

12-17-2025

## Employees' Perceptions of Leaders' Diversity Training for Supporting Organizational Equity

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# Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

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Michelle L. Burchfield

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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University  
2025

Abstract

Employees' Perceptions of Leaders' Diversity Training for Supporting Organizational  
Equity

by

Michelle L. Burchfield

MPhil, Walden University, 2023

MA, Salmon P. Chase College of Law, 2021

BS, Northern Kentucky University, 2019

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Management

Walden University

December 2025

## Abstract

Despite growing organizational attention to diversity, equity, and inclusion, some workplaces continued to struggle with embedding equitable practices. The research problem addressed in this study focused on understanding how employees perceived leaders' diversity training and its effectiveness in supporting organizational equity. The purpose of this qualitative interpretative phenomenological study was to explore employees' perspectives of leadership diversity training and its role in supporting organizational equity. Behavioral leadership theory and critical race theory grounded this study. The participants consisted of 10 employees with experience in leadership diversity training in Kentucky, Ohio, and Indiana. Data were collected using semistructured interviews. Seven most common themes emerged from the thematic analysis: (a) training methods; (b) diversity, equity, and inclusion; (c) communication; (d) personal experience; (e) leadership; (f) onboarding; (g) equity; and (h) inclusion. Findings indicated that employees viewed diversity training as vital for building empathy, respect, and cultural awareness among leaders. Employees expressed concerns about inconsistency in implementation, accountability, consistency, and follow-through. The results suggest that diversity training needs to extend beyond compliance to become an integrated and ongoing component of leadership development. Recommendations included designing practical, context-based training programs with measurable outcomes and opportunities for reflection and dialogue. The implications for positive social change include the potential for organizational leaders to implement policies and processes that promote equitable leadership practices, improve organizational culture, and gain mutual respect.

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## Dedication

This journey is dedicated to the three people who have been the pinnacle of support and motivation during this process. To my mom (Lisa), dad (Christopher), and sister (Christina), you have supported me through every step, and your unwavering unconditional love is an immeasurable contribution to the success I have achieved at Walden University. Mom and Dad, you have gifted me with the freedom and opportunity to chase my dreams, and this accomplishment is as much yours as it is mine. I proudly share this moment with you as what we would call a true "*Burchfield win.*" I also dedicate this to my grandmother, Edna, who has passed but is never forgotten. The love, care, and support run deep within the group listed above, and I will always cherish them. You bring out the very best in me, challenge me to get the most out of life, and stand by me during thick and thin. Words cannot begin to capture the appreciation and love that I have for you. I wish Grandma could see me walk during the graduation ceremony but having you three here with me to witness this greatness is a truly unforgettable memory that will keep me going for life.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to those who have supported, guided, and inspired me throughout my doctoral journey at Walden University. This achievement would not have been possible without the encouragement, mentorship, and understanding of many remarkable individuals.

First and foremost, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to my committee members, Dr. Hamid Kazeroony and Dr. Jose Perez, for their invaluable guidance, constructive feedback, and unwavering support. Your expertise, patience, and dedication have been instrumental in shaping my research and strengthening my scholarly growth. I am also profoundly grateful to the Walden University Department Chief Academic Officer and President for fostering an environment that encourages academic excellence and continuous learning.

To my family and loved ones, your endless love, patience, and belief in me have been my foundation and motivation. You have stood beside me through every challenge and triumph, and for that, I am forever thankful. I would also like to acknowledge my colleagues and peers within the Walden University community who provided encouragement, shared insights, and offered words of motivation throughout this process.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Organizations accentuate leadership development to ensure success (Williams et al., 2022). Leadership was also held to the standards of doing what is right when guiding employees (Drucker, 2004). Leaders are on the front line of the employee experience and play an integral role in driving organizational change due to their direct contact with employees (Stavrinoudis et al., 2022). Leaders could influence, build, grow, maintain relationships, educate, and lead people by leveraging their employees to achieve a specific objective, result, or goal (Doolittle, 2021). Leadership can significantly influence employees' perspectives (Maria, 2019). Therefore, to support organizational equity, leadership could undergo additional training to build an educational strategy on the significance of diversity training to support organizational equity.

To understand the employee perspective, this research considered human resources as a leader and a partner with all organizational levels to ensure employees are treated fairly, collaborate with department leaders to develop efficient training material, and provide consistency (Mertens, 2023). Leadership has the power to make changes in the workplace. Despite the change's size, the impact of the adjustment is essential for leadership to understand because the modified training can have a negative or positive result for the employees if little to no effort is applied to the training process.

Researchers have explored diversity training within specific organizations and demographics to understand the impact of educating leadership on effective presentations (Azevedo et al., 2021). An in-depth understanding of how the presentation can impact employees may prove beneficial in making positive improvements to future research and

business leaders' training processes. A more in-depth understanding of how the presentation impacts employees may prove helpful in building positive improvements in future processes. Tilman et al. (2022) reported that more than 70% of the pharmacy residents at a medical center found value in diversity training and had a positive learning experience from the session. Therefore, the employees and leadership could benefit from understanding the different demographics in the workplace so that leaders can develop practical diversity training (Majczyk, 2022). However, the delivery of the training, how the content is structured, and the follow-up should be considered in the development and implementation of the diversity training (Soklaridis et al., 2022).

The current literature review pointed to a gap in employees' perception of leaders' training on how the training supports organizational equity (Thakur, 2023). This qualitative, interpretative phenomenological research study focused on employees' perceptions of organizational equity in response to leaders' diversity training, encompassing various diversity topics such as race, gender, culture, age, religion, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and disability (Kress, 2006). This is another example of the vast ripple effect that diversity training may have on employees. Research conducted by Chaudhry (2023) found a positive result for shared leadership and the correlation among teams. Diversity training can benefit from leadership consistently evaluating the training and gathering feedback from their employees to include relevant facts such as specific cultural dos and don'ts so that all employees can strengthen their communication skills with each other at work (Ghasempour et al., 2021). Engaging employees from upper management can motivate the organization to emphasize building a team within the

company to be the centralized group for providing consistent training across the organization (Griswold & Ariss, 2022). Part of the process includes an accurate team selection to lead the organizational change and hold the group accountable for maintaining consistency.

After an initial review of the literature, the gap in this research encompassed organizations of any size with employees in Indiana, Kentucky, or Ohio. Organizations interviewed employees face-to-face in a confidential room away from other coworkers, including but not limited to healthcare, warehouse, educational, retail, food, aircraft, manufacturing, finance, transportation, agriculture, construction, entertainment, recreation, and business. Each organization provided a professional environment where employees regularly interact with leadership, which offered valuable insights into the employee perception of their leadership team's diversity training in fostering an equitable workplace.

The involvement of specific departments, such as human resources, can establish standardized processes for all levels of the organization, and part of that process includes continuous improvement of diversity training (Johnson et al., 2021). Without a designated department to manage diversity training, there is a possibility of inconsistencies in the content and delivery of the presentation's message. Diversity training from the top down, within the leadership hierarchy, is necessary to ensure consistent support for the initiative throughout the organization (Hayden et al., 2017). This cycle of consistently evaluating the program could positively change workplace communication breakdown and conflict (Weiss et al., 2023). The contribution from

human resources to the development of the leadership team is intended to understand and improve the qualities of each presenter (Kranz & Sale, 2022). Practical communication skills, bias awareness, sympathy, and empathy could connect the leader with the audience (Noluthando, 2023). The topics listed above are answered in the following chapters.

### **Background of the Study**

Diversity training can encompass a range of groups, situations, and topics that relate to organizational equity (Bowen et al., 2024). Since the 1960s, corporate America has developed diversity, equity, and inclusion. The leading cause of incorporating diversity initiatives into the business environment started with the Civil Rights movement (Isaac & Christiansen, 2002). Over six decades, organizations have implemented diversity initiatives in the workplace, evolving to include equity training (Patton et al., 2019).

Companies are held to the legal standards set by Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) laws and Affirmative Action (AA) policies guided by the Department of Labor (DOL) (United States Department of Labor, n.d.) to enforce equal employment and treatment of people inside and outside the organization. These laws help drive positive organizational change by providing essential legal parameters around diversity initiatives. With basic legal parameters in place, learning the history and acknowledging the federal and state foundation diversity training is required to abide by, and it can serve as a starting point to understand how an area's leadership can impact when presenting on diversity (Burrell, 2023). It can be seen how many companies dive deeper into this subject in the next paragraph.

