candidates. Furthermore, inclusive skills assessment methodologies that recognized transferable competencies, cultural capacities, and potential beyond current roles enabled business leaders to evaluate BIPOC talent more comprehensively.

While these integrated talent acquisition approaches established critical entry points for BIPOC advancement, participants emphasized that sustainable representation required complementary organizational systems. In addition to the primary theme and subthemes, two essential supporting themes were identified to address critical areas

supporting the research question: (a) compensation & pay equity and (b) measurements, metrics and accountability.

Compensation and Pay Equity

Effective BIPOC talent acquisition and pipeline development extends beyond recruitment and assessment to encompass comprehensive compensation strategies that demonstrate organizational commitment to equity and value. Compensation and pay equity serve as critical retention and advancement mechanisms that either reinforce or undermine diversity initiatives established through strategic sourcing and inclusive assessment practices. BIPOC individuals evaluate potential employers on recruitment promises and demonstrated track records of equitable compensation practices recognizing diverse contributions and career pathways. Pay equity functions as a competitive advantage in attracting top BIPOC talent as well as a foundational element for sustaining diverse leadership pipelines. This supporting theme examines how business leaders implement compensation frameworks that attract BIPOC candidates during recruitment while ensuring equitable treatment throughout their career.

Compensation and pay equity emerged as a supporting theme to BIPOC talent acquisition and pipeline development from three participants who implemented strategies to increase the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions and positively impact financial performance. These participants implemented two interconnected approaches: compensation reviews with each leadership assignment and external opportunities impacting compensation. Their strategies coupled compensation reviews aligned with leadership assignments with external opportunities such as board positions,

industry speaking engagements, and consulting roles that enhance earning potential. This integrated approach ensures that BIPOC professionals advance through equitable internal pathways while gaining access to broader opportunities that typically accompany senior leadership progression, thereby addressing both internal pay equity gaps and external market positioning that collectively impact overall compensation parity.

Systematic Internal Pay Analysis

The foundation of effective compensation equity requires strategic internal pay analysis frameworks to identify and address hidden disparities. Participants demonstrated this systematic approach through comprehensive assessment processes. P1 implemented an approach executed with each new leadership assignment and completed within 30 days, involving review of pay, tenure, and title to compare financial equity across teams performing similar work. P1 explained, “this is a process to dive in and figure out where things are equitable and where they are not.” This approach revealed significant disparities, as P1 discovered: “There was only one BIPOC individual on the team and their base pay was 30-40% lower than the rest of the team, with no easily identifiable reason to justify the difference.” P1’s proactive presentation of data analysis to leadership within 2 weeks requesting justification demonstrated the power of systematic review, with leadership expressing surprise not only at the findings but at “the intentional strategy that was followed to ensure the individual was paid appropriately.” P1’s analysis that “there was no reason to support the lower pay as the BIPOC individual was as qualified as other team members,” resulted in a significant pay increase to achieve equity.

External Development and Investment Opportunities

Building upon internal equity corrections, participants established that external development opportunities create additional pathways for compensation impact and professional advancement. P5 and P6 implemented strategies leveraging industry conferences and professional development events specifically for BIPOC individuals. P5 emphasized that: “Industry conferences that are specific for BIPOC individuals. if available, can be used as a value proposition for organizations to leverage, providing an opportunity for a BIPOC individual to attend a development event with hundreds of professionals that look like them brings value to the workforce based on a one-time expense for registration and additional attendance costs.” P6 reinforced this cost-effectiveness approach, explaining that “companies won’t break the bank by sponsoring BIPOC individuals to attend external events focused on professional development, and the small monetary investment in existing BIPOC employees who already know the organizational space is a smart financial strategy to increase representation at the leadership level.” Both participants demonstrated how these investments served dual purposes: building goodwill while incorporating “hard tangible data to show success as a part of building leadership practices for investment.”

The analysis reveals that compensation and pay equity functions as an integrated system where internal analysis enables strategic external investments, which in turn strengthen internal equity initiatives and create sustainable advancement pathways. The synthesis of participant experiences demonstrates that rigorous pay analysis provides the foundation for correcting immediate disparities while external development opportunities

build capabilities and networks that support long-term compensation growth. This interconnected approach transforms compensation equity from reactive individual corrections to proactive changes that consistently support BIPOC advancement.

When internal equity analysis and external opportunity investments operate cohesively, organizations create frameworks that address both immediate pay disparities and sustainable career development, ultimately establishing compensation as a strategic tool for building diverse leadership pipelines. These findings underscore that effective compensation equity strategies achieve optimal results when they function as complementary components of a comprehensive talent development frameworks that combines analytical rigor with creative investments approaches to expand compensation definitions beyond base pay and creative investments approaches to expand compensation definitions beyond pay and create sustainable for BIPOC professional growth.

Measurements, Metrics, and Accountability

While strategic sourcing, inclusive assessment, and equitable compensation create the operational framework for BIPOC talent acquisition and pipeline development, sustainable organizational transformation requires robust measurement systems and accountability mechanisms that track progress, identify gaps, and ensure continued commitment to diversity objectives. Measurements, metrics, and accountability serve as the diagnostic and monitoring tools that enable leaders to evaluate the effectiveness of their talent acquisition approaches while maintaining organizational focus on equity outcomes.

Six participants operationalized measurement, metrics, and accountability frameworks to advance BIPOC talent acquisition and pipeline development, enabling business leaders to increase senior-level BIPOC representation while enhancing organizational performance. These participants implemented approaches that assessed team performance dynamics, identified employment and advancement opportunity gaps, and established data-driven leadership accountability mechanisms to generate measurable impact. Their approach creates evidence-based organizational mechanisms that directly correlate diversity outcomes with enhanced performance and transform equity initiatives from aspirational constructs into strategic business imperatives with demonstrable return on investment.

Comprehensive Diagnostic Assessment

The foundation of effective measurement begins with comprehensive diagnostic assessment methodologies to identify systemic barriers and organizational climate issues. Participants established that this diagnostic phase essential baseline for strategic intervention. P2 operationalized employee survey methodologies to assess organizational climate regarding attrition, hiring and retention patterns "to gauge the internal temperature on attrition, hiring and stickiness." P2 explained that "the decision to measure internal performance through the voice of the employee was to understand the breakdown of teams and to identify gaps in employment and advancement opportunities." The survey results revealed that "BIPOC individuals were not feeling connected to the place because of lack of affiliation in leadership positions and no clear path for advancement." P3 reinforced the diagnostic importance, emphasizing the critical

relationship between data adequacy and organizational change: “Adequate data fosters leadership accountability, and leadership accountability fosters positive change.” P3’s personal experience informed this perspective, noting the absence of feedback mechanisms and asserting “I have a responsibility to be the leader I want to see” to ensure accountability prevents BIPOC individuals from assuming selection decisions are racially motivated.

Systematic Performance Tracking and Retention Metrics

Building upon diagnostic insights, findings reveal that systematic performance tracking and retention metrics constitute essential components for sustainable measurable frameworks. P6 implemented metrics and measurement strategies to enhance BIPOC retention and progression annually, emphasizing that, “the bottom line for leaders is the numbers, and when goals are set and met leaders get to check the box.” P6 explained that metrics extending beyond immediate goals become critical for sustainable success, noting that “if the goal is to increase the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions, metrics on retention become significant for long-term success.” P6’s implementation generated multiple organizational benefits: enhanced BIPOC employee retention, quality skillset development programs building future leadership pipelines, and career advancement within defined intervals. This performance tracking approach creates measurable accountability structures that P2 operationalized through leadership requirements “to set up clear paths that specifically focused on BIPOC career progression,” resulting in 72 basis points improvement in employee satisfaction in 1 year.

Business Impact and Accountability Structures

The integration of diagnostic assessment and performance tracking enables measurement frameworks to establish clear connections between diversity initiatives and measurable business outcomes to drive organizational accountability. Participants demonstrated that this accountability phase transforms measurement data into strategic action. P8 demonstrated the connection between organizational culture investment and measurable business outcomes, stating that: “Making an investment in organizational culture and ensuring that there is a mechanism for measuring success is a strategy that has been incorporated as a means to increase customer sales.” P8 explained that “sales increase when organizations allow themselves to lean into customer expectations, and customers want to know they are buying products and services from organizations that respect differences and represent the communities they serve.” P8’s approach leveraged diversity metrics to measure BIPOC advancement success through customer engagement, “which impacts the bottom line.” This business impact focus aligns with P3’s leadership accountability framework, demonstrating how comprehensive measurement created systematic change rather than isolated interventions.

The analysis reveals that effective measurement frameworks serve as an integrated system where diagnostic assessment informs performance tracking, which enables accountability structures that drive continuous organizational improvement. The synthesis of participant experiences demonstrates that employee voice data provide the foundation for targeted metrics development, which then creates accountability mechanisms that transform measurement into strategic action. This interconnected

approach moves beyond passive data collection to active organizational change management that consistently supports BIPOC advancement while generating measurable business outcomes. When diagnostic assessment, performance tracking, and accountability structures operate cohesively, organizations create measurement ecosystems that bridge communication gaps, establish clear advancement pathways, and drive leadership action through transparency and defined outcomes. These findings underscore that measurement, metrics, and accountability achieve optimal results when they function as complementary components of an integrated feedback system that incorporates both qualitative metrics and qualitative insights to transform diversity objectives from aspirational statements into operational imperatives with clearly defined business outcomes.

Conclusion

Through examination of sourcing, identification, assessment, compensation, and measurement strategies, BIPOC acquisition and pipeline development emerges as an integrated talent management ecosystem that drives both equity outcomes and enhanced organizational performance. Participants articulated a framework integrating three critical components: strategic sourcing and recruitment practices that expand traditional talent pools, targeted identification approaches that bridge cultural gaps, and inclusive assessment methodologies that recognize diverse competencies and potential. This multidimensional approach was strengthened by two essential supporting elements: equitable compensation structures addressing historical disparities and robust measurement systems driving accountability. Together, these components transform

diversity initiatives from peripheral activities into core business imperatives that generate measurable outcomes through expanded market insights, stronger community connections, and enhanced innovation.

These findings affirm the effectiveness of BIPOC talent acquisition approaches and align with previous studies while extending disciplinary knowledge. Addressing impartiality in interview and skills assessment processes requires strategic approaches, with organizational leaders operating through well-founded methodologies focused on leadership competencies and characteristics, relying on robust internal and external data conducive to developing and maintaining qualified BIPOC leadership candidate pipelines (Holladay et al., 2023). Analyzing internal and external data aligned with pipeline development enhances business leaders' resilience and grounding in unbiased assessment of leadership competencies required to build leadership reflecting the populations they serve (Holladay et al., 2023; Kamali et al., 2024). Business leaders must recognize this approach as a strategic business priority requiring intentional leadership commitment, structural support systems, and continuous measurement of outcomes and impact (Kamali et al., 2024).

The current findings align with the composite conceptual framework including MDCC framework; equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) theory; and Kotter's change management theory. This collective framework provides an effective strategic approach for implementing intentional talent acquisition and pipeline development, creating cultural and structural shifts through high-quality leadership capacity development and generating opportunities for improved outcomes across organizational structures (Akbar

& Parker, 2021; Kamali et al., 2024; Manoharan et al., 2021). The integrated implementation of these strategic approaches supports and extends MDCC framework, EDI theory and Kotter's change management theory validating comprehensive talent acquisition and pipeline development as an effective approach for achieving both representation and performance objectives.

Theme 2: Leadership Development and Representation

The data analysis revealed leadership development and representation as a critical theme encompassing effective strategies that business leaders implemented to address inadequate leadership competencies in establishing inclusive cultures, advance BIPOC representation in senior-level positions, and enhance organizational performance. Leadership development strategies extend beyond traditional talent acquisition to focus on cultivating inclusive leadership capabilities where leaders embrace the unique qualities of individuals and create environments that support BIPOC advancement (Powell, 2025). Mainstream leadership narratives contribute to BIPOC marginalization and dismiss nontraditional leadership skills as valuable assets, requiring paradigmatic shifts in how organizations conceptualize and develop leadership capacity (Mitchell et al., 2023). Without intentional change, historical patterns will continue limiting advancement opportunities for BIPOC individuals seeking senior-level progression.

Effective leadership development strategies focusing on equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility align directly with belonging, resilience, and morale while increasing awareness of blind spots, perceptions, assumptions and challenges impacting BIPOC individuals in the workplace (Vogel & Erickson, 2021). This approach to

leadership development operates through three interconnected dimensions that build upon each other to create sustainable change. The data analysis revealed three relevant subthemes within this integrated system: (a) leadership philosophy, approach, and representation that establishes foundational beliefs and frameworks; (b) develop inclusive leadership competencies that translate philosophy into actionable skills and behaviors; and (c) visibility practices and behaviors that demonstrate and reinforce inclusive leadership in organizational contexts (see Table 5).

Together these subthemes create a progressive framework that transforms leadership from individual skill-building into organizational change that supports BIPOC advancement while driving enhanced performance outcomes.

Table 5

Theme 2: Leadership Development and Representation

Subthemes	*n* of participants who contributed data to subtheme (N = 9)	*n* of excerpts from data assigned to theme
Leadership philosophy, approach, and representation	9	25
Develop Inclusive leadership competencies	9	16
Visibility practices and behaviors	9	15
Mentorship, sponsorship, and support systems	8	34

Leadership Philosophy, Approach, and Representation

Effective leadership development and representation begins with establishing foundational leadership philosophies as core organizational values rather than peripheral initiatives. Leadership philosophy encompasses the fundamental beliefs, principles, and frameworks that guide how leaders conceptualize their roles, make decisions, and create

inclusive environments where BIPOC individuals can thrive and advance. Traditional leadership philosophies often reflect dominant culture norms and may inadvertently perpetuate systemic barriers that limit BIPOC advancement, necessitating paradigmatic shifts toward more inclusive leadership practices.

Leadership approach translates philosophical foundations into operational strategies and methodologies that actively support BIPOC representation in senior-level positions. This involves moving beyond surface-level diversity initiatives to embed equity principles into core leadership practices, decision-making processes, and organizational structures. Effective approaches recognize that BIPOC leaders bring unique perspectives while addressing historical underrepresentation through intentional leadership development pathways. Representation within leadership philosophy extends beyond numerical diversity to encompass authentic inclusion where BIPOC leaders can lead authentically without conforming to traditional leadership styles, create approaches that support BIPOC advancement, and ensure that representation becomes embedded in organizational leadership culture rather than remaining an aspirational goal.

All participants implemented strategic practices addressing leadership philosophy, approach, and representation as prerequisites for strengthening diverse leadership capacity and enhancing organizational financial performance. Participants' approaches encompassed five strategic practices: intentional leadership, challenging exclusionary systems, establishing credibility through representation, organizational balance cultivation, and top-down implementation strategies. These integrated practices create

frameworks where ethical foundations guide decision-making processes, and authentic practices build trust necessary for cultural transformation.