In the 21st century, diversity training is prevalent in approximately 80% of organizations that offer some form of diversity training (Worldatwork, 2021). According to research by Kathy Gurchiek (2021), 76% of companies have no diversity goals, and it is without these goals that businesses can open the door to an organization with little to no education on the diversity differences between employees that can have an impact on the organization's success (Gurchiek, 2021). According to Kossek et al. (2024), educating leadership on practical diversity training has advantages when people actively participate. By attending diversity training sessions, employees can identify microaggressions and promote behavior that supports an equitable organization.

Research from the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM) yielded that only 32% of companies require diversity training for all employees, and only 34% of those surveyed have educational training on diversity offered to the leadership team. (Gurchiek, 2019). The organizational progress on diversity programs throughout the years has played an essential role in the corporate world for training because of the potential to positively impact the company culture by opening employees' minds to understand the various cultures within the organization (Anand & Winters, 2008). Evan et al. (2023) address training from professionals in leadership, and it can still be seen that this is still a relevant topic that should be reviewed from the perspective of all employees to ensure the desired result still exists and, if so, where to begin addressing improvements to understand the current perspectives from employees. This shows that studies have been conducted for more than 60 years to explore diversity programs (Noluthando, 2023).

Within that time, research has yet to identify the holistic perspective directly from the employees, which influences organizational equity.

Creating an equitable organization starts with understanding that not all people are given equal opportunities within the business environment. Diversity training is critical in the workplace because it can address various social issues that can be applied inside and outside the workplace (Hammersley, 2024). Possible areas of company improvement include team engagement, efficacy, communication, problem-solving, education on diversity bias, and understanding of diverse cultures within the workforce. These areas are tied to a more equitable organization (United Way of the National Capital Area, 2022).

Tillman et al. (2022) noted that diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) training reduces bias in the workplace. However, to address the gap in research, it may be beneficial to understand the impact of diversity training within the workforce by interviewing the employees to gain their perspective on the perception of their leadership team's training on diversity. As companies find diversity initiatives a contributing factor to business improvement, there is more room for continuous improvement in understanding if diversity training aids in creating a more equitable organization (Williams & Dolkas, 2022). After interviewing the employees, the information can be utilized to improve workplace interactions amongst employees, potentially addressing current and future problems.

### **Problem Statement**

The social problem was that employees perceived organizational equity based on leaders' diversity training (Bernstein et al., 2020). The challenge for leadership was to maintain equitable organizations. Company strategies for diversity indicated that 75% of them do not have diversity included in leadership training, and 40% view diversity as mitigating legal, compliance, or reputational risks with the support of human resources (Gurchiek, 2022). The general problem was that the researchers have not explored the employees' perception of leadership diversity training for supporting an equitable organization (Yusof et al., 2018; Thompson, 2020; Batmomolin et al., 2022). The specific problem was how employees' perceptions of leaders' diversity training support organizational equity (Griswold & Ariss, 2022; Sarkar, 2022).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative interpretative phenomenological study was to explore the employees' perceptions of their leadership's diversity training in supporting organizational equity. Interpretative phenomenology explored people's perceptions of particular moments (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). From the employees' perspective, the leadership team could share the knowledge to understand the employee environment.

An interpretative phenomenological study was appropriate for this research because a detailed perspective of the employee about their thought process after diversity training was further explored (Smith et al., 2022). Exploration of the extent of employees' perception of their leadership's diversity training sheds light on real-time

feedback from employees to understand the current organizational equity that can be continuously improved for future research studies (Hughes, 2018).

### **Research Question**

How do employees perceive leadership's diversity training in supporting organizational equity?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework that grounds this study includes critical race and behavioral leadership theories. Critical race theory is a social construct, and racism is more than just bias, but is a part of the business policies and the movement toward building communication amongst races (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023). Behavioral leadership theory plays a crucial role in exploring how the leadership team behaves, given that this theory focuses on the actions of a leader and makes predictions based on the leader's actions (Tajeddini et al., 2023). Key research questions that need to be understood from the employee perspective include people's perceptions after seeing, hearing, and participating in the diversity training from their leadership. Combining both frameworks into this research gives a deeper understanding of how employees perceive diversity presentations (Ferguson, 2021). Applying both concepts to this research can lead to exploring the logical connection between theory and the human perspective (Chaudhry, 2023).

Critical race and behavioral leadership theories helps collect and analyze diversity training data, providing insight into inequalities and the nature of decisions made in the workplace (Martins, 2023). These inequalities can hinder employees from excelling in

their roles and achieving a higher employment status, or prevent them from accessing critical information to make the most informed decision (King et al., 2023). Exploring the concept of critical race theory could explain the organizational capacity for diversity training and help understand its impact on diverse groups (Shillingford et al., 2022). The behavioral leadership theory sheds light on ways human resources can develop their leadership team to conduct unbiased diversity training that brings the team together by leading by example (Imram et al., 2023).

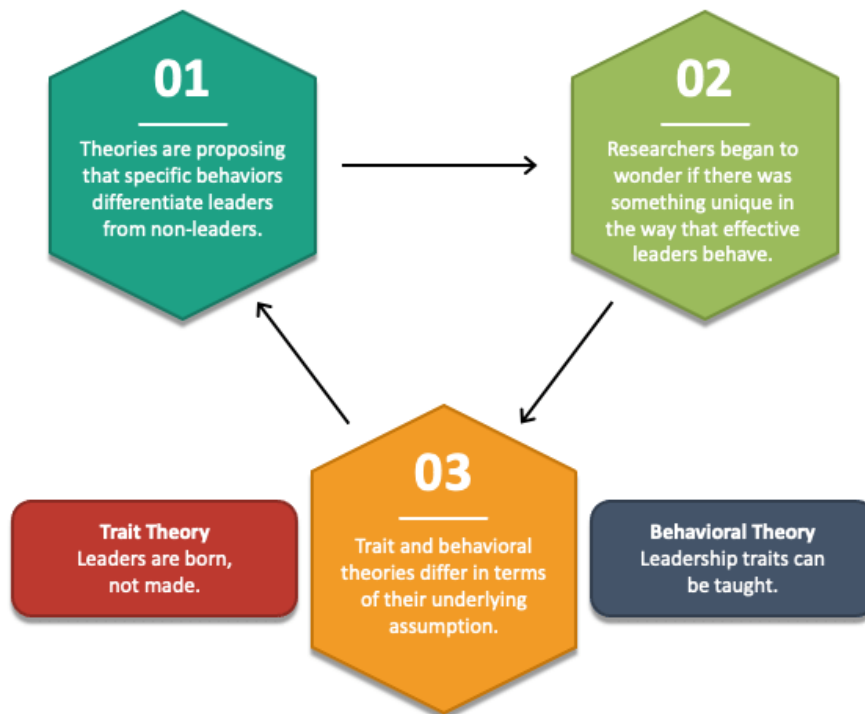
Employees look to their leadership team for guidance, so if the leader behaves a specific way, then the employee may mirror that behavior to another employee. So, it was essential to tie in behavioral leadership theory to help explain the reasons for having maintained an objective, open mind during diversity training (Waldman & Sparr, 2023). Behavioral leadership theory can be used as a learning tool to explore further the causes of different perceptions based on the leaders' training (Banks, 2023).

These bodies of research support the need for this study, including but not limited to Devine and Ash (2022) and Willard et al. (2023), which discussed how the proper use of different tools, such as e-learning, paperwork, videos, hands-on learning, seminars, and workshops, created value in the organization (Maqbool et al., 2023). This also helps support how the concepts and ideas come together to create a more equitable organization. Lastly, applying critical race theory and behavioral leadership theory concepts helps explain the reasons for the misinterpretation of diversity training that disconnected employees from their leadership team, coworkers, and the company, which

could increase resignations (Soren, 2023). A more detailed analysis of the conceptual framework was further explained in Chapter 2, following this section.