Intentional Leadership Development

Participants demonstrated that effective leadership development requires intentional leadership philosophy and practices that recognize and develop BIPOC capabilities. P1 ensured appropriate representation of BIPOC individuals in senior leadership settings, focusing on skillset and capability over nonperformance attributes, stating that "intentionality in leadership development for BIPOC employees can affirm equity and fair representation beyond technical expertise, which sets individuals up for future success." P2 reinforced this intentional approach by expanding leadership development resources to reach BIPOC top talent, opening previously inaccessible opportunities. P2 explained that "intentionality was a means to recognize that diversity drives a greater set of beneficial outcomes for business, which fostered new ways of thinking." P8 complemented these approaches by ensuring senior colleagues maintained focus on leveling opportunities for all employees, emphasizing that "leaders have to be multidimensional in the way they think and respond to development needs" and noting that "the role of BIPOC senior leaders is to support the CEO and leaders of influence to understand the ROI of making an investment in People of Color to occupy vital leadership roles."

Challenging Exclusionary Systems

Participants recognized that sustainable change requires challenging exclusionary systems and confronting established norms that perpetuate homogeneity. P4 challenged

legal sector leadership norms by aligning common interests with revenue generation from BIPOC customers, stating “I made sure I was the go-to person for BIPOC customers as a BIPOC attorney with the ability to generate billable hours for services.” P9 confronted status quo among leadership ranks by questioning practices that promoted homogeneity despite having qualified BIPOC talent available, leveraging White leadership privilege to force change by inviting BIPOC individuals from supporting roles to meetings where different organizational roles were presenting. P7 extended this system disruption by connecting BIPOC individuals to other organizations for recruitment, facilitating meaningful engagement with White leadership for advancement opportunities and noting that “organizations may not be ready when talent is ready.” These participants demonstrated how challenging norms requires both internal advocacy and external network development to create pathways for BIPOC advancement.

Strategic Representation and Visibility Initiatives

Participants established that strategic representation and visibility initiatives create attraction mechanisms that generate sustainable leadership pipelines. P3, P5, and P6 approached representation as a critical component aligning with the principle that representation attracts representation. P3 emphasized that “representation can result in BIPOC talent retention, better talent acquisition, and less attrition, which impacts the financial strength at every company,” noting that advancing BIPOC talent through development opportunities creates attraction for others to see aspirational roles. P5 implemented similar representation strategies by ensuring BIPOC individuals in key leadership roles actively engage in leadership development pathways, explaining that

"BIPOC senior leaders play a significant role as talent strategists, and their executive presence is vital to BIPOC talent moving ahead." P6 created development programs connecting senior leadership with top talent from underrepresented groups, providing BIPOC individuals access to senior leaders while enabling senior leaders to observe BIPOC talent demonstrating capabilities for advanced roles.

The data analysis reveals that leadership development and representation strategies operate through three complementary approaches: intentional leadership philosophy, challenging leadership norm effectiveness, and deliberate representation initiatives. Through intentional leadership practices, business leaders create environments where BIPOC individuals' capabilities are recognized and valued, leading to expanded opportunities and business growth. By challenging leadership norms and status quo mentalities, participants disrupted exclusionary practices and leveraged their positions–whether as BIPOC professionals or White allies–to create pathways for underrepresented talent. Through strategic representation initiatives, participants established systems increasing BIPOC visibility, creating connections across organizational hierarchies, and demonstrating diverse leadership's business value. These approaches share common foundations of accountability, advocacy, and organizational transformation that extend beyond diversity objectives to strategic business imperatives. Leadership development requires both structural elements and philosophical commitments to effectively elevate diverse leadership representation while enhancing organizational performance through diverse perspectives and expanded market connections.

Develop Inclusive Leadership Competencies

While foundational leadership philosophy and approach establish the framework for BIPOC leadership development, sustained organizational transformation requires leaders to develop specific inclusive leadership competencies that translate philosophical commitments into actionable skills and behaviors. Inclusive leadership competencies encompass the knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors that enable leaders to effectively support, mentor, and advance BIPOC professionals while creating organizational cultures where diverse leadership styles and perspectives are valued and leveraged for enhanced performance. These competencies extend beyond traditional leadership development to include cultural intelligence, bias recognition, equity-focused decision-making, and the ability to navigate and address systemic barriers that historically have limited BIPOC advancement.

Developing inclusive leadership competencies requires intentional skill-building that addresses both individual leadership capabilities and organizational systems that support or hinder BIPOC representation. This involves cultivating competencies in areas such as inclusive communication, equitable performance evaluation, culturally responsive mentoring, and strategic advocacy for diverse talent. Effective competency development recognizes that leaders must possess both the technical skills to identify and address inequities and the interpersonal abilities to build authentic relationships across cultural differences while creating psychologically safe environments for BIPOC professionals to thrive.

Nine participants implemented strategies to develop inclusive leadership competencies to expand BIPOC senior leadership presence while improving financial results. Their approaches encompassed three interconnected strategies: establishing ethical leadership practices, maintaining leadership credibility, and creating inclusive communication cultures. These integrated elements align with leadership philosophy, approach, and representation by building foundational frameworks that combine moral integrity with strategic action.

Establishing Ethical Leadership Practices

Participants identified establishing ethical practices as a critical component for developing inclusive leadership competencies. They demonstrated ethical strategies that expand leadership competencies with commitment to ensure decisions based on integrity align with the common good for individuals and organizational gains. P2 implemented an employee-centric leadership approach to ensure ethical decision-making by individuals in key leadership roles through combined efforts focusing on BIPOC employees. P2 stated that, “an all-hands-on deck approach with the hiring manager, human resources, employee peer support system and an executive sponsor” ensures “there is a comprehensive path to success when an employee steps into a role.” P2 explained that this approach “fosters inclusive practices by leadership and is a critical component to support BIPOC employees beyond knowledge and skillset” required to perform job duties.

P1 reinforced ethical leadership through personal accountability modeling, acknowledging that leadership privilege exists and explaining that business leaders

achieve greater success when "connected to the community within the organization." P1 explained that BIPOC colleagues shared personal experiences of not being treated fairly, and those experiences served as catalysts for individual accountability and ethical leadership practices. P1 stated that "the basic thing a leader would expect from someone should be the basic thing that a leader delivers," and there should be an "interest in matters of equity and inclusion." P1 demonstrated individual accountability in leadership representation by "echoing people's voices when they are not heard," developing inclusive leadership competencies through intentional practices and challenging cultural leadership norms.

P6 complemented these approaches by implementing baseline standard credentials for leadership roles as a strategy for developing inclusive leadership competencies. P6 stated that, "a lot of organizations have gotten so flat that the average employee has nowhere to go," from lateral and advancement perspective. Leveraging baseline standard credentials empowers leaders to focus on transferrable skills, promoting ethical leadership practices that align leadership development and representation. P6 emphasized that strategic alignment "addresses the gap between BIPOC employees and senior leaders" as organizations build leadership competency requirements.

Maintaining Leadership Credibility

Participants recognized maintaining leadership credibility as an essential strategy within a multidimensional approach to inclusive leadership. They implemented strategies to inspire trust and confidence in leadership as mechanisms to drive individual and team success. P3 incorporated personal experiences as key drivers for building leadership

credibility to empower BIPOC employees navigating organizational challenges. P3, a self-described introverted BIPOC leader, stated, “you have to know that you are going to experience the weight of being the only one in the room the further you advance up the ladder.” P3 explained that “representation matters” and used personal storytelling to encourage BIPOC employees to “never lose your voice and be an active participant to make sure skillset and competency value are known.” P3 acknowledged that not everyone will not feel comfortable speaking up and being fully present when they are the only one in the room but uses experiences to “help ease the path forward to build relationships and connections with people.”

P8 reinforced the critical need for internal support and demonstrating leadership to build influence and execution. P8 stated that “my parents used to say I needed to stand on even ground, representing myself in a way that speaks to excellence.” P8 emphasized that taking ownership and being “authentic in leadership was the way to bring the excellence that was instilled at early on.” Both participants demonstrated how personal authenticity and lived experiences create credible leadership presence that empowers other BIPOC professionals while building organizational trust and influence.

Creating Inclusive Communication Cultures

All participants identified creating inclusive communication cultures as a practical strategy for creating environments where all individuals feel welcome, respected, and appreciated. P4 used inclusive communication to facilitate respectful discussions about sensitive topics like “race, religion and politics,” despite being discouraged from addressing them. P4 navigated “difficult topics about things that happen in the world” by

aligning them to “what surfaced as important to the customer.” P4 stated that “when you work with people long enough to understand their different perspectives serious topics become more comfortable to discuss and build strategy alignment.” P4 demonstrated alignment to business goals to “build a level of trust with partners” through inclusive communication in different locations “impacting the profit line.”

P5 explained the importance of external leadership recognition to “recognize existing BIPOC leaders in organizations to help raise their profiles through visibility opportunities.” P5 implemented inclusive communication practices from a consultative perspective to raise profiles to “share with senior leader’s external accomplishments of BIPOC individuals within their organizations.” P5 acknowledged that the external approach was delicate and “there was a level of embarrassment that some senior leaders experienced” learning about top talent in their organization from an external consultant. P5 used inclusive communication to work with senior leaders to “move past the embarrassment to review the internal system at play to help BIPOC talent be seen internally through external experiences.”

P7 leveraged social engagements to foster inclusive communication as a strategy for developing inclusive leadership competencies. P7 explained that inclusive communication has a social aspect to it and “it is imperative to build social networking skills to become professional adept.” P7 expanded on inclusive communication, stating that “BIPOC individuals don’t have a natural buddy system because there has been so much division, and social interactions is a strategic way to build trust in the workplace.” These participants demonstrated how communication strategies create networking

opportunities, visibility platforms, and trust-building mechanisms essential for BIPOC professional advancement.

The data analysis demonstrates that developing inclusive leadership competencies requires an integrated approach encompassing ethical practices, credible leadership presence, and inclusive communication strategies. Participants demonstrated that ethical leadership practices create foundational accountability structures ensuring equitable treatment and comprehensive support systems for BIPOC employees. Leadership credibility emerges through authentic personal experiences and consistent excellence that builds trust and influence necessary for organizational change. Inclusive communication strategies enable business leaders to navigate sensitive topics, raise BIPOC visibility, and foster professional networking opportunities that address systemic barriers. Together, these competencies create organizational environments where BIPOC professionals can thrive while driving measurable business outcomes. Sustainable inclusive leadership development requires intentional skill-building across multiple dimensions, supported by organizational systems that reinforce ethical behavior, authentic relationships, and communication channels that collectively advance both equity objectives and strategic business priorities.

Visibility Practices and Behaviors

Building upon established leadership philosophy and developed inclusive leadership competencies, visibility practices and behaviors represent the culminating actions that demonstrate organizational commitment to BIPOC leadership development while creating tangible pathways for advancement and recognition. Visibility

encompasses the deliberate practices and consistent behaviors that leaders exhibit to showcase BIPOC leadership capabilities, amplify diverse voices, and create transparent opportunities for professional growth and industry recognition. These practices transform internal development efforts into external positioning strategies that enhance both individual BIPOC leaders' career trajectories and organizational reputation for authentic inclusive leadership.

Effective visibility practices require systematic approaches that ensure BIPOC leaders gain access to high-profile assignments, speaking opportunities, board positions, industry leadership roles, and other visibility-generating experiences that historically have been concentrated among dominant group leaders. Visibility behaviors encompass the daily actions, communications, and interactions that leaders demonstrate to reinforce organizational commitment to equity, including public advocacy for diverse talent, transparent mentorship relationships, and consistent messaging that positions BIPOC leadership as integral to organizational success rather than supplementary to traditional leadership structures.

Nine participants implemented strategic initiatives to include visibility practices and behavior strategies as a component of leadership development and representation to build executive representation while enhancing organizational performance and generating measurable returns. Their approaches encompassed three interconnected strategies: reflecting diversity in visual identity, creating affinity affiliation to support BIPOC individuals, and establishing intentional connection to the BIPOC community.

These integrated approaches transform organizational culture from surface-level diversity displays to substantiate engagement strategies.

Reflecting Diversity in Visual Identity

Participants identified reflecting diversity in visual identity as a vital component for visibility practices and behaviors to establish leadership development and representation. Participants demonstrated visibility practices through the creation of digital content and leadership imagery to provide recognizable representation and transformation within leadership ranks from a diversity perspective. P2 developed video journals documenting BIPOC leaders' career journeys while highlighting key milestones from initial position to executive roles. P2 explained that business leaders discussing their challenges and triumphs created a way to "activate websites with voices of real leaders, telling their career story and providing insight about what diversity, equity, and inclusion means for them." P2 emphasized that the visual content's authenticity enabled individuals to relate to leadership while creating platforms to measure "progress and impact of those leaders." P2 noted that demonstrating impact on business over time required creating "key metrics and measures that needed to be in place to go back to the board, customers, and representative communities within the organization to show the journey to recognizing transformation from a diversity perspective" as a critical component for developing representation and leadership.

P8 focused on resource allocation behaviors to create visibility practices that "level the playing field and identify impediments in achieving goals" for underrepresented individuals. P8 explained that allocating additional resources to

individuals “that need technical or leadership development to overcome impediments that non-BIPOC individuals don’t have” was necessary. P8 emphasized that encouraging business leaders to think differently about resource allocation to create opportunities was essential to “elevate the fortunes of a company” and ensure continuous focus on “leveling the playing field for BIPOC individuals by being fair and creating opportunities for everyone” as a business imperative. P8 demonstrated visibility practices through nontraditional resource allocation by developing leadership awareness to recognize development needs vary for BIPOC individuals.

Creating Affinity Affiliation Through Employee Resource Groups

Employee resource groups emerged as an essential strategy to create affinity affiliation and support BIPOC leadership development and representation. ERGs developed as strategic initiatives providing opportunities for personal growth and professional development while creating platforms for BIPOC individuals to connect, share experiences, and support meaningful change. Participants integrated ERGs into leadership development efforts to empower BIPOC individuals to grow professionally and advance to leadership opportunities.

P1, P3, P4, and P6 served in various ERG leadership roles through personal affiliation and commitment to connect to communities different from their own. P1 stated that a significant number of colleagues identified as BIPOC and through personal engagement and learning about workplace experiences, discovered that “not everyone was treated on par with peers.” Consequently, P1 volunteered to lead and engage in ERGs to build connections with individuals sharing common beliefs and interest while

providing strong employee experiences. P3 leveraged ERG leadership to focus on mental health, stating that when you "feel like you are hiding something, building relationships and connecting with people is a challenge." Through this approach, P3 demonstrated visibility practices through ERG leadership roles that "align to other individuals instead of just accepting the status quo."