**Figure 1**

*Behavioral Leadership Theory*



**Nature of the Study**

This qualitative interpretative phenomenological study explores how employees perceive leadership's diversity training in supporting organizational equity (Amos, 2016). The qualitative nature of this research study allowed for collecting data based on the employees' perception of diversity training from the employees' leadership (Mertens, 2023). Interpretative phenomenology provided a detailed examination of the employees' perceptions to explore diversity training and create an equitable organization (Atzert, 2023).

This study stems from equitable organizations that prioritize fairness and inclusivity to ensure employees have access to and are exposed to the same opportunities, resources, and support, regardless of diverse characteristics (Alabi & Mahmuda, 2024). The exploration of employees' perspectives may help identify and address any disparities or conformity in the workplace (Bhattacharyya & Berdahl, 2023). By cultivating an environment where everyone is valued equally, leadership and organizations can enhance employee satisfaction, performance, engagement, and retention (Utete, 2024). Leadership's contributions to supporting organizational equity require systemic changes and an ongoing commitment to dismantling barriers that perpetuate inequality, as seen in diversity training (Roberson & Scott, 2024).

Diversity training plays a crucial role in promoting equitable environments by educating individuals about unconscious biases, discrimination, fairness, and inclusion (Weiss et al., 2023). Diversity training programs presented by the leadership team could increase awareness and understanding of diverse perspectives (Legate & Weinstein, 2024). Employees should be educated to perform respectfully, enhance communication, and improve collaboration across departments (Kadam et al., 2020).

In the context of equitable training, diversity training encourages participants to reflect on their behavior and actions while providing practical organizational strategies to foster a more equitable workplace (Onyeador et al., 2021). Effective diversity training can help organizations create and maintain a culture where all employees feel respected, understood, and empowered (Thakur et al., 2023). Diversity training provides a valuable framework for understanding organizational equity, and interpretative phenomenology

offered a deeper, more individualized exploration of employees' perspectives (Rosenzweig et al., 2024).

The research aligned best with interpretative phenomenology because, historically, it was rooted in the philosophical traditions of phenomenology, with its development influenced by thinkers such as Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Heidegger, 1994). Phenomenology, introduced by Husserl, studies the essence of experiences through rigorous reflection, bracketing assumptions as they appear to consciousness. Since the 1900s, interpretative phenomenology has evolved as a methodology that combines philosophical foundations, allowing researchers to explore and interpret the meanings individuals attribute to their lived experiences (Van Manen, 2017). A quantitative research study does not align with capturing the perceptions, emotions, and experiences of people, which is the foundation of the research process (Davis et al., 2022).

A combination of purposeful and convenience sampling was used (Salome, 2021). This sampling method was appropriate for this study because it narrowed the research focus to a representative, randomly-selected group to save time in obtaining the employees' perceptions of the leadership's diversity training (Subedi, 2021). Participants in this study were chosen based on geographic convenience and snowball sampling to avoid personal bias during the selection process (Ellis, 2020). The interview included 10-15 participants employed with midwestern organizations in the United States. Upon receipt of the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to conduct interviews, the participants' consent, explaining the interview process, and scheduling the

interviews using web based or in person, depending on the participant's convenience and feasibility, outside of their current employment to ensure confidentiality while getting information about their leadership's diversity training (Jackson et al., 2022).

The data were collected from participant employees with at least one year of experience through live interviews with or web-based mediums, and a confidential setting with each participant. If conducted in person or over the phone, notes have been recorded via pen and paper, online, or in person, which alleviates the person's concerns with the process's confidentiality and opens the conversation to a more in-depth interview (Stenman et al., 2023). The criteria included employees who had undergone diversity training within the last year and were employed in Kentucky, Ohio, or Indiana. Consenting participants who do not meet this criterion fall out of the scope of the data collection process (Van Niekerk et al., 2022).

The topic may be a sensitive conversation for the employee, which aided in the proper assessment of the situation and tailored the interview's tone. Hence, they felt more comfortable answering the questions. The process concluded by reassuring the participant of the process to maintain confidentiality. Recruitment efforts included reaching out through social media, referrals, and other technological means to engage with potential participants. To maintain reliable ethical standards, employees received detailed information about the study's purpose and their role. The confidentiality of the process, including their names, and the data collection, primarily through semistructured interviews, was explained to the participants. Then, a follow-up with the individual was conducted to determine where they can locate the final research paper. After the

interview process and after gathering employee insights, it was critical to identify definitions that guide the interpretation of the study and ensure clarity in understanding the concepts explored.

### **Definitions**

*Organizational Equity*: Equal distribution of power, education, training, and resources amongst all employees within the company (Moreno et al., 2024)

*Perception*: This is how a person comprehends and interprets a situation (Lim et al., 2023).

*Leader*: A person is seen as a coach or mentor to another individual. A leader is an effective communicator who motivates people around them and promotes unity, teamwork, and collaboration (Acosta & Guthrie, 2021).

*Employee*: An employee is a person who is currently employed at the company (Muhl, 2002).

*Critical Race Theory*: An academic framework focusing on systemic racism based on social movements analyzes how people perceive race and relative inequalities (Shillingford et al., 2022).

*Behavioral Leadership Theory*: Focuses on the premise that a leader's behavior and actions contribute more towards their success in the workplace than their natural characteristics (Waldman & Sparr, 2023).

*Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)*: Three values within organizations that promote organizational equity (Tillman et al., 2022).

*Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO)*: Fair and equal treatment of all employees. (United States Department of Labor, n.d.).

*Diversity Intelligence (DQ)*: A leader's ability to recognize and understand the variances between people without relying on the differences to make decisions (May 2023).

*Institutional Review Board (IRB)*: The Institutional Review Board is an ethics committee within a university that ensures that research involving humans is conducted ethically (Friedman, 2022).

*Affirmative Action (AA)*: Process created to eliminate discrimination against employees (Lander & McGinn, 2023).

*Department of Labor (DOL)*: Administrator of federal labor laws for a fair, safe, and healthy working environment (USA.gov, n.d.).

*Emotional Intelligence: Emotional Quotient (EQ)* is the ability of an individual to manage their emotions to perceive, use, understand, and manage emotions (Mukhidinovich, 2024).

*Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM)*: Professional human resource organization that certifies compliance and discipline expertise (DiDomenico, 2023).

### **Assumptions**

Research needs to list assumptions and understand what was assumed when conducting the study. The assumption that the person can read, write, speak, and understand English, as the interviewer only speaks English, implies that the recipient understands the same language throughout all process steps unless stated otherwise by the

participant. Another assumption was that the participant upholds the truth throughout the research process. This primarily included the person's age as stated in the initial qualifying questionnaire. There was also the assumption that the employee could recall their formal training with their leadership team to provide accurate feedback during the interview. It is assumed that the employee was within working distance to participate in the research study and was comfortable with a semistructured interview process.

It was assumed that the participants who engaged and went through the process wished to partake in the optional research study, but disagreed solely because they did not want to participate. This means the participant fully understood their rights upon the initial outreach email and did not participate only because they may have known the interviewer, nor did they feel pressured to engage or disengage in the research process. Maintaining a professional semistructured interview did eliminate potential bias, with the interviewer knowing the interviewee. I also assumed that the population for this research study represented the population within a 50-mile radius of the interviewer's location and represented the population of employees in Kentucky, Indiana, and Ohio as a collective sample range.

Another assumption included that the interviewee provided a candid perspective of the leadership training they received and elaborated to the best of their ability when asked a follow-up question. Finally, an assumption could be made that the employee has experienced diversity training. These assumptions were mitigated by asking the potential participants basic questions at the introductory level upon sending invitation letters to

participants, such as: Are you currently employed? Have you sat in a diversity training session, and are you in the state of Ohio, Indiana, or Kentucky?

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The purpose of this qualitative, interpretative phenomenological study was to explore employees' perceptions of their leadership's diversity training in supporting organizational equity. The scope of this study was limited to the employees' perception of their leadership's diversity training. Therefore, the study maintains its focus on diversity, leadership, and human resources, and not on research people have obtained from the internet, as that defeated the purpose of obtaining the perception from the employee who experienced the training firsthand. The minimum age of the participant was greater than or equal to 18 years, and they must be employed. The participants were at any level within their organization or employed by any organization. The variety of participants' statuses helped show how the training can be used in various companies (Ghasempour, 2021).