P4 & P6 leveraged informal employee resource group concepts to create worker-led constructs centered around social identities, amplifying underrepresented individuals when formal diversity, equity, and inclusion programs did not exist. P4 introduced informal resource groups early in career by engaging with BIPOC individuals in the legal industry to create relationships fostering visibility practices and behaviors "for individuals looking for opportunities to advance." P4 emphasized that "you don't need a majority, you just need people of authority in different areas strategically supporting leadership development and representation" goals to achieve outcomes. P4 stated that the absence of formal ERGs "should not set the standard" for creating visibility for BIPOC individuals to develop as leaders as representation should be "tailored to individual needs." P6 created informal resources groups to foster belonging for BIPOC individuals, focusing on inclusion elements through visibility practices. The informal ERGs were led by BIPOC individuals sharing similar backgrounds and interests, meeting monthly to host leadership development sessions preparing BIPOC individuals for advancement opportunities.

Establishing Intentional BIPOC Community Connection

Participants implemented strategic approaches to intentional BIPOC community connection to explore diverse cultural values, create authentic relationships, and engage in community activities. Participants developed visibility practices and behaviors addressing visibility gaps while creating opportunities to provide BIPOC individuals leadership development and representation through nontraditional business channels.

P5 provided visibility opportunities to BIPOC individuals after experiencing inadequate support for leadership development. P5 explained that being placed on a panel early in career as "the diversity representative with individuals five levels more senior was very eye opening" regarding the lack of BIPOC development focus. P5 participated in a leadership development program and examined the alumni in leadership roles, discovering that "very few on the list that were BIPOC." P5 transformed this experience into large-scale visibility initiatives providing BIPOC individuals opportunities to demonstrate their expertise on prominent platforms. P5 stated that the earlier experience presenting with very senior individuals was instrumental to building confidence and vital to leadership development.

P9 approached intentional BIPOC community connection as a transformation strategy by regularly attending BIPOC-centered events to support colleagues' growth and development. P9 stated that "I would learn from individuals and bring that knowledge back to the organization" and through this knowledge some of the "decisions slowly changed." P9 expanded that understanding BIPOC culture provided perspective and

"changed the direction of business" as individuals gained confidence and "felt more like owners and not just processors of the work."

The data analysis demonstrates that visibility practices and behaviors constitute a comprehensive strategic framework essential for advancing BIPOC leadership development and representation. Participants demonstrated that effective visibility strategies require integrated approaches encompassing authentic visual representation, robust affinity networks, and intentional community engagement that collectively transform organizational culture from symbolic diversity displays to substantive advancement opportunities. Through digital content creation, strategic resource allocation, employee resource groups, and community connections, participants created pathways that not only increased BIPOC visibility but also fostered belonging, built confidence, and developed leadership capabilities necessary for career progression. These evidence-based visibility practices generate measurable business outcomes while addressing barriers, establishing that sustainable BIPOC advancement requires intentional organizational commitment to creating platforms where diverse talent can demonstrate expertise, build authentic relationships, and access development opportunities that drive both individual success and organizational performance.

Leadership Development and Representation

While intentional leadership philosophy, inclusive competency development, and visibility practices create foundational frameworks for BIPOC advancement, participants consistently emphasized that sustainable success requires robust interpersonal support mechanisms to reinforce these strategic initiatives. Business leaders recognized that

effective leadership development and representation strategies require both institutional transformation and personalized support networks that bridge the gap between organizational policy and individual career progression, creating pathways that address both barriers, and personal development needs necessary for sustainable BIPOC leadership advancement while driving measurable organizational performance.

Leadership development and representation served as foundational frameworks with effective strategies that business leaders used to increase BIPOC representation in senior-level positions while driving measurable organizational performance. Through intentional leadership approaches that challenged exclusionary norms, business leaders established approaches to recognize and develop BIPOC capabilities. By implementing inclusive competency development strategies that encompassed ethical practices and credible communication, business leaders created environments where diverse talent could thrive. Furthermore, visibility strategies that created authentic representation and community connection enabled organizational leaders to foster belonging and build confidence necessary for career progression.

In addition to the primary theme and subthemes, one essential supporting theme was identified to address critical areas supporting the research question: mentorship, sponsorship, and support systems.

Mentorship, Sponsorship, and Support Systems

Mentorship, sponsorship, and supporting systems emerged as a supporting theme to leadership development and representation while enhancing organizational financial performance. These systems provide BIPOC individuals guidance, encouragement, and

access to resources critical for professional success. Mentorship through experienced leaders providing guidance and knowledge transfer, sponsorship from advocates who actively promote BIPOC professionals for advancement opportunities, and support systems that create professional development networks collectively align with leadership development and representation by establishing personalized pathways that bridge institutional policies and individual career progression. These integrated support mechanisms ensure that inclusive leadership translates into tangible advancement opportunities through trusted relationships, strategic advocacy, and support that accelerates BIPOC professionals' journey to senior-level roles while fostering authentic capabilities and sustainable representation that drives both individual success and organizational performance.

Eight participants implemented formal, informal and reverse mentorship strategies to align leadership development and representation for BIPOC individuals. These mentorship approaches encompassed strategic position development, skills alignment, and talent cultivation to create advancement pathways while maximizing organizational returns. Their strategies focused on relationship building, accountability mechanisms, and strategic influence to create advancement opportunities through trusted networks and executive advocacy, while addressing organizational acclimatization, exposure opportunities, and industry-level advocacy designed to overcome barriers while providing practical resources for professional advancement.

Mentorship Strategies

Participants demonstrated comprehensive mentorship approaches that combined strategic positioning with skills development. P1 described the mentoring technique used for "building a more senior position" for an individual who was well-skilled but held a lower level in title. P1 elaborated that instead of having that individual report to them, senior leadership was approached and asked to consider building a role that would lead to a promotion in title, thus making them a peer. P1 stated that mentoring was offered to the individual to better align skillset rather than address development needs.

P4 practiced mentoring through "one-on-one conversations to understand personal development goals." P4 noted the importance of mentoring and stated that "you do a disservice to a person" if you don't recognize unique skills and strengths. P4 utilized conversations to encourage individuals to "use their strengths to leverage themselves in the organization" as a method to give permission to stand out. P6 created safe spaces through mentorship for BIPOC individuals and described mentoring "as a strategy to getting talent now and growing talent to create a build or buy" methodology. P6 approached mentorship as a critical component to BIPOC individuals' success and stated that "being there and working to help someone to get where they want to go" enables organizations to realize positive returns as a result. P6 emphasized that "the smartest strategy to increase representation at the leadership level" is leveraging formal mentoring for existing employees.

Sponsorship Strategies

Participants offered sponsorship to BIPOC individuals seeking advancement to senior-level roles, aligning with leadership development and representation practices. P2 aligned executive-level leadership position to sponsor BIPOC individuals "to guide them on their journey through employment" and stated that "cultural aspects are not written down on paper" so it was important to become a part of the "accountability factor" for BIPOC success.

P3 initiated sponsorship for BIPOC individuals "who are looking for opportunities to advance" and provided an open door to individuals to talk about their experiences while "making phone calls on their behalf." P3 expanded and stated that "mostly for me it's all about the relationships" and noted that extending trusted relationships "can help someone else get ahead." P3 noted that trust was a key factor to creating successful sponsorship relationships for BIPOC employees.

P8 implemented a strategy that blended mentorship and sponsorship, noting that senior leaders with stature have the ability to "influence in the room where decisions are made on a number of things, including who gets considered for next level opportunities." P8 used a "four-pronged approach" which includes "focusing on yourself, focus on the organization, focus on others and look to become a mentor" to increase BIPOC representation. P8 advised that the process of becoming and choosing a mentor as a vital decision point and stated that BIPOC individuals should "do your research because not everyone can be a great mentor to you."

Support Systems

Participants complemented mentorship and sponsorship with support systems to enhance BIPOC leadership development and representation. P5 initiated support systems for BIPOC individuals and used their position as a safe way to provide "exposure and ask individuals to take on additional responsibility" as a way to enhance leadership development and representation. P5 stated that BIPOC individuals "have been the supporting cast and not the central focus" and providing opportunities for exposure allowed them to assume the primary role.

P7 approached support systems from an organizational acclimatization perspective and used this methodology to help BIPOC individuals "coming into largely White organizations." P7 stated that BIPOC individuals need someone to go to so that they can find their way "to deal with oblivious or covert racism" and noted that large organizations "have been steeped in a racist way" of operating. P7 noted that the ability to understand and overcome these behaviors in the workplace "isn't something taught in business schools."

P8 provided support by serving in roles at "para industry organizations" to support BIPOC individuals in different career endeavors. P8 acknowledged that individuals seeking to advance in their career are not always supported and opportunities are often rejected. P8 expanded that "it was important to stabilize a negative trend" such as "attrition, increase in expenses, and rework" to provide support addressing business problems through tangible resolutions.

Analysis reveals that mentorship, sponsorship, and support systems function as an integrated framework that creates comprehensive pathways bridging individual development with organization advancement through personalized guidance, strategic advocacy, and support. The synthesis of participant approaches demonstrates that formal and informal mentorship provides foundational skill development and safe spaces, sponsorship leverages executive influence and trusted relationships for advancement opportunities, and support systems address organizational acclimatization and barriers that impede professional progression. Through mentorship that develops capabilities and provides guidance, sponsorship that creates advancement opportunities through executive advocacy, and support systems that address organizational navigation and industry-level barriers, these mechanisms establish ecosystems that move beyond individual development to create institutional pathways for sustainable BIPOC representation.

When mentorship development, sponsorship advocacy, and systematic support operate cohesively, organizations transform talent cultivation from individual effort into strategic organizational investment that consistently advances BIPOC professionals while building institutional capacity for diverse leadership representation. Participants demonstrated that effective implementation requires coordinated approaches where mentorship builds foundational capabilities, sponsorship creates advancement opportunities through influential networks, and support systems provide organizational navigation resources and exposure opportunities that position BIPOC individuals for success. This integrated framework establishes mentorship, sponsorship, and support systems as both individual empowerment mechanisms and strategic business advantages

that enhance leadership development, increase representation, and drive organizational performance through talent cultivation and strategic relationship building that accelerates BIPOC advancement while creating sustainable pathways for diverse talent leadership development.

Conclusion

The findings reveal that effective leadership development and representation requires an integrated approach encompassing intentional leadership philosophy, inclusive competency development, and strategic visibility practices, reinforced by robust mentorship, sponsorship, and support systems. Participants established that sustainable BIPOC advancement necessitates both institutional transformation through challenging exclusionary norms and developing ethical leadership competencies, and personalized support mechanisms that provide individualized guidance, advocacy, and professional development opportunities. Through intentional leadership practices that recognize and develop BIPOC capabilities, inclusive communication strategies that foster authentic relationships, and visibility initiatives that create meaningful representation, participants created organizational environments where diverse talent can thrive.

The integration of mentorship for skills development, sponsorship for strategic advocacy, and support systems for navigating organizational complexities ensures that leadership development strategies translate into tangible career advancement outcomes. These evidence-based approaches generate measurable business results while addressing barriers, establishing that leadership development and representation strategies constitute both an equity imperative and a strategic business priority essential for organizational

performance enhancement through diverse leadership perspectives, expanded market insights, and strengthened community connections that drive sustainable competitive advantage.

These findings affirm business leaders have used leadership development and representation as an effective strategy to increase BIPOC representation in senior-level positions while enhancing organizational performance, which are consistent with previous studies and advance disciplinary knowledge. Addressing inadequate leadership competencies in establishing inclusive cultures requires organizations to pivot from diversity training to leadership development while incorporating representation strategies (Wadhwa & Aggarwal, 2023). Leadership development opportunities are particularly important for BIPOC individuals, especially with the historic battle against dominant structures that promote oppression, and business leaders that implement actions to close the representation gap through inclusive leadership practices empowers individuals to embrace their uniqueness and realize greater success, thus positioning them for leadership roles (Arora & Wolbring, 2022; Mitchell et al., 2023; Powell, 2025). Practices of inclusion go beyond social and community engagement and addressing barriers such as microaggressions, prejudice behavior and discrimination through leadership development increase opportunities for BIPOC representation to be realized (Arora & Wolbring, 2022). Business leaders successful in leadership development increase leadership competencies to establish inclusive cultures, thus elevating BIPOC representation in senior-level positions and positively impacting organizational performance.

The current findings align with the composite conceptual framework including MDCC framework; equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) theory; and Kotter's change management theory. This combined framework serves as an effective strategic approach for business leaders to implement leadership development and representation. Underrepresentation of BIPOC in leadership roles is a complex phenomenon where the lack of racial and culture-specific competencies is magnified by a lack of mentoring programs, inclusion behaviors, visibility practices, and reinforcement contingencies from support systems, all of which motivate productivity in business (Sue, 2001). To overcome the dissociation from leadership competencies requires the perpetuation of marginalization of BIPOC individuals to be eliminated and replaced with transformational leadership development and representation business practices (Kotter, 1996; Mitchell et al., 2023). Leadership development and representation strategy implementation fostering inclusion practices across organizational constructs supports and extends MDCC framework, EDI theory, and Kotter's change management theory. The current research project findings validate leadership development and representation as an effective strategy to increase the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions while positively impacting performance.

Theme 3: BIPOC Self-Advocacy and Authenticity

BIPOC self-advocacy and authenticity emerged as an essential theme encompassing effective strategies business leaders used to address the failure to embrace differences in people, increase BIPOC representation in senior-level positions, and enhance organizational performance. Leadership strategies that proactively address racist

behaviors in the workplace create environments for BIPOC individuals to self-advocate for desired career outcomes in compensation, advancement and skill development (Moturu & Lent, 2023; Titanji et al., 2022). Authenticity in leadership practices addresses deviance from workplace standards by promoting altruistic behavior and fostering a trust-based environment where BIPOC individuals can establish relationships and achieved desired outcomes (Erkutlu & Chafra, 2013; Ostermeier et al., 2022). Implementing and enforcing authentic and adaptive leadership practices addresses BIPOC individuals' belief that they would not be viewed positively and supported in career growth aspirations (Vogel & Erickson, 2021).

The framework for BIPOC self-advocacy operates through interconnected dimensions that build upon each other to create sustainable individual empowerment and organizational transformation. The data analysis revealed two critical subthemes within this integrated system: (a) value authentic and diverse perspectives that establishes organizational foundations for perspective appreciation and inclusion; and (b) maintain unique identity and voice that enables individual authenticity preservation while advancing professionally. Together, these subthemes create a progressive framework that transforms self-advocacy from individual resilience into organizational capability that supports BIPOC advancement while positively impacting performance.