The scope of this study was limited to employees within an organization who have experienced diversity training from their leadership team. Therefore, it was a requirement for the person to have a diversity training program promoted by the organization and led by the leadership team. Additionally, the location of this research study remained within the states of Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana because expanding to other states would be too far to meet for an in-person interview.

Delimitations were the decision to set specific boundaries to include or exclude in research (AJE, 2022). To make the research more manageable, the research was not

explicitly focused on one industry, job, or age group, but rather on individuals at least 18 years old. The study needed to provide a complete literature review on how diversity training was developed or how to create one. Instead, the research pulled from relevant articles to support the exploration of the employee perspective on diversity training (Zaman et al., 2021). Employees outside of the 50-mile radius were excluded from the research, and the semistructured interview questions were not limited to a specific topic of diversity.

### **Limitations**

Limitations of this study include the risk of potential employees who would like to participate in the interview failing to meet the requirements, or the participant needing to answer the introductory/screening survey questions honestly. For example, if the individual stated they are employed in the survey, and upon finding on their public social media profile that they have not been employed for years, their feedback was not within the study's boundaries. Although it cannot be controlled whether the person answers the questions honestly, an additional verification process occurred after the person moved forward to the meeting portion of the data collection process to verify. One way to mitigate this was to research online job profiles available to the public. Another solution utilized multiple recruitment methods, including emails, posters, and social media, to reach a diverse group of employees.

Another limitation of this research included the loss of participants, the challenges associated with online surveying, maintaining interest during virtual conversations, and the person's willingness to meet in person. There was also a consideration of the

individual's timing, schedule, and location barrier. Although the radius for this study was 50 miles from the interviewer, the meeting location can be a challenge. This was mitigated by reaching an agreement with a location best suited for the interviewee and interviewer. Lastly, since this was a qualitative research study dependent on the employee's perspective, the information may not be objective and was subject to bias or misrepresentation of their historical recollection of their training. The survey procedures were transparent to the interviewees to address the potential response bias. An emphasis was placed on survey anonymity and confidentiality to encourage honest responses and communicate the purpose of the study, as well as how the data would be used, thereby building trust with participants. Participants were informed that there was no financial incentive to participate in the optional interview.

Limitations that were outside of the control of the interviewer and interviewee included severe weather conditions that were unfit for travel, accidents causing hospitalization or the passing of the individual, national emergencies, and similar unforeseen events that could alter the timing of the interview. The timing of the study could be a limitation because the data collection method was in-person interviews. There was a time constraint regarding alignment between the interviewer's and interviewee's schedules, especially if vacation time is scheduled when they are unavailable. Then, there was the time constraint of the interview itself. The interviewee may be under a time constraint despite previously agreeing to dedicate an hour to this interview.

One of the challenges could also be seen as a barrier if the snowball effect method points to a person willing to participate who does not speak, write, read, or understand the

English language well. It would be a challenge for the interviewer to fully understand what the person is saying. There was a possibility of a language barrier that could miss important details because the translation was not accurately conveyed into English. There was also the limitation of participants. Although more people can be interviewed, this research study had a time constraint, so interviews were limited to 10-15 people or until saturation was reached to meet timing requirements. A challenge would be to remove personal bias from the study, as it was within the field of human resources, and the study needed to remain free of my subjective opinion.

Potential limitations existed with the theories tied to this research study. Critical race theory could have created limitations if it focused solely on race, which might have overlooked other forms of social inequality, such as gender, class, national origin, or religion (Salter et al., 2024). Critical race theory's focus on challenging dominant narratives might have led to a perceived antagonism toward policies and procedures. Ultimately, this potentially limited acceptance in organizational settings that prioritized maintaining harmony, consensus, and equity (Busey et al., 2023). Limitations of behavioral leadership theory included the possibility of focusing on one part of the behavior, such as transformational leadership, which could have overly idealized leadership from the employees' point of view (Soetjipto et al., 2021). This might have overlooked the complexities and power dynamics of organizational structures and resulted in an oversimplified understanding of leadership's influence on employee diversity training effectiveness (Sahap et al., 2024).

### **Significance of the Study**

This study was significant because it filled a gap in understanding employees' perceptions of leadership's diversity training in supporting organizational equity. Since Human Resources was a supporting group for all levels of the organization, the study was significant as it explored strategies for continuous improvement in leadership training and the creation of equity. The significance of the theories showed the relationships among ideas and how they related to the research (Jackson et al., 2022). The findings revealed a positive social impact, benefiting the organizational culture by creating a more equitable workplace.

### **Significance to Practice**

The contributions that advance the practice of meaningful and fair organizational diversity training started by obtaining updated and current feedback on the diversity training, aligning with the company's and Human Resources strategy of continuous improvement within the organization, and realigning the training to meet the company's mission, vision, strategy, and goals. According to Jackson et al. (2022), the communication between the leader and their employee(s) can impact the organization, reflecting on the organizational equity within the company. My research focuses on the employees' lived experiences and how their perceptions can help leadership understand areas of improvement within their diversity training program to create a more equitable organization. By starting with the diversity training presented by the leadership, a fair assessment can be made to improve this management tool because the employees' view is considered (Barnes & Grayer, 2023).

Research conducted by Majczyk (2022) stated that identifying conceptual trends in research provoked additional conversation around leadership development and diversity training. This tied into addressing the problem of a need for more feedback from the employees' perspective to understand further if the diversity training from their leadership team made any impact on the employees. Furthermore, this study supported the development of conceptual research by exploring how people perceived the training and identified areas of improvement for future research studies. Specifically, improving awareness training and educating employees on how to engage with an employee who was not like-minded while maintaining a professional conversation was critical in organizations (Witburn & Corcoran, 2021).

The significance of this research study was that it explored the impact of diversity training and the possibility for organizations to assess their diversity programs to educate employees on workplace differences. Training programs could have developed further into a program that improved the workplace culture, communication, progression, retention, recruiting, and development strategies (The management of diversity: Designing an effective diversity training program, 2022). This could have improved the professionalism of the leadership team. Professionalism and understanding could have created a more equitable organization (Madzima, 2021).

Overall, the leadership team should not have been solely responsible for the diversity training, as the process should have been a collaboration between leadership and human resources because without a second group reviewing the process, critical information could have gotten lost in translation, which could have reverted the method

to the original stage instead of progressing with the evolving world (Noon & Ogbonna, 2021). Collaboration, clear communication, and understanding group expectations were essential when dealing with qualitative data (Chaudhry, 2023).

### **Significance to Theory**

The contributions of this qualitative interpretative phenomenological research could have improved knowledge and helped leadership understand what employees perceived after diversity training from the leadership team (Brooke, 2009). The feedback helped give perspective on what people comprehended from the diversity training. According to Noluthando's (2023) research, a lack of effective communication contributed to employees' misunderstanding of the training topic. To explore possible explanations for the lack of communication, critical race and behavioral leadership theories could have been used to identify areas of improvement to guide leadership to impact the workplace culture positively (Tillman et al., 2022).

My research filled the gap in the literature by understanding the employees' perceptions of the leadership's diversity training in supporting organizational equity. Prior research had been underexplored in understanding the perspective of the employee. Asking employees additional and new questions and using theories like critical race theory (CRT) to understand the employee perspective further, drew conclusions, and identified the relationship without unconscious bias to answer the research question based on the qualitative data via surveys.

The significance of theory in research was that it could create a systematic method to explore research areas and explain the phenomenon (Giles & Harrison, 2023).

Critical race and behavioral leadership theories furthered the knowledge in organizational practices to examine the leader's behavior over their current skillset to create an organizational strategy to impact organizational equity positively (Maria, 2019). The theoretical implications of this research could have impacted the Human Resources field by giving the leadership team a logical reason to seek continuous improvement in employee diversity training (Bair, 2022).

### **Significance to Social Change**

The potential implications for positive social change could have helped companies improve their diversity training to support organizational equity. They could have created a more inclusive and positive work environment for the employees. This research study aligned with the scope of the study because Human Resources could have played a critical role in aligning diversity training to ensure that accurate information was presented in a meaningful and easily understood way to all employees. Human Resources had the potential to be an influential support group for diversity training, as it was part of their duties to ensure fairness across the organization (Gurchiek, 2019). Fairness was one part of the social change that could have been improved in the workplace. Another aspect that could have benefited from diversity training was the communication barriers between different personalities and mindsets. Diversity training helped employees develop vital conflict resolution skills inside and outside the workplace.

This research was significant for social change because it could have enabled all levels of the organization to gain a deeper understanding of the employees they worked with and how others perceived their actions and words. Findings from this study could

have helped leadership better understand employees' experiences, which would in turn explain the subject more effectively and foster a fair work environment for all employees. A fair work environment could have improved employee morale, increased employee retention, expanded internal learning opportunities for people to participate in, developed stronger relationships, and improved communication.

Improving diversity training could have improved the relationships among employees, which had the potential to improve productivity and support collaboration among a diverse group of people. From the 17 goals of the United Nations, this research could have helped reduce inequalities, improve the quality of education, and achieve gender equality, all of which align with the United Nations' sustainable development goals. These goals were also aligned with Walden University's mission and vision to promote positive global social change. Exploring diversity training within organizations tied into the collaboration with Human Resources, as this department is supported and influenced by retaining training document processes for leadership to follow, making positive organizational changes, and giving guidance to the leadership team to align with the business goal of creating an equitable organization (Tajeddini et al., 2023).

Lastly, there was the opportunity to improve new or existing diversity initiatives within multiple workplace environments to expose more people to various cultures, experiences, preferences, and understanding of how people learned best (Burrell, 2023). Overall, improvement in diversity training could have positively affected other business areas, such as recruiting, retention, recognition, and culture. By understanding the employee perspective, the leadership team could have interacted with the employee on a

deeper level, which made them feel valued and willing to go the extra mile (Barnes & Grayer, 2023).

### **Summary and Transition**

Chapter 1 presented the background, problem statement, purpose, research question, conceptual framework, nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope, delimitations, and limitations. Chapter 1 also included the study's significance to practice, theory, and social change. Chapter 2 presents the literature review.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The specific problem was how employees' perceptions of leaders' diversity training supported organizational equity (Griswold & Ariss, 2022; Sarkar, 2022). The purpose of this qualitative interpretative phenomenological study was to explore the employees' perceptions of their leadership's diversity training in supporting organizational equity. This chapter contained the literature review strategy, conceptual framework, literature review, summary, and conclusion.

When leadership conducted diversity training, the employee perspective could have differed from the complexity and content of the diversity training. How a leader presented and engaged with the subject could have conjured different levels of awareness, experience, and openness to discussions around diversity. If leadership approached diversity topics with understanding and empathy, a safe space for employees to share their thoughts and experiences could have supported organizational equity. However, a presentation could have been perceived as superficial or disingenuous, and employees might have become disengaged or skeptical, viewing the training as an obligation rather than a genuine commitment to change. Additionally, the effectiveness of the training could have been influenced by existing workplace dynamics and power structures, making it essential for leaders to acknowledge these complexities and actively work to address them by understanding employee perceptions (Englander, 2019). The following section explains the literature research strategy and the criteria used to source research articles for this study.

### Literature Search Strategy

The literature search strategy for this study included utilizing databases and search engines like EBSCO, ProQuest, Emerald Management, LexisNexis, Google Scholar, Wiley, Google, and government websites. Key search terms used included *diversity, equity, inclusion, DE&I, human resources, HR, management, leadership, employee perception, communication, organizational development, workplace diversity, management leadership, and workplace experience.*

Other search items related to the subject used to create a more comprehensive study that addressed other factors with the potential to understand further the employee's perception were *workforce fairness, development, supervisor, manager, leader, professional relationship, treatment, co-workers, perception, experience, employees, direct report, education, training, continuous improvement, organizational psychology, organizational behavior, values, diversity intelligence, multiculturalism, interpersonal relationships, workplace attitude, social responsibility, group dynamics, social perception, work teams, training intention, organizational leadership goal, organizational climate, job satisfaction, interprofessional engagement, diversity training, organizational equity, strategy, team dynamics, workplace bias, unconscious and conscious bias, professional relationship, shared leadership performance, workforce, employee performance, organization, cultural competency, leadership coaching, leadership development, business, self-efficacy, employment, organizational culture, organizational strategy, changing workforce, perspective, business environment, job*

*satisfaction, motivation, promotions, implementing training, personnel management, staff development, and leadership development program.*

This research process included relevant, recent references from the past 5 years to assist in exploring the topic's past, present, and future predictions, thereby enhancing understanding. Most articles chosen for this research were limited to 2024. Research articles were selected for this study due to their relevance to the subject, and articles that did not discuss one of the keywords listed above were excluded. Multiple studies had been conducted on diversity, so the research was refined to include specific words to better support the topic (Golob, 2013). For example, if the topic revolved around leadership training, critical words like leadership presentations or communication skills were part of the Boolean data search process.

The literature research strategy included reviewing the citations for the references used in the research. For example, referencing Waldman and Sparr (2023), the citation list was screened for relevant articles supporting my research. The research articles were also screened for credibility and relevant content. For example, if the author explained that the research argued against diversity training, that research would have been used to delve further into the possibility of the opposite being true, or where the research could have been improved. The literature review excluded articles unrelated to human resources, leadership, diversity, and the employee perspective, as these topics were not the focus of this research. This chapter consisted of an introduction to chapter two, stating the research problem, purpose, and expansion of the literature research strategy, conceptual framework, and literature review, and it concluded with a summary.

## **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual frameworks undergirding this research were critical race theory (Giles & Harrison, 2023) and behavioral leadership theory (Shillingford et al., 2022). These theories contributed to a deeper understanding of the workplace dynamics between employees and their leadership teams, facilitating data collection and analysis. Critical race theory explored the potential bias that could have created obstacles in organizations, and behavioral leadership theory explained the logical reasoning behind how people behaved in the workplace (Legate & Weinstein, 2024). The first theory employed was critical race theory, a movement and framework that has historically influenced human interaction in social environments. It began with an introduction to how the study started and then how it tied into the topic.

### **Critical Race Theory**

This theory has evolved since the late 1970s into a social movement in the United States (Giles & Harrison, 2023). This was due to a combination of several ideas revolving around racial bias and prejudice against a person or group of people (Salter et al., 2024). Critical race theory (CRT) extended across multiple topics that could have impacted the employee. For example, CRT could have addressed social factors, such as interactions between leadership and other employees, as well as political factors like office politics or organizational behaviors, and economic factors, including wages, promotions, and employment status. Utilizing critical race theory in this research aided in understanding the role that discrimination against another person because of their physical differences

plays in society and the workplace. Key concepts within the CRT framework are as follows.

The first concept is intersectionality, which is tied to diversity training because individuals have multiple overlapping identities and experiences in the workplace (Busey et al., 2023). When leadership employs critical race theory (CRT) in diversity training, it emphasizes understanding how race intersects with other social categories like gender, class, and sexuality to produce unique experiences of discrimination and privilege. Intersectionality originated from the interconnected nature of social categorizations, incorporating components of critical race theory to emphasize the importance of considering multiple axes of identity and power when analyzing social issues (Bhattacharyya & Berdahl, 2023). Understanding this helped leaders design training that addressed the complex ways systemic inequities manifested. This approach fosters a more inclusive environment, encouraging employees to

The second concept of critical race theory is structural racism. CRT posits that racism is ingrained in societal structures, policies, and institutions rather than just individual prejudices. Through diversity training, leadership is equipped to comprehend differences beyond surface-level qualities and address systemic factors that perpetuate racial inequities in the workplace (Ahmad et al., 2004). Therefore, understanding company policies and processes existing throughout society that resulted in unfair advantages to a specific group of people creates an opportunity to examine and challenge existing organizational practices, unequal opportunities for advancement, and discriminatory workplace cultures that could have yielded an unfair advantage to a person

due to their race (Roche & Passmore, 2023). The third concept in CRT is counter-storytelling. This derivative of critical race theory relies on the perspective of underprivileged people and elevates the voices of experiences that were historically oppressed, excluded, or silenced. Counter-storytelling is a narrative technique that challenged perspectives that perpetuated stereotypes, inequalities, or injustices (Hantke et al., 2023). By understanding counter-storytelling, leaders could use it to highlight the lived experiences of employees who faced systemic inequities and foster an inclusive environment where employees were encouraged to understand diverse perspectives.