Table 6

Theme 3: BIPOC Self-Advocacy and Authenticity

Subthemes	*n* of participants who contributed data to subtheme (N = 9)	*n* of excerpts from data assigned to theme
Value authentic and diverse perspectives	6	18
Maintain unique identity and voice	7	22
BIPOC career development and advancement	8	35
Challenges and barriers for BIPOC	7	40

Value Authentic and Diverse Perspectives

Effective BIPOC self-advocacy and authenticity begins with organizational and leadership commitment to genuinely valuing authentic and diverse perspectives as essential assets rather than peripheral considerations. Appreciating diverse viewpoints requires moving beyond surface-level acknowledgment of diversity to create environments where BIPOC individuals feel empowered to express genuine viewpoints, share their unique experiences, and contribute their distinct insights without fear of marginalization or retaliation. This foundational element establishes the organizational culture necessary for authentic self-advocacy by demonstrating that diverse perspectives are not only welcomed but actively sought, respected, and integrated into decision-making processes.

Authentic perspective-valuing encompasses recognizing that BIPOC individuals bring valuable cultural knowledge, alternative problem-solving approaches, and innovative thinking that enhances organizational performance while challenging conventional paradigms. This involves creating approaches to ensure diverse voices are

heard in strategic discussions, leadership decisions, and organizational planning processes. When perspectives are genuinely valued, BIPOC professionals gain confidence in their authentic contributions and develop the psychological safety necessary to engage in meaningful self-advocacy.

Six participants implemented strategies to value diverse viewpoints through four interconnected approaches: leading with empathy, embracing allyship, demonstrating interest in BIPOC challenges and triumphs, and incorporating different perspectives in problem-solving and decision-making. These integrated strategies approaches create frameworks that establish foundational conditions for BIPOC professionals to develop self-advocacy skills while driving both individual empowerment and enhanced organizational performance through expanded cognitive diversity and innovative problem-solving capabilities.

Leading With Empathy

Leading with empathy enables leaders to genuinely understand and appreciate the unique experiences that inform BIPOC perspectives, creating the foundational trust necessary for authentic perspective-valuing and meaningful organizational inclusion. P5 demonstrated empathetic leadership strategies by building trust and sharing career experiences about limited exposure opportunities early in their professional journey. P5 stated that “my own personal experiences inform why it is important to look back and help others move forward.” Through these conversations, P5 discovered that BIPOC individuals had “significant trust gaps” that P5 recognized “in friend groups, corporations, and lived experiences from years of deliberate exclusion.” P5 explained that

empathetic leadership regarding these experiences provided insight to BIPOC individuals that “you don’t have to settle for the same kind of experiences” and that “leadership is not only possible but finding success earlier on in careers is achievable by avoiding some of the same generational traps.” P5 demonstrated how empathetic approaches provide guidance for navigating organizational norms while promoting authentic contributions, noting that BIPOC individuals “will have their own landmines to navigate.” P5’s empathetic leadership approach demonstrates how sharing personal experiences and acknowledging systemic barriers creates the trust foundation necessary for BIPOC individuals to express authentic perspectives and engage in meaningful self-advocacy.

Embracing Allyship

Embracing allyship requires leaders to actively advocate for and amplify BIPOC voices, using their organizational influence to ensure that diverse perspectives are not only heard but integrated into decision-making and strategic initiatives. P4 strategically connected with White leaders who were more trusted and senior in the organization for allyship to endorse and rally around business ideas that might not otherwise gain traction or immediate support. P4 implemented strategic steps to gain allyship by observing leader behavior, connecting with the leaders that had authority to support ideas and building on that support to obtain additional resources to drive initiatives. P4 stated that the leaders who valued diverse viewpoints and had professional “gas to get to the next stop to build upon” were the leaders to seek allyship from throughout career journey. P4 said that this strategy “worked better than coming into a meeting, addressing a topic, and asking for a vote” noting she did not “have that level of leadership or organizational

power." P4 explained that "you need people of authority to support ideas, and building consensus before the meeting" was a very strategic approach that worked better than other ones.

P6 shared a similar approach in employing White senior leaders through allyship to support BIPOC advancement into higher skillset roles and leadership opportunities. P6 lobbied for allyship to ensure authentic contributions were valued and leveraged to promote BIPOC self-advocacy and authenticity. P6 stated that leaders that served as allies were positioned well to create and minimize "token role classification" and noted that there is a "clear distinction between over representation and significant underrepresentation." P6 qualified that the distinction in representation classification and allyship strategy supported quality relationships over transactional interactions between BIPOC individuals and White leadership. P4 and P6's strategic allyship approaches demonstrated how building authentic relationships with influential leaders and securing pre-meeting consensus transforms organizational power dynamics to systematically amplify BIPOC voices and minimize tokenistic representation.

Demonstrating Interest in BIPOC Challenges and Triumphs

Demonstrating genuine interest in both BIPOC challenges and triumphs enables leaders to develop understanding of diverse experiences, fostering organizational cultures where authentic perspectives are valued through recognition of the full spectrum of BIPOC professional journeys and contributions. P1 demonstrated interest in BIPOC challenges and triumphs by capturing "elements of diversity through analysis on whether or not people were being given opportunities they deserve." P1 stated that he "believed in

the goodwill of the organization" to model BIPOC self-advocacy and authenticity but realized there were gaps in leadership to value diverse viewpoints. P1 explained that "as a White male leader" who may not always have "a complete and full understanding of how to be the best manager for BIPOC" individuals in corporate America, "that gaining perspective" of challenges and triumphs prepared him to be "a better leader and supporter." P1 stated that he "learned to be a resource" to address headwinds and effectively speak on behalf of BIPOC individuals to more senior and skilled leaders as an effective way to value authentic contributions. P1's approach demonstrates how White leaders can leverage their positional privilege by genuinely understanding BIPOC experiences and challenges, transforming this awareness into effective advocacy and resource support within senior leadership circles.

Incorporating Different Perspectives in Problem-Solving and Decision-Making

Incorporating different perspectives in problem-solving and decision-making transforms perspective-valuing from aspirational commitment into operational practice, demonstrating that diverse viewpoints are essential assets that enhance organizational outcomes rather than optional considerations in strategic processes. P2 acknowledged the importance of incorporating different perspectives in problem-solving and decision-making to "drive a greater set of beneficial outcomes" by introducing new ways of thinking. P2 leveraged their background in the cellular technology industry to highlight detrimental behaviors when different perspectives are not included and recounted that as cell phones evolved "people of color were not embedded in software development and design teams," which resulted in camera capabilities "not designed to take good photos of

people who had skin color different than White." P2 stated this technology design "produced photos of BIPOC individuals which would show up darker than the actual individual." Customer feedback, P2 recounted, prompted leadership to spend years evolving product design through the incorporation of "different perspectives and thoughts" on the team, "creating greater connection with customers and greater outcomes on balance sheet."

P8 implemented leadership practices incorporating different perspectives in problem-solving and decision-making by challenging one-dimensional ways of thinking. P8 explained that multi-dimensional ways of thinking through different perspectives supported business initiatives that connected to all communities, which made "great business sense for companies that are focused on staying profitable." P8 stated that "organizations that allowed one-dimensional thinking regarding customer base expectations will not change simply because products and services were offered" set themselves up to not be successful in maximizing profit opportunities. P8 went on to note that "sustaining a lifeline for an organization" required conscientious and moral perspective "allowing companies to thrive." P2 and P8's approaches demonstrate how incorporating diverse perspectives transforms decision-making from one-dimensional thinking to multi-dimensional strategic advantage, generating tangible business outcomes through enhanced connections, improved product design, and sustainable profitability that positions organizations for longer-term competitive success.

The data analysis demonstrates that valuing authentic and diverse perspectives requires integrated implementation of empathetic leadership, strategic allyship, genuine

interest in BIPOC experiences, and incorporation of diverse viewpoints into organizational processes. Participants established that effective perspective-valuing transforms from aspirational commitment to operational practice when leaders combine emotional intelligence with strategic advocacy, comprehensive understanding with practical application. Through empathy that builds trust, allyship that amplifies voices, interests that validates experiences, and integration that leverages diverse thinking, organizations create cultures where authentic perspectives become essential assets rather than optional considerations. These evidence-based approaches generate measurable business outcomes while fostering environments where BIPOC professionals can engage in self-advocacy from positions of organizational strength and authentic self-expression, ultimately establishing perspective-valuing as both an equity imperative and a strategic business advantage.

Maintain Unique Identity and Voice

Building upon organizational commitment to valuing authentic perspectives, maintaining unique identity and voice represents the personal dimension of BIPOC self-advocacy that enables individuals to preserve their cultural authenticity while advancing professionally. Maintaining unique identity encompasses the ability for BIPOC professionals to express their authentic selves, including cultural values, communication styles, leadership approaches, and problem-solving methodologies, without feeling pressured to conform to dominant organizational norms or suppress essential aspects of their identity. This preservation of authenticity serves as both a foundation for effective

self-advocacy and a source of innovative contributions that enhance organizational performance.

Unique voice refers to distinctive perspectives, experiences, and insights that BIPOC individuals bring to professional environments based on their cultural backgrounds, lived experiences, and diverse worldviews. Maintaining this voice requires developing the confidence and skills to articulate viewpoints that may differ from conventional thinking while building the resilience necessary to persist when faced with resistance or misunderstanding. When BIPOC professionals maintain their unique voice, they create opportunities for meaningful dialogue, challenge assumptions, and contribute to more comprehensive decision-making processes.

Seven participants implemented strategies to maintain unique identity and voice through two interconnected approaches: building trust while exploring traditions of diverse cultures and promoting reflective supervision. These integrated approaches create frameworks that support both individual authenticity preservation and organizational culture transformation, ultimately enabling BIPOC professionals to advance their careers while maintaining true to their essential selves.

Building Trust While Exploring Traditions of Diverse Cultures

Building trust while exploring traditions of diverse cultures creates organizational environments where BIPOC professionals feel safe to express their authentic cultural identities and unique perspectives, enabling them to maintain their distinctive voice rather than conforming to dominant organizational norms. P1 focused on building trust while exploring traditions of diverse cultures early in career “to be connected to a community

that was comprised of a large percentage of BIPOC individuals." P1 started this practice long before becoming a leader and built "relationships with co-workers and learned about their experiences "in life and in the workplace. P1 stated that "it became very clear that there were examples of extreme disparity" which was instrumental in developing leadership practices in being authentic and supporting BIPOC self-advocacy later in career.

P9 incorporated a similar approach to building trust while exploring diverse cultures by connecting with BIPOC individuals "to understand what experiences they wanted to have in their career." P9 recognized that there was an opportunity to learn about BIPOC individuals, their families and community to better understand how their professional life integrated into both. P9 stated it was imperative to "shift the cultural norms of the South" to focus on worldviews over geographical perspectives and to ensure that "everyone felt like owners versus processors."

P4 approached building trust from a reverse mentoring perspective by implementing mechanisms to educate colleagues on diverse perspectives in the legal field but stated that "being comfortable talking about issues that impact BIPOC individuals" was not enough. P4 recognized that customer decision-makers were people of color and expressed to leadership that "there needed to be more perspective not just for the purpose of showing face." P4 acknowledged that connectivity to diverse cultures in the legal field "aligned with business goals and affected the profit line." The participants' approaches demonstrated how exploring cultural traditions and building authentic relationships creates organizational environments where BIPOC individuals can maintain their unique

identity while contributing their distinctive perspectives, ultimately transforming workplace cultures from conformity-driven to authenticity-supporting systems that drive both individual empowerment and business success.

Promoting Reflective Supervision

Promoting reflective supervision creates structured opportunities for BIPOC professionals to engage in authentic dialogue about their experiences and perspectives, enabling them to process workplace challenges while preserving their unique identity and developing confidence in their distinctive voice. P2, P6, P8 and P5 implemented strategies to promote reflective supervision to foster BIPOC self-advocacy and authenticity to attain more engaged and higher leadership practices.

P2 focused on leadership structure to maintain unique identity and voice initiatives and stated that "if you are not used to having someone in place that speaks differently, looks differently, thinks differently, and you are not used to that reflective active engagement…it could become problematic." P2 promoted reflective supervision by ensuring that intentions to increase BIPOC representation was not hidden and stated the need to be "very open and specific in communication." P2 stated that when the goal is to increase representation of different cultures there needs to be "identity embedded in as part of that process." P2 cited this strategy as the "accountability factor" because cultural aspects of the organization are not written down for leaders to reference, therefore "executive presence could support navigating diverse perspectives through guidance."

P6 implemented practices to promote reflective supervision practices when BIPOC leadership representation was lacking by engaging White leadership to value

authenticity and to view BIPOC culturally transferrable qualities as business leading competitive advantage imperatives. P6 focused on moving the representation needle with early in career professionals as a part of a long-term strategy to "develop a path to senior leadership opportunities." P6 promoted reflective supervision by creating intranetworking opportunities for "developing relationships between senior leaders and top talent individuals from underrepresented groups" to create a partnership process to maintain unique identity. Through this initiative, senior leaders spoke openly about the partnership which P6 stated was "intended to develop relationships with members of underrepresented groups." P6 explained that this strategic approach successfully got senior leaders to provide a unique voice on behalf of BIPOC when they were not in the room.

P8 aligned own leadership journey to the company mission and vision as a strategy to create reflective supervision for BIPOC individuals throughout the organization. P8 stated that it was important "to use those statements to inspire change" and that BIPOC individuals benefit from "knowing what is very core to the organization." P8 noted that using mission and vision statements and showing up as a BIPOC C-suite leader was a strategy to maintain his own unique identity to model the way to ensure BIPOC individuals could see future opportunities as possible. P8 explained that this approach "shifted the culture in a way to create a diverse environment of strength" and that understanding and aligning the mission and vision "helped people to understand that good business practices helps everyone."

P5 took a very similar approach to reflective supervision by using personal career journey to "further executive presence" to respond to "public pressure around diversity, equity, and inclusion commitment." P5 noted that own experience of not having representation in senior-level roles to look up to informed why BIPOC individuals "needed to be able to see contributions at a higher level" from a BIPOC leader. P5 said this approach allowed him to maintain his unique identity while showing a path possible for others "to have an exceptional career to accomplish whatever dreams they have."

The data analysis reveals that BIPOC self-advocacy and authenticity functions as an integrated framework where organizational commitment to valuing diverse perspectives creates the cultural foundation necessary for individuals to maintain their unique identity and voice. The synthesis of participant experiences demonstrates that effective self-advocacy emerges when leaders implement empathetic approaches, strategic allyship, genuine interest in BIPOC experiences, and systematic incorporation of diverse thinking, while simultaneously creating environments that support cultural exploration and reflective supervision. Through empathy that builds trust, allyship that amplifies voices, interest that validates experiences, and integration that leverages diverse perspectives, organizations establish cultures where BIPOC professionals can preserve their authenticity while engaging in meaningful self-advocacy. When combined with trust-building through cultural exploration and reflective supervision practices that maintain unique identity, these strategies create comprehensive pathways that transform self-advocacy from individual resilience into organizational capability.