Social construction is the fourth concept emphasized in CRT. It is critical to understand diversity training from leadership to employees. For example, the social construction of race rejects the notion of race as a biological, fixed attribute or natural category and instead emphasizes its social construction (Peck & Mummery, 2018). Race is a dynamic and historically contingent concept shaped by social, political, cultural, and economic forces (Babulal et al., 2022). When applied to diversity training, both leadership and employees deconstructed how race and other identities were constructed and perpetuated within the organization to critically assess the impact of social constructs on workplace dynamics, policies, and interactions, ultimately creating an equitable organization.

The fifth concept of critical race theory is legal and institutional analysis. This is a vital component of CRT for enhancing diversity training because it examines the role of law and institutions in perpetuating racial inequalities. This includes analyzing how legal precedents, policies, rules, regulations, historical context, and practices maintained racial

hierarchies and disparities (Geneviève et al., 2023). The analysis could equip the leadership team with the knowledge to understand the legal and institutional frameworks contributing to systemic discrimination and identify areas that disadvantage marginalized groups, such as recruiting and accessibility to professional development.

Finally, the sixth concept of CRT is interest convergence. This concept was developed by critical race theorist and legal scholar Derrick Bell. The idea of aligning the interests of marginalized groups with those of the majority ultimately led to the establishment of new laws, policies, or processes for the mutual benefit of all people (Lewis & Shah, 2021). By leadership understanding the principles of interest convergence, more vital awareness and recognition could have been built to address organizational changes towards diversity and inclusion, benefiting the organization (Lewis & Shah, 2021). Applying the concept of interest convergence in diversity training meant leaders taught diversity in ways that highlighted mutual benefits, such as improved innovation, enhanced employee satisfaction, and better market competitiveness (Mayer et al., 2023). This approach could help garner broader support for diversity efforts and clarify that fostering an equitable environment benefited the organization (Tseng et al., 2024). For employees, understanding interest convergence could lead to a more strategic and realistic engagement with diversity efforts, recognizing both the potential for positive change and the limitations imposed by self-interest within the organization (Lewis & Shah, 2021).

Exploring the concepts outlined in critical race theory, as mentioned above, addresses systemic racism and has the potential to promote social justice and equity

within the workplace (Ahmad et al., 2024). CRT identifies areas for improvement amongst people and highlights potential areas that could have resulted in unfavorable employee outcomes. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Current Population Survey (CPS), the labor force who participated in the data collection survey consisted of an employment population of 58.4% African American, 60% Caucasian, 56% American Indian and Alaskan Natives, 63.9% Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, and 61.7% of people with two or more races (BLS, 2022). The data lacked information on other demographic groups that entered the workforce, which could have been identified by reviewing all available languages and their origins (Salter et al., 2022). The organization needed to be aware of its current and potential demographic groups to understand what cultures existed in the workplace and how employees should have understood each one.

Critical race theory is a foundational piece of this research, as it incorporates vital principles such as employee education on conscious and unconscious bias, and equity, which are tied to diversity training (Shillingford et al., 2022). According to the Ohio administrative code 4112-5-05 (J)(7), employers were advised to provide sexual harassment training. This information was significant because diversity encompassed many topics organizations could have educated employees on (Shukla, 2024). A nationwide government report from the United States EEOC supported the diverse population employed across businesses and acknowledged that there were more than one group of people (Busey et al., 2023). An awareness of potential conscious or unconscious bias should have been recognized when leaders interacted with their employees because this behavior was incorporated into employee interactions (Spindle-Jackson et al., 2023).

At the same time, Critical Race Theory (CRT) provided a foundational understanding of systemic racism and its impact on societal structures in the workplace. Behavioral leadership theory offers a complementary perspective by focusing on the behaviors and actions of leaders in promoting organizational equity within organizations.

### **Behavioral Leadership Theory**

Various concepts within behavioral leadership theory can explain a leader's actions and behaviors (Helmuth et al., 2024). Part of identifying the behavior falls within a person's habits (Aroussi et al., 2024). After a prolonged time, repetition of the same action results in the method becoming embedded in how that person operates. Therefore, it becomes their default style when interacting with others (Mayer et al., 2023). By leveraging the principles of behavioral leadership theory in diversity training initiatives, organizations could create a culture of equity, respect, and inclusion where all employees feel valued, respected, and empowered to contribute their best work. Behavioral leadership is broken down into seven types, as explored below (Ali, 2023).

### **Seven Types of Leadership Behaviors**

The first type of behavioral leadership is a leader exhibiting a task-oriented leadership approach. The leader prioritizes achieving the project's objectives, productivity, and efficiency goals over the employee's emotional well-being, satisfaction, motivation, and functionality (Lee, 2022). Attention is directed toward planning, organizing, and managing resources to meet objectives and prioritizing the accomplishment of tasks over interpersonal relationships (Shula et al., 2022). The pros and cons of this behavior for diversity training include the leader's neglect of the

emotional and relational aspects of the training (Ghasempour et al., 2021). However, leadership could positively impact the training by ensuring diversity training was efficiently organized and completed on time with clear objectives and measurable outcomes.

The second type of behavioral leadership is task-oriented leadership, which is relationship-oriented behavior. Opposite of the task-oriented individual, this behavior emphasizes fostering positive relationships with employees, attending to their emotional well-being, and creating a supportive work environment (Sylvester, 2024). This type of leader prioritizes team cohesion, employee satisfaction, and motivation, viewing these as critical to long-term success. A leader exhibiting relationship-oriented leadership could positively impacted diversity training by fostering an open, supportive environment where employees felt comfortable discussing sensitive topics such as inclusion and equity (Panagopoulos et al., 2024).

A task-oriented leader emphasizes the importance of understanding and respecting diverse perspectives, which could enhance participation, empathy, and a deeper personal connection to the training (Eltemasi & Arami, 2024). By building trust and encouraging collaboration, the leader helps create an atmosphere where employees were more likely to embrace and internalize the values of diversity (Gursoy & Maier, 2023). This behavior's blind spot was that the leader might have prioritize emotional well-being and relationships over the practical outcomes of the training (Woods et al., 2024). As a result, there may have been less emphasis on setting clear goals, measuring

progress, or ensuring accountability, which could reduce the effectiveness and efficiency of the diversity training process.

The third type of leadership behavior is a directive style. The directive leadership approach is when a directive leader was the sole initiator of the task. A leader exhibiting directive leadership could positively impact diversity training in the workplace by providing clear instructions, structured processes, and defined expectations for employees (Easton & Steyn, 2022). This leadership style ensured that diversity training is efficiently organized, focusing on achieving concrete outcomes. Employees know exactly what is expected of them, which could lead to higher compliance and ensured the training was completed within set timelines (Hans et al., 2023). However, the downside of directive leadership in the context of workplace diversity training is that it might limit open communication and personal reflection. Employees might feel less comfortable sharing their thoughts or experiences, as the leader's focus on control and direction could suppress the nuanced discussions vital for deepening understanding around diversity and inclusion (Post et al., 2022). This could reduce the training's long-term impact, as it prioritizes task completion over fostering genuine cultural change.

The fourth type of behavioral leadership is participative leadership. Participative leadership, also known as democratic leadership, is a leadership style in which leaders actively involved team members in decision-making (Post et al., 2022). Instead of making decisions unilaterally, participative leaders sought input, feedback, and suggestions from employees or team members before concluding. This leadership style valued collaboration, open communication, and shared responsibility. Participative

leaders believed involving employees in decisions fostered a sense of ownership, boosted motivation, and leveraged diverse perspectives, leading to more innovative solutions (Plückelmann et al., 2024). While it promotes engagement and trust, this style could also stall decision-making and led to challenges in reaching consensus. A leader exhibiting participative leadership could positively impact diversity training in the workplace by fostering collaboration and actively involving employees in the process (Jha et al., 2024).