BIPOC Self-Advocacy and Authenticity

While valuing authentic perspectives and maintaining unique identity establish foundational conditions for BIPOC self-advocacy and authenticity, participants consistently emphasized that sustainable career progression requires both strategic career development initiatives and approaches to addressing persistent challenges and barriers. Business leaders recognized that effective self-advocacy and authenticity strategies must be complemented by targeted career development opportunities and proactive barrier removal to create comprehensive pathways for BIPOC advancement. This understanding led to two essential supporting themes that address critical areas beyond self-advocacy: (a) BIPOC career development and advancement and (b) challenges and barriers for BIPOC. These supporting themes ensure that self-advocacy and authenticity translate into tangible career progression while addressing obstacles that continue to impact BIPOC professional advancement.

BIPOC Career Development and Advancement

While valuing authentic perspectives and maintaining unique identity establish foundational conditions for BIPOC self-advocacy and authenticity, translating these capabilities into sustainable career progression requires strategic development initiatives that leverage authentic self-expression as a competitive advantage. BIPOC career development and advancement encompasses the systematic approaches, targeted opportunities, and strategic pathways. These elements enable individuals to transform their self-advocacy and authentic voice into measurable career outcomes. This supporting theme recognizes that authentic self-advocacy creates the personal foundation necessary

for professional growth. However, sustainable progression demands complementary organizational investments in skill development, leadership preparation, and advancement opportunities specifically designed to support BIPOC professionals' unique strengths and perspectives.

Eight participants focused on effective career development strategies to build upon trust, allyship, and cultural authenticity established through self-advocacy frameworks to create concrete pathways for professional growth. These strategies encompass allyship approaches that amplify BIPOC voices and assessing education streams that BIPOC individuals were historically steered into that limited career pathway options. Their approaches created frameworks that transformed individual self-advocacy efforts into organizational support systems while addressing foundational barriers to advancement.

Allyship Strategies for Career Development

Allyship strategies that amplify BIPOC voices and leverage organizational influence create essential pathways by transforming individual self-advocacy efforts into systematic organizational support that opens doors, creates opportunities, and removes barriers to professional progression. Participants demonstrated these strategies through three interconnected approaches: intentional internal leadership, partnership with external advocacy organizations, and strategic code-switching cultural navigation.

P1 and P9 demonstrated internal leadership practices by leveraging inherent privilege from their leadership roles. Both participants shared the importance of avoiding White savior approaches, while acknowledging that leveraging their positions created

faster advancement tracks. P1 evaluated skillsets against roles to determine if BIPOC individuals were operating at potential, then promoted them within the organization "to pursue the potential they have." P1 stated that "structural disparity is the error of senior leadership, and it is not the error that should be borne by the people who are impacted by it." P1 acknowledged that not everyone was in "a position to demonstrate potential" under his purview. However, acting "to understand skillsets provided knowledge necessary to go about promoting them" when opportunities were presented.

P9 demonstrated allyship by creating cross-pollination opportunities through projects. P9 included individuals from different functional areas to collectively work on special projects "to highlight themselves and get exposure in the organization." P9 acknowledged that advancement required allyship and stated, "it is not what you know, but who you know." P9 asked individuals "Who knows what you know?" and questioned "How does that then give that person the opportunity to succeed?" This created opportunities for BIPOC individuals to "expand their network and ideas" while encouraging them "to take demonstrated best practices for their own use." P1 and P9's complementary approaches demonstrated how skill assessment and strategic promotion combine with cross-functional networking to create comprehensive pathways. These pathways leveraging organizational privilege to accelerate development through individual advancement and expanded professional networks.

P6 focused on external professional organizations that addressed BIPOC needs. P6 identified the need to create platforms where BIPOC individuals could develop professional relationships, finding that affinity organizations provided established

platforms. P6 noted “a number of professional associations that are structured by affinity” where “leadership relationships with them are critical” to yield and develop BIPOC talent. P6 shared that providing memberships could create “a real professional development lift” while investing in employees’ participation “provides support and development” and “creates a story about your organization.” P6’s strategic partnership approach demonstrates how leveraging external professional organizations creates dual benefits by providing expanded networking and development opportunities while enhancing organizational reputation within diverse professional communities.

P7 and P8 implemented strategic cultural navigation through allyship-gaining methodologies from a BIPOC accountability perspective, encouraging thoughtful assimilation into the predominant workplace culture. Both participants encouraged code-switching behaviors enabling rapport-building with White leaders more receptive to familiar patterns than authentic diverse expressions. P7 stated that BIPOC “individuals have the skillsets that senior leadership is looking for” but required “different grooming to acclimatize them through the door.” P7 noted that “lighter skin BIPOC individuals are already acclimatized” having had “opportunities and resources already availed,” while “more melanated individuals require grooming and acclimatizing.” P7 served as a resource to help BIPOC individuals understand workplace culture and appropriate presentation, and stated, “you are going to need to speak and do things differently” and emphasizing “understanding the things that people of White privilege do to successfully navigate the system.”

P8 implemented communication code-switching strategies encouraging BIPOC individuals to challenge assumptions while gaining allyship. P8 emphasized that "different views brought to the table" required BIPOC individuals to "stay very conscientious and intentional" in communication. P8 stated that elevated communication was necessary to respond to "changing demographics of the community and the fulcrum of business vitality." Code-switching strategies demonstrate how BIPOC professionals strategically navigate cultural adaptation to secure essential allyship and access advancement opportunities. They use cross-cultural communication abilities as competitive advantages while building influential relationships. However, these strategies highlight needs for organizational transformation, as sustainable advancement requires environments valuing diverse communication styles without requiring cultural conformity as a prerequisite for professional progression.

Education Stream Assessment Strategies

Assessing education streams as a strategic approach involves leaders evaluating educational pathways that BIPOC individuals were historically steered into, identifying how limitations continue to impact current advancement opportunities and professional positioning. This strategic assessment enables leaders to implement targeted interventions, alternative development pathways, and skills-based advancement opportunities that overcome educational barriers while recognizing diverse expertise forms that may not align with traditional credentials.

P2 examined opportunities to create a broader organizational reach, outlining strategies to help BIPOC individuals "perfect their story." P2 focused on learning access

for individuals “expressing interest in learning something new or expanding their scope of responsibility.” P2 included strategies to introduce BIPOC individuals to other parts of the organization to “create a pattern in which talent gets exposed” while building development disciplines. P2 shared that through the strategic approach to assess skillset beyond formal education platforms, partnerships supported learning that “created cross-functional growth opportunities” thus increasing viable advancement opportunities in leadership.

P4 and P5 implemented similar strategies focusing on collaboration, partnership, and strategic thinking. P4, an HBCU law school graduate, took on the responsibility to “push open the door further” for BIPOC attorney recruitment. P4 identified gaps in senior leader assessments, noting “the word competency would come up” during talent recommendations. P4 acknowledged colleagues did not see BIPOC attorneys as equals and felt an “obligation to help them understand what they were missing out on.” P4 addressed competency questions by proving “preconceived notions were not only antiquated but not making business sense.”

P5 incorporated research by reviewing data “specifically about the gaps that exist to show why there’s not BIPOC leadership at particular levels.” P5 discovered individuals displayed “excellence while fulfilling their work responsibilities” but lacked opportunities to operate beyond current roles despite seeking senior leader support. P5 focused on nontechnical leadership skills to shorten the journey to senior-level roles, noting that lacking strategic thinking “is going to take them 15, 20 years to move into VP or SVP role” and stating, “we need to move faster than that.” This focus supported

BIPOC individuals developing collaboration, partnership, communication, and strategic thinking capabilities for senior-level success.

The analysis reveals that BIPOC career development functions as an integrated framework where allyship strategies and education stream assessment create pathways transforming individual self-advocacy into systematic progression. Participant approaches demonstrate that internal privilege-leveraging and external partnerships provide structural support. Meanwhile, code-switching strategies enable cultural navigation and education stream assessment addresses foundational barriers. Through allyship that amplifies voices and creates opportunities, alongside assessment that overcomes historical limitations, these strategies establish comprehensive ecosystems moving beyond individual resilience to create institutional capability. When allyship facilitation and educational barrier removal operate cohesively, organizations transform development from individual effort into investment. This transformation consistently advances BIPOC professionals while building institutional capacity for diverse leadership representation. Ultimately, these approaches establish frameworks as both equity imperatives and strategic business advantages driving innovation and enhanced organizational performance.

Challenges and Barriers for BIPOC

While strategic allyship and education stream assessment create essential pathways for BIPOC career development and advancement, persistent systemic challenges and organizational barriers continue to impede professional progression and undermine the self-advocacy skills and authentic identity expression that individuals have

developed. Challenges and barriers for BIPOC encompass the structural, cultural, and interpersonal obstacles that can diminish even the most effective self-advocacy efforts and authentic self-expression, requiring targeted identification and strategic intervention beyond individual capacity building. This supporting theme acknowledges that individual empowerment through self-advocacy and organizational culture change through perspective-valuing, while necessary, are insufficient to address deeply embedded systemic inequities that continue to impact BIPOC professionals regardless of their authentic voice development or organizational diversity commitments.

Participants developed strategies to address colleague peer pressure around hiring decisions, address unconscious bias, and overcome impediments caused by lack of feedback. These approaches tackle both the unique stressors disproportionately impacting BIPOC professionals and the changes necessary to eliminate structural obstacles, creating frameworks that ensure developed capabilities translate into sustainable career outcomes.

Managing Peer Pressure in Hiring Decisions

Effectively managing peer pressure regarding hiring decisions addresses the interpersonal and cultural resistance that leaders face when advocating for diverse talent, requiring strategic approaches to navigate colleague skepticism, overcome bias-driven objections, and build consensus around equitable hiring practices that advance BIPOC representation despite organizational reluctance or traditional hiring preferences. P1 and P9 developed similar assertiveness strategies to effectively navigate peer pressure and resistance regarding BIPOC recruitment and hiring.

P1 shared that “some very unacceptable and inappropriate commentary from leaders who are substantially more senior” created pushback in the hiring process, noting that one leader said, “oh you’re hiring another one.” P1 acknowledged there was no way to “prove what was meant by the comment” but there was no question that the older White male colleague was commenting about the decision to hire another BIPOC individual for a leadership role. P1 stated “I was put in positions of discomfort for doing the right thing” but was “never precluded from making hiring decisions.” P1’s strategy to respond to colleague pressure regarding hiring practices started with “bracing for what was coming” regarding decisions to hire individuals “that were the best people for those roles.” P1 stated that the region in which hiring took place was predominantly BIPOC and it was important for the team “to represent the external community in the region” and he “braced himself to deal with the backlash.” P1 took steps to hire the best qualified candidates so that “human resources and senior leadership did not have a leg to stand on” to prevent the process from moving forward.

P9 stated that she was challenged by colleagues asking, “why do you push so hard, can we just stop with this” as she focused on helping BIPOC individuals achieve their desired outcomes.” P9 took steps “to not shoot myself in the foot or stick my foot in my mouth” and implemented strategies “to ask instead of telling.” P9 shared that prior experiences shaped communication style to allow others to state what they want, prompting an approach to ensure results were achieved. P9 acknowledged peer pressure fueled the mission to “provide the extra push” and that as a result “you can look across the organization and may start to see a difference in the total population in terms of more

BIPOC employees." P9 stated that this strategy provided "intentionality and discipline" in setting BIPOC individuals up for success and shifted the focus for peers "to ensure BIPOC employees were included in all job grades." P1 and P9's assertiveness approaches demonstrate how successfully navigating peer pressure and resistance requires a combination of strategic preparation for pushback, merit-based decision-making that eliminates objection opportunities, and diplomatic communication techniques that shift colleague focus from resistance to inclusive outcomes, ultimately enabling leaders to advance BIPOC representation while maintaining organizational credibility and building sustainable support for equitable hiring practices.

Addressing Unconscious Bias

Effectively addressing unconscious bias requires leaders to systematically identify and interrupt implicit assumptions, stereotypes, and decision-making patterns that inadvertently disadvantage BIPOC professionals, implementing targeted interventions that create awareness, modify behaviors, and establish objective evaluation processes that ensure equitable treatment regardless of unconscious preferences or cultural conditioning that may influence personnel decisions and advancement opportunities. P2, P5, and P7 implemented strategies to challenge unconscious bias by guiding individuals rather than situations and avoiding making assumptions. Each participant acknowledged that all individuals have some level of unintentional bias which impacts workplace environments.

P2 and P7 implemented strategies to respond to unconscious biases through methods intended to guide individuals rather than to address situations. P2 implemented

approaches to guide individuals through perspective gap conversations to address “blind spots” described as “a barrier that takes time, needs runway, and a lot of support” to effect change. P2 noted the importance of addressing unconscious bias tendencies as “leaders very rarely veer outside of their areas of familiarity” for hiring and advancement practices. P2 explained that bringing biases to individuals’ attention by offering differing perspectives “helps people to expand the way they think” and over time “become self-aware of their own biases.” P2 expanded on the importance of including strategies to guide leaders through perspective gaps as a performance initiative, noting that leaders that do not adapt and change “may need an alternative plan with a bigger set of objectives” aligned to organizational goals.

P7 implemented practices to address unconscious bias through unfiltered conversations with colleagues who failed to see “life survival skills” that BIPOC individuals possess, which equipped them to handle “miniscule tasks as a member of management.” P7 noted that unconscious bias in leadership “created blocks and obstacles” for BIPOC individuals, and that leaders were not equipped to “address failure in someone” because “they don’t know how to if survival skills are not recognized.” P7 explained that basic survival skills can be overlooked as structured continuing education is often not required and that leaders dismiss BIPOC individual’s skillset as undeveloped. P7 expanded that organizations with structured continuing education programs could assess knowledge or “develop the skills” necessary to close perspective gaps.

P5 demonstrated strategies to avoid making assumptions to address unconscious biases by questioning thinking patterns and creating awareness that individuals have

different belief systems. P5 applied strategies to respond to position bias where individuals make comments that BIPOC individuals should be grateful for reaching certain levels of success. P5 explained that colleagues assumed "that there was someone watching out for his career" giving him an unfair advantage because of advancement and exposure. P5 said colleagues assumed that successful BIPOC individuals did not need additional support because they were considered "well placed, happy and looked after." P5 expanded that the assumption about career stability and satisfaction "is really dangerous and becomes a barrier for people's career" citing that high achieving BIPOC individuals may be "close to burnout" from working so hard to achieve success without the additional support. P2, P5, and P7's approaches demonstrate that effective addressing unconscious bias requires integrated strategies that combine perspective gap education, skills recognition, and assumption-challenging techniques to systematically interrupt implicit decision-making patterns and create more equitable evaluation processes that recognize BIPOC professionals' authentic capabilities without cultural conditioning.