By encouraging open dialogue, seeking input, and allowing employees to share their experiences, this leadership style helped create a more inclusive environment where diverse perspectives were valued (Ali et al., 2022). This approach enhanced engagement, as employees feel empowered and invested in the success of the training, leading to a deeper understanding of diversity issues and a more substantial commitment to organizational equity. However, the downside of participative leadership is the decision-making process could have become slower as it required input from multiple stakeholders (Iqbal et al., 2024). This could delay implementation of training initiatives and may have led to difficulty in reaching a consensus on critical issues (Katsaros, 2024). Additionally, if not well-managed, participative leadership could result in conflicting viewpoints, hindering progress in achieving the intended diversity goals.

The fifth behavioral leadership is adaptive, a leadership model by Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky in which a leader could leverage various characteristics of leadership, like emotional intelligence, organizational justice, character, and development, to unite employees to conquer complex tasks successfully (Heifetz et al., 2009). A leader exhibiting adaptive leadership could have positively impacted diversity training in the

workplace by demonstrating flexibility and responsiveness to the unique needs of diverse employees (Al Halbusi, 2022). This leadership style encouraged leaders to assess their teams' specific challenges and dynamics, allowing them to tailor diversity training programs to address participants' distinct experiences and perspectives (AlAbri et al., 2022). By fostering an environment that valued adaptability and learning, these leaders could promote open discussions about diversity issues, helping employees feel more comfortable sharing their insights (Azevedo & Jugdev, 2022). However, the downside of adaptive leadership may have a lack of consistency in training approaches, as the leader's responsiveness could lead to varying levels of engagement or focus among different groups (Mjege & Kavenuke, 2022). This variability could create confusion or misalignment regarding the organization's diversity goals, making it challenging to establish a unified framework for fostering inclusivity across the workplace (Askew, 2023).

The sixth and seventh behavioral leadership styles include transformational versus transactional leadership. Transformational leadership focuses on motivating the team to inspire them to complete goals (Scott & Klein, 2022), whereas transactional looked to encourage employees to complete work by leveraging rewards and punishments (Zahap et al., 2024). A leader exhibiting transformational leadership could positively impact diversity training in the workplace by inspiring and motivating employees to embrace diversity as a core organizational value (Zuo et al., 2024). Transformational leaders fostered a vision of inclusivity and engaged employees emotionally, encouraging them to reflect on their beliefs and behaviors regarding diversity (Turner & Merriman, 2022).

This approach promotes continuous learning and personal growth, leading to deeper engagement with diversity training and a commitment to implementing inclusive practices (Jaiswal et al., 2022).

Conversely, transactional leadership, which focuses on clear structures, rewards, and performance outcomes, could also influence diversity training but in a more limited way. While transactional leaders may ensure that training was completed and policies were followed, their approach could emphasize compliance over genuine understanding and engagement (Huynh & Nguyen, 2024). This focus on rewards and penalties could lead to superficial adherence to diversity initiatives rather than fostering a meaningful commitment to inclusivity (Prasodojo, 2023). As a result, while transactional leadership may drive short-term compliance, it may fall short of cultivating the more profound cultural change that transformational leadership could have inspired (Dartey-Baah et al., 2024). An employee's preferred leadership style varied based on individual preference (Yadav & Chaudhari, 2024).

### **Incorporating the Behavioral Leadership Framework in the Workplace**

Based on the behaviors of the leadership team discussed above, the framework is built upon intentional efforts and executing skills (Bowen, 2024). However, this concept showed that leadership is not a skill that an individual was born with. Instead, it is cultivated through interactions among people and their environment (Aei-Kung et al., 2022). As a learned skill, behavioral leadership theory serves as one of the foundations of this research. The interaction between employees is critical in understanding the employees' perception of their leaders' training. Behavioral leadership uncovers

inconsistencies within the leadership team and evaluated traits taught across the leadership team (Imran et al., 2023). If a leader continuously engages in the proper behavior that positively impacts the employees and motivated them to professionally and personally improve, the possibility of successful leadership created a more equitable organization (Bowen, 2024). According to Rios and Cohen (2023), it was easy for leaders to adopt a behavior they were most comfortable with. However, this theory shows significant improvement for individuals who embraced all aspects of leadership and continue to understand and connect with diverse groups of people (Ghasempour et al., 2021). Behavioral leadership theory emphasizes the importance of consistency and accountability in driving behavioral change (Kransniqi et al., & Drakulevski, 2024). Through diversity training, leaders could reinforce the organization's commitment to diversity and inclusion and held themselves and others accountable for upholding equitable practices (Bora, 2024).

Research by Van der Hoek (2024) explored the identity theories regarding behavioral leadership. The author found that human resource management could have been a starting point to help improve leadership. This is significant because this research also included the human resource team's support and influence during training. Human resources' impact reached all levels of the organization, so diversity training could have been more consistent, meaningful, and updated if monitored and sustained by this department.

A leader's style could help open the doors to uncovering potential behavior at the workplace and explaining how to best educate other employees with a different

perspective (Tilman et al., 2024). Delivering presentations to employees was essential for leadership because information could be interpreted in multiple ways, and diversity training could have served as one area of educational training. Organizations could leverage the behavioral leadership theory to make positive adjustments to their training by breaking down the topic into examples for the group (Fernandez et al., 2024). For example, a leader's management style tied into their behavior; employees could perceive the leadership styles as democratic, directive, autocratic, supportive, laissez-faire, participative, paternalistic, or achievement-oriented leadership.

Leadership could have leveraged providing feedback and recognition to reinforce desired behaviors (Lee, 2022). During diversity training, leaders could have given specific feedback to employees who demonstrated inclusive behaviors and recognized their contributions to creating an equitable workplace (Gurchiek, 2022). This reinforced the importance of diversity and inclusion and encouraged others to follow suit. Leaders were also essential contributors to shaping and upholding organizational culture and norms (Woods et al., 2024). Through diversity training, leaders could have modeled inclusive behaviors such as active listening, empathy, and respect for diverse perspectives. By consistently demonstrating these behaviors, leaders set the tone for inclusive practices throughout the organization (Kundro et al., 2024). Lastly, this leadership theory promoted a growth mindset and continuous improvement (Mayer et al., 2023). Through diversity training, leaders could have encouraged employees to reflect on their biases and assumptions, seek feedback from others, and engage in ongoing learning and development to foster a more inclusive and equitable workplace culture.

The following selection identified a review of the literature associated with this research to explore the appropriate research studies that applied to this paper further. The literature review began with an introduction to the section, then delved into the baseline criteria for diversity training from the legal perspective, followed by addressing the employment dilemma, organizational equity, diversity, what diversity training was, diversity training in organizations, diversity drivers, unconscious and conscious bias, organizational behavior, leadership behavior, leadership impact, employee and employer relationship, including human resources, diversity barriers and obstacles, employee engagement, forms of diversity training and its benefits, diversity feedback, skill development for leaders, commitment to diversity training, and concluded with the chapter summary.

### **Literature Review**

The literature review identified multiple research studies aligned with diversity training from the leadership team in creating an equitable organization. A detailed review of the diversity training was established. This section included vital topics of creating organizational equity in the workplace. Each subject further explored the details and aligned research. The introduction to this literature review began with the legal requirements, which laid the foundation for why diversity training was at its current status and what applied to employers in the United States.

### **Legal Requirements**

Research conducted by DeStefano (2023) found that millions of dollars had been spent on diversity initiatives. However, there were still underrepresented groups, and they

still needed to be given an equal opportunity as the rest of the employees. DeStefano (2023) broke down the communication skills and professional development needed to enhance diversity training into three groups: innovation, collaboration, concrete organizational, service, and tech (COST) skills. Understanding what barriers existed, why, if any, and how to address the situation was critical to the success of diversity training within an organization. While the success of diversity training was essential to fostering an equitable workplace, it was equally important to consider the legal frameworks that underpinned leadership's diversity training, as these regulations shaped implementation and ensured compliance with organizational and societal standards.

Legalities of diversity initiatives were established in the late 1900s; employers only executed the bare minimum actions for organizations to implement to comply with the law (EEOC, n.d.). However, additional research by Skaggs et al. (2020) focused on institutional theory to study the state and political cultures within the United States. This was relevant to the current research because governmental regulations were intended to impact the people. However, it was up to the organizations to implement a program appropriate to their workforce, and adhering to the process was the leadership's responsibility (Lee et al., 2020).