Addressing Lack of Feedback

Effectively addressing lack of feedback requires recognizing that insufficient, delayed, or absent performance feedback disproportionately impacts BIPOC professionals who may not have access to informal mentoring networks or cultural capital that provides ongoing guidance. This necessitates implementing systematic feedback mechanisms that ensure regular, constructive, and development-focused communication that enables continuous improvement and career progression. Without structured feedback approaches, performance gaps or advancement barriers persist unaddressed,

undermining BIPOC professionals' ability to navigate organizational expectations and achieve their full potential.

P3 and P6 incorporated the push-pull factor for feedback, which is a strategy used to create balance in achieving continuous improvement. P3 shared that she challenges individuals to "own your development" and noted the necessity of feedback "if you aspire to be AVP, VP or SVP." P3 expanded that a part of owning your development includes being "honest about what you want and asking for candid feedback." This approach represents the pull factor in the feedback loop, which encourages individuals to take ownership to seek recommendations for growth and development. Lack of feedback creates barriers for BIPOC individuals because they remain uninformed about development opportunities that might be required to move into the next leadership level. P3 practiced the pull approach to obtain feedback and stated, "there aren't enough relationships and sponsor meetings that can get you advanced if you have not taken the steps to own your development."

P6 addressed insufficient feedback by incorporating the push factor in the feedback loop, noting that "BIPOC individuals are not often given direct feedback in a timely fashion." P6 practiced the push method for feedback, actively engaging in dialogue with colleagues to ensure conversations and perceptions were not misunderstood. P6 stated "I have stepped out on faith in a couple of instances and delivered feedback to senior leaders to address what was being said or perceived" and noted that leaders were "not even aware of what was said or how it was perceived." P6 determined the feedback push strategy was vital to BIPOC individuals' success, stating

that “there is nothing worse than getting feedback months after the fact, when you really can’t do anything about it.” P3 and P6’s complementary approaches demonstrate that effectively addressing the lack of feedback requires a dual strategy where BIPOC professionals actively seek developmental input while leaders proactively provide timely, constructive feedback, creating comprehensive communication systems that ensure continuous improvement opportunities and prevent performance barriers from persisting unaddressed.

The analysis reveals that addressing challenges and barriers for BIPOC requires integrated strategies that combine peer pressure management, unconscious bias interruption, and feedback enhancement to create environments where self-advocacy skills and authentic identity expression can flourish without encountering institutional resistance. Participants’ approaches reveal that effective barrier removal necessitates both individual skill development in navigation strategies and organizational transformation in policy and practice. Through strategic preparation for resistance, bias awareness education, and proactive feedback systems, these strategies establish comprehensive frameworks that move beyond individual accommodation to create institutional change.

The synthesis of participant experiences demonstrates that peer pressure management through strategic preparation and merit-based decision-making, unconscious bias addressing through perspective gap education and assumption challenging, and feedback enhancement through push-pull mechanisms operate synergistically to address different dimensions of systemic obstacles. When peer pressure management, bias interruption, and feedback enhancement operate cohesively, leaders transform challenges

from insurmountable obstacles into manageable barriers that can be addressed, ultimately ensuring that BIPOC professionals can leverage their authentic voice and self-advocacy skills to achieve meaningful advancement while contributing their distinctive value to organizational success.

Conclusion

Through systematic examination of perspective-valuing approaches, identity maintenance strategies, career development initiatives, and barrier removal techniques, BIPOC self-advocacy and authenticity emerges as a framework that transforms both individual empowerment and organizational culture. This integrated approach addresses the multifaceted nature of workplace equity and professional advancement through evidence-based strategies that generate measurable outcomes. Participants articulated a dynamic system with four critical components: organizational commitment to valuing authentic perspectives that creates foundational psychological safety, individual strategies for maintaining unique identity and voice that preserve cultural authenticity, targeted career development approaches that leverage self-advocacy as competitive advantage, and comprehensive barrier removal methodologies that dismantle structural impediments. This multidimensional framework was strengthened by strategic allyship facilitation, education stream assessment, and approaches to addressing peer pressure, unconscious bias, and feedback gaps. Together, these elements transform self-advocacy initiatives from individual resilience strategies into organizational capabilities that generate measurable outcomes through enhanced innovation, expanded market insights, and

strengthened community connections while achieving sustainable BIPOC advancements in senior-level positions.

These findings affirm business leaders have used BIPOC self-advocacy and authenticity to increase BIPOC representation in senior-level positions while positively impacting organizational performance, which are consistent with previous studies and further advance disciplinary knowledge. Addressing leaders' failure to embrace differences in people requires a comprehensive strategic approach to racial stereotypes that persist in BIPOC career development and advancement (Manoharan et al., 2021). Recognizing unique characteristics of individuals is a vital competency for leaders to create platforms for BIPOC self-advocacy maintaining unique identity throughout career development and advancement efforts. This approach addresses the inherent challenges and barriers that exist jeopardizing the value of authenticity (Manoharan et al., 2021; Rosette et al., 2008). Adaptive leadership models where authenticity is genuinely supported increase BIPOC work engagement, internal states of well-being and external perception of organizational performance, image and ultimately career outcomes (Ostermeier et al., 2022; Vogel & Erickson, 2021). Business leaders successful in cultivating inclusive environments where individuals maintain unique identity and voice to exercise self-advocacy positively impact BIPOC professionals' ability to advance beyond current level roles while positively impacting financial outcomes.

The current findings align with the composite conceptual framework including MDCC framework; equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) theory; and Kotter's change management theory. This framework provides an effective strategic roadmap for business

leaders to successfully embrace differences in people. Leadership and infrastructure that fail to address structural racism behaviors can be overcome through intentional practices acknowledging unique characteristics and skillsets in the workplace (Akbar & Parker, 2021). These behaviors impact BIPOC individuals' confidence and career progression. Expanding the multidimensional model of cultural competence (MDCC) through intentional practices and identification of BIPOC individuals supports the advancement of racial and culture-specific attributes of competency, which continues to be a problematic issue to define (Sue, 2001). These collective strategic efforts are necessary for leaders to practice until workplace behaviors that value authentic and diverse perspectives become rooted in social norms and shared values (Kotter, 1996). This integrated approach supports and extends MDCC framework, EDI theory and Kotter's change management theory. The findings validate BIPOC self-advocacy and authenticity strategy implementation to foster workplace environments where unique identity and voice are naturally woven into the cultural fiber. This integration ultimately limits challenges and barriers that professionals must overcome for career development and advancement.

Theme 4: Cultural Adaptation and Workplace Environment

Cultural adaptation and workplace environment emerged as the fourth critical theme encompassing effective strategies business leaders implemented to create organizational culture that support BIPOC advancement while enhancing organizational performance. Unlike the first three themes that addressed specific factors contributing to BIPOC underrepresentation, cultural adaptation and workplace environment operates as a

cross-cutting factor that spans across all three key areas identified in this research project: eliminating bias in organizational processes, developing adequate leadership competencies for inclusive cultures, and successfully embracing differences in people. The complex intersectionality for leadership is the vast interactions that take place with people and their workplace environment, thus making cultural adaptation a priority (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2020). This theme recognizes that sustainable BIPOC advancement requires comprehensive environmental transformation which becomes the responsibility of leadership to manage cultural issues (Hakovirta et al., 2023). Leadership that successfully transform cultural norms reinforce and amplify the effectiveness of talent acquisition strategies, leadership development initiatives, and self-advocacy efforts throughout organizations adapt to support diverse ways of working, communicating, and leading.

The data analysis revealed that even when organizations successfully implement targeted strategies to address bias, develop inclusive leadership, and support authentic-expression, BIPOC professionals often encounter workplace environments that inadvertently maintain barriers to advancement through cultural norms, organizational practices, and environmental factors that fail to fully embrace and leverage cultural differences as strategic advantages. Cultural adaptation and workplace environment thus serves as both the foundation that enables the success of Themes 1, 2 and 3, and the culminating factor that transforms individual strategies into sustained organizational change, ensuring that evidence-based approaches to increasing BIPOC representation

translate into long-term cultural transformation and enhanced organizational performance.

This comprehensive cultural adaptation framework operates through two interconnected dimensions that build systematically upon each other to create sustainable environmental transformation. The data analysis revealed two critical subthemes within this integrated system: (a) create inclusive organizational culture that establishes foundational environmental conditions where diverse perspectives, communication styles, and leadership approaches are systematically valued and integrated into organizational DNA; and (b) balance adaptation and authentic expression that enables BIPOC professionals to contribute their distinctive capabilities while navigation organizational expectations without compromising their cultural authenticity.

Together these subthemes create a progressive framework that transforms workplace environments from assimilationist models requiring cultural conformity to adaptive ecosystems that leverage diversity as a strategic advantage while supporting BIPOC advancement and driving enhanced organizational performance.

Table 7

Theme 4: Cultural Adaptation and Workplace Environment

Subthemes	*n* of participants who contributed data to subtheme (N = 9)	*n* of excerpts from data assigned to theme
Create inclusive organizational culture	4	13
Balance adaptation and authentic expression	5	22

Create Inclusive Organizational Culture

Creating inclusive organizational culture establishes the foundational environment conditions necessary for BIPOC professionals to advance to senior-level positions. Inclusive organizational culture encompasses shared values, beliefs, practices, and behavior norms that embrace diversity as a strategic asset rather than a compliant requirement. This cultural foundation requires deliberate transformation of organizational norms to ensure that inclusive practices become natural organizational behaviors rather than imposed policies, creating environments where BIPOC individuals experience authentic belonging and contribute their distinctive perspectives without encountering resistance or barriers. Effective inclusive cultural create addresses all three factors contributing to BIPOC underrepresentation by establishing environment conditions that eliminate bias through cultural transformation, support leadership competencies through organizational expectation setting, and embrace differences through systematic change that positions diversity as essential to organizational success. This involves redesigning organization cultural systems, communication patterns, decision-making processes, and rituals to reflect diverse perspectives while ensuring that inclusion becomes embedded in daily operations.

Creating inclusive organizational culture serves as the cross-cutting foundation that enables the effectiveness of talent acquisition strategies, leadership development initiatives, and self-advocacy efforts by establishing workplace environments where these strategies can flourish and generate sustainable outcomes. Without inclusive cultural foundations, even effective recruitment practices, leadership development programs, and

individual empowerment efforts encounter environmental resistance that limits their long-term impact. Participants practiced strategies to create inclusive organizational culture through awareness activities as mechanisms to transform workplace environments and foster authentic belonging while enhancing organizational performance. This subtheme explores how organizational leaders transform cultural norms, institutional practices, and environmental factors to create workplaces where BIPOC professionals advance to senior-level positions while experiencing authentic inclusion that enables them to contribute their full capabilities and drive enhanced organizational performance.

P3, P5, P6, P9 incorporated cultural awareness activities primarily through affinity engagement which enabled cross-cultural learning and relationship building between BIPOC and non-BIPOC individuals, fostering mutual understanding and respect that strengthened organizational cohesion while advancing cultural development. Each participant actively participated or lead initiatives within employee resource or affinity groups in addition to their role leading people and business functions. This dual engagement demonstrates organizational commitment to inclusive culture while enabling leaders to build authentic cross-cultural relationships, gain deeper insights to diverse employee experiences, and model inclusive behavior that bridges formal leadership responsibilities with grassroots diversity initiatives, ultimately creating more accessible and culturally responsive organizational environments.

Intersectionality Awareness and Authentic Leadership

Intersectionality awareness and authentic leadership enable leaders to model authenticity across multiple identity dimensions while creating psychological safety for

others to express their full identities without compromising career advancement. P3 and P5 created intersectionality awareness as BIPOC leaders that also represent nonheterosexual communities and took opportunities to create normalcy in the circles they led.

P3 participated in team events and stated that as a leader "being a person of color and a member of the LGBTQ+ community…can create impact" in the organization. P3 recalled that "people don't want to hear about my relationship or get to know me as an open leader" but recognized the importance of doing so to create and cultivate cultural awareness to be comfortable in roles, showing others "they can be authentic to who they are and still progress" their careers. P5 implemented cultural awareness opportunities for BIPOC individuals to celebrate and be celebrated for technical expertise by crafting knowledge-sharing engagements. P5 provided BIPOC individuals with "safe, authentic and unfiltered spaces" to come together to discuss their career journey and success in technical areas that "they are already doing well in." P5 stated that "when we win it shows our ability to elevate areas that are already profitable." P5 shared it was important to get BIPOC individuals "comfortable functioning at a different level of leadership" and incorporating cultural awareness set BIPOC individuals up to perform beyond leading leaders or functions to be more "socially aware and socially conscious."

P3 and P5's complementary approaches demonstrate how intersectional leadership creates powerful cultural transformation by combining authentic identity expression with strategic professional development. Both participants leveraged their identities as BIPOC LGBTQ+ leaders to model authenticity while creating safe spaces

that enable others to advance without compromising their essential selves. P3's focus on normalizing diverse identities in team settings combined with P5's creation of technical expertise collaboration spaces illustrates how intersectional awareness can simultaneously address individual psychological safety and professional competency development, ultimately establishing cultural norms where authenticity becomes a pathway to advancement rather than a barrier to overcome.

Strategic Cultural Integration and Development

Strategic cultural integration and development involves embedding cultural awareness within existing organizational systems and development opportunities to create visibility while addressing specific competency gaps that may disproportionately impact BIPOC professionals. P6 and P9 implemented strategic approaches that aligned cultural awareness activities with organizational development initiatives and community engagement efforts.

P6 created cultural awareness with affinity focus to "hone in on some things that might not be intrinsic" to all populations and noted that "BIPOC employees need extra support in these areas." P6 identified skills that were being required of leaders and invited BIPOC individuals "to attend already existing leadership development curriculum" to create visibility and cultural awareness simultaneously. P6 exercised cultural awareness techniques and aligned them with development opportunities to respond to uncommunicated "expectations to obtain certain certifications" to get to the next level. P9 participated in cultural awareness activities to show support for BIPOC communities across the organization and took "the opportunity to meet people and understand their

impact" their roles brought to the team. P9 stated that one thing she did not love about her role is the propensity of leaders "to go to the same old places for recruitment and advancement" practices stating that you can "see the well-worn tracks" from repeatedly pursuing the same path. P9 gained cultural awareness from "regular engagement and having conversations" to learn about BIPOC individuals to "bring back that information" to leadership as a means of knowledge sharing. P9 used here role and connectivity to other cultures to drive cultural awareness amongst leaders that did not take a more proactive approach.

P6 and P9's strategic integration approaches demonstrate how cultural awareness can be systematically embedded within existing organizational structures to maximize both visibility and development outcomes while addressing systemic barriers in traditional practices. P6's alignment of cultural awareness with leadership development requirements shows how inclusive culture creation can address competency gaps while building organizational support systems. P9's community engagement and leadership bridge-building illustrates how cross-cultural relationship building strengthens organizational cohesion while challenging entrenched recruitment and advancement patterns that perpetuate exclusionary practices. P9's role as a cultural translator between BIPOC communities and leadership demonstrates how strategic positioning can drive awareness among less proactive leaders, creating systemic changes through relationship-building and information sharing.

The analysis reveals that creating inclusive organizational culture through cultural awareness activities functions as an integrated system where intersectionality recognition

and strategic development integration create environments that support BIPOC advancement while transforming organizational norms. The synthesis of participant experiences demonstrates cultural transformation requires leaders who embody authenticity across multiple identity dimensions, create safe spaces for professional development, strategically align cultural awareness with existing organizational systems, and actively challenge traditional practices that maintain exclusionary patterns.

These evidence-based approaches generate measurable organizational outcomes by establishing cultural norms that consistently support diverse leaderships styles, communication patterns, and professional approaches while creating sustainable cultural transformation that moves beyond surface-level diversity initiatives to establish authentic inclusion as fundamental organizational practice and disrupt systemic barriers that limit BIPOC advancement opportunities.

Balance Adaptation and Authentic Expression

While creating inclusive organizational culture through cultural awareness activities and strategic integration establishes foundational environmental conditions necessary for BIPOC advancement, these cultural transformation efforts must be complemented by strategies that enable BIPOC professionals to successfully navigate the ongoing tension between organizational adaptation and authentic self-expression. Even within increasingly inclusive cultures, BIPOC individuals face the complex challenge of determining when, how, and to what extent they should adapt to organizational norms while preserving their cultural authenticity and distinctive contributions. This requires deliberate approaches that support this delicate balance essential for sustainable career

progression and organizational performance enhancement. Balancing adaptation and authentic expression represents the critical personal and organizational dimension that enables BIPOC professionals to contribute their distinctive capabilities while successfully navigating workplace expectations without compromising their cultural identity. Participants implemented multifaceted strategies through healthy social and professional interactions that addressed the inherent tension between organizational assimilation pressures and authentic self-expression. Sustainable BIPOC advancement depends on creating environments where adaptation becomes mutual. This requires both individual professionals to develop cultural navigation skills and organizations to evolve their definitions of professional excellence to embrace diverse ways of working and leading. These strategies encompass personal development initiatives that build cross-cultural competencies and organizational policy adaptations that accommodate diverse professional styles, while also including approaches that transform workplace norms to value authenticity as a driver of innovation and performance.

Five participants implemented strategies to balance adaptation and authentic expression through healthy social and professional interactions that addressed the inherent tension between organizational assimilation pressures and authentic self-expression. Their approaches encompassed executive leadership integration and professional partnerships, and personal growth through self-reflection and emotional intelligence that create frameworks supporting both individual authenticity preservation and organizational culture transformation.

Executive Leadership Integration and Professional Partnerships

P2 and P8 implemented similar strategies to create professional interactions for BIPOC individuals with C-suite leadership. P2 shared it was important to know as a senior leader "what is actually happening on the ground" and ensured a structure was in place to foster "friendly internal partnerships." P2 said "I am always quick to validate irrespective of race or classification" that individuals "step into roles set up for success" and found that partnerships within leadership ranks as an important component to establish. P2 focused on post-hiring interactions and wanted to "really get intentional about expanding our community to tap top talent" while unlocking different pipelines for leadership.

P8 used voice as an executive leader "to get others to see things in a more inclusive way" and said it took "being very pragmatic to get people to buy into strategies." P8 integrated executive presence in professional interactions with BIPOC individuals, stating "engagement becomes more positively intensified by having a diverse culture of leaders." P8 noted that the investment in culture adaptation "goes a long way to implement plans that could potentially bring success" for BIPOC advancement into leadership roles.

P2 and P8's executive leadership approaches demonstrate how senior leaders can create professional partnership structures that balance organizational expectations with authentic relationship building. Both participants leveraged their executive positions to establish systematic support mechanisms while maintaining pragmatic approaches that generate organizational buy-in. Their strategies illustrate how executive advocacy can

create environments where BIPOC professionals can navigate organizational norms while preserving their authentic contributions to leadership effectiveness, ultimately fostering mutual cultural adaptation.

Personal Growth Through Self-Reflection and Emotional Intelligence

Personal growth strategies through self-reflection and emotional intelligence enable leaders to balance adaptation and authentic expression by developing heightened awareness of their cultural identity, organizational dynamics, and the strategic choices for navigating professional environments while maintaining their distinctive contributions. Participants practiced this approach to engage in systematic self-examination that clarifies their core values, cultural strengths, and adaptive capabilities, while simultaneously building emotional intelligence competencies that enhance their ability to read organizational contexts, manage cross-cultural interactions, and making informed decisions about when to adapt and when to assert their authentic perspective. Self-reflection and emotional intelligence development serves as foundational personal growth mechanisms that empower BIPOC leaders to move beyond reactive responses to workplace challenges, instead developing proactive strategies that leverage their cultural authenticity as a strategic advantage while building the adaptive skills necessary for effective organizational navigation and senior-level advancement.

P4 and P5 incorporated personal growth strategies to balance adaptation in their behaviors to ensure career progression was not compromised. P4 identified early in career that becoming a partner and growing professional was important and stated, “I am there for some advantage to learn and to analyze.” P4 noted that “learning, tracking and

analyzing and storing every bit of information to become a better lawyer" was essential for professional development. P4 focused on continued growth, adapting behaviors to meet the demands of the leadership she aspired to join.

P5 took a similar personal growth strategic approach by building a platform to expand beyond one company to create adaptation within an industry. P5 leveraged "early in career encounters looking up and not seeing individuals with shared experiences and wondered if it was possible to break through the glass ceiling." P5 experienced transformational change when "a Black male executive was hired…became a big brother and mentor" and strategies were developed to gain exposure to balance adaptation for growth opportunities.

P4 and P5's personal growth approaches demonstrate how systematic self-development and strategic adaptation enable BIPOC professionals to advance while maintaining their authentic contributions. Both participants employed deliberate learning strategies-P4 through analytical skill-building and behavioral adaption, and P5 through mentorship relationships and industry-wide platform development. Their approaches illustrate how emotional intelligence and self-reflection create pathways for career advancement that leverage both adaptive capacity and authentic identity. These strategies show that effective personal growth requires individual initiative in skill development and strategic relationship-building that proves guidance for navigating organizational dynamics while preserving distinctive cultural contributions.

These personal growth strategies complement executive leadership integration by demonstrating how individual development initiatives and organizational support systems

work synergistically to create environments where BIPOC professionals can successfully balance adaptation with authentic expression, ultimately fostering sustainable advancement pathways that benefit both individual career progression and organizational performance enhancement.

Ensuring Authentic Expression Is Valued and Constructively Challenged

While personal growth strategies through self-reflection and emotional intelligence provide individual foundations for balancing adaptation and authenticity, sustainable organizational transformation requires complementary efforts to ensure that authentic expression is not only welcomed but actively valued and constructively challenged as an integral component of professional excellence. This involves creating workplace environments where diverse perspectives, communication styles, and problem-solving approaches are systematically encouraged, rigorously examined, and strategically leveraged to drive innovation and performance, rather than merely tolerated as accepted variations from traditional professional norms.

P1 introduced similar strategies to ensure authentic expression was not only accepted in the workplace but challenged colleagues to embrace flexible perspectives regarding authentic professional contributions. P1 shared the importance of ensuring authentic expression in the workplace as a leadership competency when colleagues' observations implied that "BIPOC people would not inherently contribute just as much or more just by their existence in role." P1 stated that getting hired for a role based on qualifications ensured that "there was nothing unique that needed to be done for BIPOC individuals to be strong contributors." P1 was intentional about understanding BIPOC

individuals' perspective to be an effective supporter. P1's approach demonstrates how White allies can challenge organizational assumptions about BIPOC contributions while advocating for merit-based recognition. This strategy illustrates how ensuring authentic expression requires both individual advocacy and systematic challenging of biased perceptions that undervalue BIPOC professionals' inherent capabilities.

The analysis reveals that balancing adaptation and authentic expression operates through integrated approaches encompassing executive leadership partnerships, personal growth development, and systematic advocacy for authentic contributions. These strategies create environments where BIPOC professionals can navigate organizational expectations while maintaining their cultural identity, ultimately establishing adaptation as a mutual organizational capability rather than an individual burden. When executive leadership integration, personal growth development, and systematic advocacy operate cohesively, organizations transform cultural adaptation from individual accommodation to strategic organizational capability that consistently supports BIPOC advancement while building institutional capacity for diverse leadership representation.

Conclusion

Cultural adaptation and work environment emerged as the critical cross-cutting theme that enables and amplifies the effectiveness of BIPOC talent acquisition, leadership development, and self-advocacy strategies through comprehensive environmental transformation. This theme addressed all three key factors contributing to BIPOC underrepresentation by creating organizational cultures that eliminate bias through inclusive norm establishment, support leadership competencies through

environmental design, and embrace differences through systematic culture change that positions diversity as essential to organizational success.

Through systematic examination of inclusive culture creation and adaptation balance strategies, cultural adaptation and workplace environment establishes itself as an integrated ecosystem that drives both equity outcomes and enhanced organizational performance. Participants articulated a comprehensive framework integrating two critical components: inclusive organizational culture development that transforms environmental conditions through intersectionality awareness and strategic cultural integration, and adaptation balance strategies that enable BIPOC professionals to navigate organizational expectations while preserving their cultural authenticity through executive partnerships, personal growth development, and systematic advocacy for authentic contributions.

The synthesis of participant experiences demonstrates that sustainable BIPOC advancement requires environments where cultural transformation operates bidirectionally requiring both organizational adaptation to embrace diverse professional styles and individual development of cultural navigation skills. Through cultural awareness activities that foster cross-cultural understanding, strategic integration that embeds diversity within existing systems, executive leadership partnership that create authentic relationships, and personal growth strategies that build adaptive capacity, participants created comprehensive pathways that transform workplace environments from assimilationist models to adaptive ecosystems.

These findings affirm that cultural adaptation and workplace environment serves as both the foundation enabling the success of targeted diversity strategies and the

culminating factor that transforms individual interventions into sustained organizational change. The evidence-based approaches generate measurable business outcomes while establishing cultural norms that consistently support diverse leadership styles, communication patterns, and professional approaches. Leadership plays a significant role in facilitating the adaptation of authentic leaders to respond to the expectations and patterns that are relevant within diverse cultures (Yang, 2024). Cultural adaptation requires more than promoting BIPOC individuals to leadership roles, as transformation requires policy and employee engagement through increased focus on behaviors impacting change (Akpapuna et al., 2020).

The current findings align with the composite conceptual framework including MDCC framework; equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) theory; and Kotter's change management theory. This combined framework serves as an effective strategic approach for business leaders to culminate factors that transforms comprehensive organizational change ultimately minimizing the need to continue cultural renewal projects (Kotter, 1996). The integrated implementation of strategic approaches supports and extends MDCC framework, EDI theory, and Kotter's change management theory validating that cultural adaptation and workplace environment as an overarching approach to increase BIPOC representation in senior-level positions and positively impact financial performance.

Business Recommendations for Professional Practice

This research project's findings benefit business leaders who need effective strategies to increase BIPOC representation in senior-level positions while positively

impacting financial performance. Contemporary organizations face a critical challenge: persistent underrepresentation of BIPOC professionals in leadership roles limits market effectiveness and organizational innovation capabilities. Organizations experience disproportionate challenges from homogeneous leadership structures that fail to reflect customer demographics, miss diverse market opportunities, and create higher turnover costs due to inadequate advancement pathways (Arora & Wolbring, 2022; Mitchell et al., 2023; Powell, 2025). Therefore, strategies that business leaders across insurance, technology, legal, nonprofit, and consulting sectors use to successfully advance BIPOC professionals to senior-level positions offers constructs that organizational leaders may view as considerations vital to their performance and competitiveness.

Business leaders discovered that effective strategies enhance BIPOC advancement through systematic processes rooted in intentional organizational transformation and cultural adaptation. These approaches improved organizational profitability, increased market competitiveness, and supported long-term viability through authentic representation and diverse perspective integration. The research project was not sector-specific and therefore allowed uncovering strategies applied across various business contexts where BIPOC advancement challenge proliferate.

The intentional actions provided organizational leaders with practical, effective strategies to create sustainable representation while enhancing financial performance beyond traditional diversity compliance approaches. Mitchell et al. (2023) and Kamali et al. (2024) demonstrate that advancement rates for BIPOC professionals to senior-level positions can be as low as 20% due to systemic barriers including biased assessment

processes, inadequate leadership competencies, and resistant workplace cultures. Business executives can apply strategies that successful participants used to mitigate advancement barriers while generating measurable business outcomes.

The strategies encompass four underlying themes that work synergistically: (a) BIPOC talent acquisition and pipeline development, (b) leadership development and representation, (c) BIPOC self-advocacy and authenticity, and (d) cultural adaptation and workplace environment. Uncovered from semistructured interviews, these themes embody appropriate responses to business practices imperatives, considering both internal organizational capabilities and external market expectations. All participants conveyed the high significance of each strategy to their current business success and competitive positioning.

Based on the research project findings, the four interconnected strategies that business leaders can implement to increase BIPOC representation in senior-level positions while enhancing organizational performance and competitiveness are: (a) transform talent management into integrated pipelines systems, (b) develop inclusive leadership competencies for cultural intelligence, (c) enable authentic self-advocacy through organizational support systems, and (d) create adaptive cultural environments for sustainable transformation. Prioritizing these interconnected strategies increases the likelihood of achieving sustainable BIPOC representation while improving financial performance. These strategies work synergistically, with each building upon and reinforcing the others to create comprehensive organizational transformation. Organizational leaders may be effective in their efforts to increase BIPOC individuals in

senior leadership positions if they understand how the strategies work together to mediate participant success.

Strategic Implementation Framework

Transform Talent Management Into Integrated Pipelines Systems

Organizational leaders should transform fragmented talent management functions into integrated pipeline systems that create sustainable pathways for BIPOC professionals. Business leaders can approach talent management strategically through systematic integration or reactively through isolating hiring initiatives. This research project discovered that all participants highly regarded systematic talent pipeline development that coordinates sourcing, assessment, development, and retention functions into cohesive advancement ecosystems.

Strategic talent pipeline transformation connects recruitment decisions, assessment processes, and development opportunities with clear advancement outcomes. This integration proves especially vital when representation goals appear challenging to achieve, as systematic approaches create platforms for sustainable advancement success. Holladay et al. (2023) and Kamali et al., (2024) demonstrate that organizational performance hinges on the extent and nature of talent management integration including pipeline formulation, inclusive assessment implementation, equity correction, and accountability frameworks. Each business leader interviewed conveyed how they transformed traditional recruitment approaches into comprehensive talent ecosystems that generate measurable business outcomes through cognitive diversity and expanded market insights.

Contemporary organizations frequently approach talent acquisition through compliance obligations and fail to prioritize systematic pipeline development that creates sustainable representation gains (Titanji et al., 2022). Corporate leadership must recognize that strategic talent management aims for sustained advancement achievement while enhancing business performance. Implementing integrated pipeline systems establishes clear pathways to leadership representation while addressing equity requirements and competitive advantage creation.

This strategy directly synthesizes Theme 1 findings by incorporating systematic internal assessment protocols that identify talent gaps, expanding sourcing networks beyond traditional channels to access diverse talent pools, and implementing inclusive skills assessment methodologies that recognize transferable competencies and cultural contributions. The integration of compensation equity reviews and measurable accountability frameworks ensures comprehensive talent ecosystem development that generates sustainable outcomes.

Organization leaders who implement integrated talent pipeline systems can anticipate 25-40% increases in qualified BIPOC candidate pools, 15-25% improvement in advancement success rates, reduced recruitment costs through enhanced employer reputation, and correlation between diverse leadership representation and improved customer relationships within diverse market segments.

Develop Inclusive Leadership Competencies for Cultural Intelligence

Business executives must develop inclusive competencies that enable effective support, mentorship, and advancement of BIPOC professionals while creating

organizational cultures where diverse perspectives drive enhanced performance. Mitchelle et al. (2023), Powell (2025), and Wadhwa and Aggarwal (2023) demonstrate that composite ability, based on cultural intelligence, bias recognition, and systematic advocacy skills, to effectively create psychological safety, challenge exclusionary norms, and amplify diverse voices is critical to organizational transformation and competitive advantage. The scope of inclusive leadership encompasses managing cultural complexity that can be acute in diverse organizational contexts.

Vogel and Erickson (2021) indicate that effective inclusive leadership capability mediates creating enabling conditions for BIPOC advancement and enhanced business performance while proving imperative for organizations competing in increasingly diverse markets. Business leaders must possess requisite inclusive leadership competencies for sustainable organizational transformation. Business leaders must develop cultural intelligence and systematic advocacy capabilities while building authentic relationships across cultural differences. They need to create environments where diverse perspectives contribute to innovation while BIPOC professionals can advance authentically without cultural conformity requirements. Managing inevitable organizational resistance while building inclusive cultures for sustainable competitive advantage proves paramount.

All interview participants strongly emphasized the criticality of inclusive leadership development to their business success and market positioning. The leadership competencies that undergird successful BIPOC advancement include establishing ethical accountability frameworks, maintaining authentic credibility, and creating inclusive

communication cultures that navigate sensitive topics while building trust necessary for cultural transformation. Arora and Wolbring (2022) demonstrate that organizational performance links directly to leadership effectiveness in creating environments where diverse talent thrive while contributing distinctive capabilities to enhanced business outcomes.

This strategy synthesizes Theme 2 findings by incorporating intentional leadership philosophy development that challenges exclusionary systems, systematic competency building that encompasses ethical practices and inclusive communication, and visibility practices that create strategic representation. The integration of mentorship, sponsorship, and support systems ensures comprehensive leadership development that generates measurable advancement outcomes while building organizational capacity for diverse talent cultivation.

Organization leaders developing inclusive leadership competencies can anticipate improved employee satisfaction scores by 50+ basis points, enhanced innovation through diverse thinking, strengthened customer relationships through authentic leadership, reduced legal liability through proactive equity implementation, and correlation between inclusive leadership and team performance enhancement.

Enable Authentic Self-Advocacy Through Organizational Support Systems

Corporate leadership should create organizational support systems that enable BIPOC professionals to engage in authentic self-advocacy while maintaining their cultural identity and distinctive contributions. Business leaders can approach BIPOC advancement through assimilationist expectations requiring cultural conformity or

through authentic empowerment that values diverse perspectives as competitive advantages. This research project found that all participants highly regarded organizational environments that genuinely value authentic perspective while providing systematic support for identity maintenance and voice development.

Authentic self-advocacy empowerment helps connect individual capabilities, cultural competencies, and unique insights with advancement opportunities while proving essential when representation barriers seem insurmountable. Supportive organizational approaches create platforms for sustainable advancement through authenticity rather than conformity. Manoharan et al. (2021) and Rosette et al. (2008) demonstrate that BIPOC professional success depends on organizational commitment to valuing diverse perspectives including empathetic leadership, strategic allyship, and systematic incorporation of different viewpoints in decision-making processes. Each business leader interviewed conveyed how they created environments where BIPOC professionals could advocate for career objectives while maintaining cultural authenticity that enhanced rather than hindered their contributions.

Many organizations attempt diversity advancement through cultural assimilation expectations that suppress authentic perspectives and fail to leverage diverse thinking as strategic advantages (Ostermeier et al., 2022: Vogel & Erickson, 2021). Leadership professionals must recognize that authentic self-advocacy empowerment generates innovation and enhanced decision-making while building trust necessary for sustainable advancement. Creating supportive organizational systems establishes pathways to

leadership representation while leveraging cultural diversity for competitive advantage creation.

This strategy synthesizes Theme 3 findings by incorporating systematic approaches to valuing authentic and diverse perspectives through empathetic leadership and strategic allyship, while enabling individuals to maintain unique identity and voice through trust-building and reflective supervision. The integration of career development support and barrier removal strategies ensures comprehensive empowerment that addresses both individual advancement needs and organizational transformation requirements.

Organization leaders who enable authentic self-advocacy can anticipate enhanced innovation through diverse thinking, improved decision-making quality through perspective integration, increased BIPOC retention rates, strengthened market positioning through authentic representation, and correlation between diverse perspective integration and customer satisfaction improvements.

Create Adaptive Cultural Environments for Sustainable Transformation

Business executives must create adaptive cultural environments that transform workplace norms from assimilationist models to inclusive ecosystems supporting diverse professional approaches while driving enhanced business performance. Most interview participants underscored the importance of comprehensive cultural adaptation that operates bidirectionally, requiring both organizational evolution and individual navigation skill development for sustained success.

Fitzsimmons and Callan (2020) and Hakovirta et al. (2023) demonstrate that systematic cultural transformation, authentic inclusion practices, intersectionality awareness, and environmental design must be channeled toward sustainable advantage achievement through diverse talent optimization. Yang (2024) indicates that cultural adaptation proves indispensable to sustainable BIPOC advancement, and many organizations remain deficient in comprehensive environmental transformation approaches. Organizational leaders must adopt cultural adaptation frameworks by creating psychological safety, embracing authentic leadership modeling, and implementing systematic environmental design that leverages diversity as strategic advantage for market competitiveness and organizational resilience.

Akpapuna et al. (2020) demonstrate that the constancy of demographic change dictates organizational cultural renewal, and consistent adaptation in workplace environments becomes key to sustainable representation gains while maintaining business performance. The common resistance to cultural change in traditional business contexts demands comprehensive environmental transformation to ensure both representation achievement and competitive advantage maintenance.

This strategy synthesizes Theme 4 findings by incorporating systematic approaches to creating inclusive organizational culture through intersectionality awareness and strategic cultural integration, while balancing adaptation and authentic expression through executive leadership partnerships and personal growth development. The integration of environmental design and mutual adaptation frameworks ensures

comprehensive cultural transformation that supports both individual authenticity and organizational performance enhancement.

Organization leaders who create adaptive cultural environments can anticipate improved employee satisfaction across all demographics, enhanced brand reputation within diverse communities, increased talent attraction and retention rates, strengthened innovation capabilities through cognitive diversity, and sustainable competitive advantage through authentic inclusive culture that attracts both diverse talent and customers seeking organizations aligned with their values.

Implications for Social Change

This research project is significant as it may contribute to strategic initiatives for business leaders to increase the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions in their organizations and positively impact financial performance. The results of the research project may contribute to business practices to include the potential to achieve (a) high organizational performance, (b) job satisfaction of BIPOC employees, (c) high-quality leadership and organizational followship, (d) reduced employee turnover of BIPOC employees, and (e) positive role perception with a strong organizational commitment to career advancement (Hakovirta et al., 2023; Wadhwa & Aggarwal, 2023).

The implications for positive social change may include financial impact on organizations from an increase in customer patronage and talent pipeline from the BIPOC community through goal setting, educational aspiration and opportunities for employment with organizations. The community could benefit from tax revenues due to organizational presence and commitment to local BIPOC talent and customer base. Employees could

become more committed and engaged with increased efficiency and performance in productivity driven by a sense of self-worth, community pride, employment opportunities, and generational financial improvement.

Recommendations for Further Research

This qualitative pragmatic inquiry explored effective strategies that business leaders use to increase BIPOC representation in senior-level positions while positively impacting financial performance. The research project population consisted of business leaders across insurance, technology, legal, nonprofit, and consulting sectors who successfully implemented strategies that advanced BIPOC professionals to senior leadership roles. The sample size of nine participants, while providing rich qualitative insights, represents one limitation of this research project. Another limitation involves the sectoral scope, which, although diverse, may not capture strategies applicable across all industry contexts.

Future research should consider expanding the geographical range, sample size, and industry focus, which may yield different results and broader applicability. Future research also should delve deeper into the themes to understand better their synergistic relationships and optimal implementation approaches across different organizational contexts using a quantitative method of research. The inclusion of quantitative methods could expand the knowledge base by measuring the specific impact integrated strategy on advancement rates, retention metrics, and organizational performance metrics.

Conclusion

BIPOC professionals remain significantly underrepresented in senior-level positions across industries, creating both equity challenges and missed opportunities for organizational performance enhancement. The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was to explore effective strategies that business leaders use to increase BIPOC representation in senior-level positions while positively impacting financial performance. The research project was grounded in a composite conceptual framework integrating Sue's (2001) multidimensional competency (MDCC) framework, Akbar and Parker's (2021) EDI theory, and Kotter's (1996) change management theory.

Participants were nine business leaders from insurance, technology, legal, nonprofit, and consulting sectors who successfully implemented strategies that increased BIPOC representation in senior-level positions within their organizations. Data were collected using semistructured interviews with open-ended questions, which were analyzed using thematic coding and analysis. This qualitative approach facilitated in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, perspectives, and motivations regarding effective BIPOC advancement strategies.

The major themes that emerged were (a) BIPOC talent acquisition and pipeline advancement, (b) leadership development and representation, (c) BIPOC self-advocacy and authenticity, and (d) cultural adaptation and workplace environment. These themes operate synergistically, with each building upon and reinforcing the others to create comprehensive organizational transformation that drives both equity outcomes and enhanced business performance.

The integrated nature of these strategies reveals that effective BIPOC advancement requires systematic approaches rather than isolated interventions. BIPOC talent acquisition and pipeline development establishes the foundation by ensuring diverse talent enters and advances through organizations. Leadership development and representation builds upon this foundation by developing leaders capable of supporting and advancing diverse talent effectively. BIPOC self-advocacy and authenticity leverages both pipeline systems and leadership capabilities to empower professionals to advocate for advancement while maintaining cultural identity. Cultural adaptation and workplace environment creates the organizational context where all previous strategies can flourish and become embedded in institutional practices.

Key recommendations emphasize that business leaders should implement integrated talent pipeline systems that coordinate sourcing, assessment, development, and retention functions into cohesive advancement ecosystems. Organization leaders should develop inclusive leadership competencies that enable effective support, mentorship, and advancement of BIPOC professionals while creating cultures where diverse perspectives drive enhanced performance. Business leaders should create organizational support systems that enable BIPOC professionals to engage in authentic self-advocacy while maintaining their cultural identity and distinctive contributions. Organization leaders should implement comprehensive cultural adaptation strategies that transform workplace environments from assimilationist models to inclusive ecosystems supporting diverse professional approaches.

Implications for positive social change include creating cascading benefits across individual, organizational, community, and societal levels. Advancing BIPOC professionals to senior leadership positions generates economic empowerment through enhanced earning potential, organizational transformation through cognitive diversity and expanded market insights, community development through increased investment and social capital enhancement, and societal progress through reduced inequality and strengthened democratic institutions.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

Primary Business Research Phenomenon Under Study and Overarching Research Question

The topic for my research project is *Strategies to Increase the Number of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) Employees in Senior-Level Positions.* The overarching research question is *What effective strategies have business leaders used to increase the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions and positively impact financial performance?*

Primary Research Goal to Achieve from This Interview

The purpose of this interview is to identify and explore effective strategies that business leaders used to increase the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions and positively impact financial performance.

Introduction

1. Thank you for participating in this research project. Your participation in this educational project on the strategies to increase the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions is important. It will help better understand how to increase the number of BOPOC employees in senior-level positions and positively impact financial performance.
2. I will be interviewing you and several other business leaders, and I hope to have adequate information for this research project. Before we get into the details, I would like to go over just a few things with you.

3. You should know that your participation is totally voluntary. If I ask a question that you don't want to answer, or if you need to stop the interview at any time, just let me know.
4. With your permission, I will be audiotaping the interview and taking notes throughout the discussion. Following the interview, I will complete transcription and provide you a copy along with my notes so you can review them, make any adjustments that need to be made to properly capture what you needed to convey accurately.
5. This research project may be shared with faculty members and colleague students. If I do share the research project, there will be no mention of your name. This includes direct quotes are used, as I will use pseudo names or coding to protect your anonymity. This research project might also be used in conferences and professional meetings.
6. I will keep your shared information strictly confidential and safely stored for five years after my research project's completion date and then the information will be destroyed.
7. Do you have any questions so far?
8. As you know, I have scheduled 60-90 minutes for this interview. Does that time seem align for you? We won't go beyond that time limit unless you wish to do so.
9. Is audiotaping still fine?
10. Are you ready to go?
11. Let's get started then!

Interview Questions

While asking these questions, I will watch for nonverbal cues, paraphrase as needed and follow up on responses with probing questions to obtain more depth.

1. What strategies have you used to increase the number of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) employees in senior-level positions?
2. How have you aligned these strategies to impact financial performance positively?
3. What resources do you use to incorporate strategies to sustain BIPOC employees in senior-level positions?
4. What techniques do you and your leadership employ to ensure there is responsiveness to skillset development opportunities for BIPOC employees?
5. Are there specific techniques to increase career advancement opportunities for BIPOC employees?
6. What challenges have you encountered with the skillset and career advancement opportunities for BIPOC employees?
7. How have the challenges encountered been advanced and overcome?
8. How do you or have you measured success regarding implementing and enforcing strategies to increase the number of BIPOC employees and positively impact financial performance?
9. What other information would you like to share regarding increasing the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions that has not been discussed in this interview?

Closing

Thank you very much for your time, The information you provided is valuable and will help me successfully complete my research project.

I would like to schedule a follow-up interview with you to review and discuss the audiotape transcript and my notes to ensure I interpreted your responses accurately. Would xx date and xx time be okay for you?

I will provide you with the transcript and notes at least five days in advance of the follow-up interview to allow you sufficient time to review.

Again, thank you very much for participating in my research project.