Under federal laws such as Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (ADEA), employers were prohibited from discriminating against employees based on protected characteristics such as race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, or genetic information (EEOC, n.d.). While these laws did not explicitly

require diversity training, they mandated that employers take proactive steps to prevent discrimination and harassment in the workplace.

Diversity training helped organizations fulfill obligations under Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) laws by promoting awareness of legal rights and responsibilities and preventing discriminatory behavior. Employers were required to take proactive measures to prevent discrimination and harassment, including providing training to employees and leadership on these issues (Roh & Sung, 2024). Leadership teams had to ensure that diversity training programs were comprehensive, accessible, and tailored to address their organization's needs and challenges (Blas et al., 2022). This included covering topics such as implicit bias, cultural sensitivity, inclusive leadership practices, and strategies for fostering a respectful and equitable workplace environment.

Diversity training was further reinforced in 2021 when President Joseph R. Biden Jr. signed an executive order to assess workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion (The White House, 2021). Therefore, legalities placed more emphasis at the forefront of the business's list of priorities because the required rules by local, state, or federal regulations set the minimum guidelines for all organizations in the United States to obey. By addressing the individuals within communities who faced discrimination, the communication between groups of people who had not faced discrimination could bridge the gap toward consistency and enable objective organizational decisions (Seliverstova & Pierog, 2021). Seliverstova and Pierog's (2021) research looked at a global perspective of diversity training and found it was valuable for organizations to implement. However, a

gap existed for additional assessment by management to create meaningful diversity training.

Research by Skaggs et al. (2020) addressed the governmental representation of diversity within the workplace but put great emphasis on the leadership team to make the proper decisions to uphold best practices so as not to alienate or fail to understand employees, causing miscommunication between the two groups. Overall, this research found a need for a solid legal foundation and a poor execution of diversity programs spearheaded by leadership. Therefore, using the minimum legal requirements as the starting point for diversity training, the leadership team could have addressed the outcomes of an effective training program (Shukla, 2024). Even without specific legal requirements outside the bare minimum, diversity training could have helped organizations mitigate legal risks and reduce liability exposure related to discrimination, harassment, and retaliation claims. By training employees on unconscious bias, respectful workplace behavior, and cultural competency, organizations could have demonstrated a commitment to preventing discrimination and harassment and defend against legal claims (Robertson et al., 2024).

Legal requirements for diversity training from the leadership team in creating an equitable organization could have varied based on jurisdiction and industry (Rios & Cohen, 2023). In the United States, while federal law did not explicitly mandate diversity training, specific state and local regulations might have required organizations to implement such programs to prevent discrimination and promote workplace equity (Simon, 2024). For example, California law mandated that employers with 50 or more

employees provide biannual harassment prevention training to supervisors and managers, which included topics on diversity, inclusion, and preventing bias-based discrimination (State of California, 2023).

Similar requirements existed in other states like New York and Illinois, where specific training on sexual harassment and discrimination prevention had to be provided periodically (Skaggs et al., 2010). By meeting legal requirements and going beyond compliance to promote genuine diversity and inclusion, leadership teams could have fostered a workplace culture that valued and respected all employees, ultimately enhancing organizational success and equity (Javed, 2024). The following section delved into the potential obstacles employees faced in the workplace regarding diversity training.

### **Workplace Diversity Dilemma**

Employers looked for areas of improvement to save business profits and increase income, so it was in the employer's best interest to implement productive programs for the organization and its employees (Rummel et al., 2022). Therefore, the return on investment for implementing a diversity training program could have benefited the company and its employees (Jun-Chen Chu et al., 2023). One of the dilemmas organizations faced when implementing diversity training was the feeling of forced training; the training did not work, and no positive results were discerned from the training (Lafair, 2024). However, this study could have addressed whether one training was sufficient to create a perception because society was ever evolving and people changed, so it could have been beneficial to have updated diversity training consistently at the workplace (Gonzales, 2023).

Implementing diversity training could have presented various employment dilemmas for employers, especially when leadership presented the information to create organizational equity (Phillips & Phillips, 2024). One common dilemma was resistance or skepticism among employees who might have perceived diversity training as mandatory indoctrination or political correctness. This resistance could have stemmed from misunderstandings about the purpose of diversity training or concerns about potential backlash if discussions around sensitive topics such as race, gender, or religion were mishandled (Koburtay et al., 2023). Effective leadership had to navigate these challenges by fostering an open dialogue, addressing concerns transparently, and emphasizing the business case for diversity, highlighting how it benefited employees and the organization (Burmeister et al., 2021).

Another dilemma involved the potential for legal implications if diversity training was perceived as discriminatory or exclusionary (Byrd & Scott, 2024). Leadership teams had to ensure that training programs complied with anti-discrimination laws and were designed to promote inclusivity rather than exacerbate divisions (Linnes et al., 2024). This required careful planning and consideration of the diverse perspectives within the workforce to avoid unintended consequences or legal disputes (Friedman et al., 2024). Additionally, balancing the need for mandatory training with respecting individual beliefs and cultural differences could have been challenging. Leaders had to approach diversity training with sensitivity and empathy, recognizing that employees might have had different experiences and viewpoints that shaped their attitudes toward diversity initiatives (Legate & Weinstein, 2024).

Furthermore, implementing diversity training effectively required commitment from leadership to lead by example and integrate diversity principles into organizational practices (Rosenzweig et al., 2024). However, a dilemma arose if leadership's actions did not align with the messages conveyed during training sessions. Inconsistencies between rhetoric and behavior could have undermined the credibility of diversity efforts and eroded employee trust (Hellerstedt et al., 2024). To mitigate this dilemma, leaders had to demonstrate an authentic commitment to equity and inclusion through their actions, decisions, and employee interactions (Thakur & Dhar, 2022). By addressing these dilemmas thoughtfully and proactively, leadership could have fostered a workplace culture where diversity was celebrated, equity was prioritized, and all employees felt valued and respected (Miller et al., 2022).

Employers benefited from diversity training because it could improve recruiting (Roberson et al., 2024). Since diversity training was not limited to one department or person, the recruiting efforts made to select the best-fit person for the organization could see improvement in understanding different communication styles (Lee, 2022). It established a better connection with the hiring manager that was not solely reliant on the resume because some recruiters selected applicants based on a cultural fit, which referred to how compatible a person was with the company's mission, vision, values, goals, and culture (Hu et al., 2024). Understanding the diversity of potential candidates could have increased the number of interviews, which might have increased the timing of finding and hiring a person (Tran et al., 2024). Once hired, diversity training could still have

influenced the business culture because that person could grow with the company and understand the workplace environment.

Another hurdle employers faced with diversity training could have been when employees questioned the relevance of diversity training to their job responsibilities, especially if they did not directly interact with diverse groups or believed that their work was unaffected by diversity-related issues (Aaby et al., 2020). This could have led to resistance, disrespect, or disengagement during the training sessions (Kanitz et al., 2024). Leadership could have addressed this by explaining why diversity training was critical to the organizational goal and how the employee contributed to something more significant with their attendance and participation (Noluthando, 2023). There was also the possibility that the employee resisted diversity training due to fear of change or discomfort with confronting biases and prejudices (Lélia da Silveira et al., 2024).

Employees might have perceived diversity training as threatening their beliefs or identity, leading to defensive reactions or opposition (Hellerstedt et al., 2024). Therefore, diversity training should have been highlighted to encourage open, healthy dialogue between different groups of people (Wu et al., 2023). When building diversity training, there was the possibility of challenges related to cultural sensitivity and relevance with multicultural or multinational groups (Munsell et al., 2024). Employees from different cultural backgrounds might have had varying perspectives on diversity. They might have perceived the training differently based on cultural norms and values (Cook et al., 2023). Hence, incorporating human resources as one of the leaders to receive the updated

constructive criticism to update the training accurately was beneficial to promoting practical training across all levels of the organization (Aguinis et al., 2022).

Retention and promotion were also factors for leadership to consider when implementing diversity training (Zou, 2023). By boosting awareness of diversity topics within the organization, leadership could have enhanced communication to explore the desired level of employment the person sought, created a standard progression process, and established training methods that were meaningful to the person (Munsell et al., 2024). Promotion and retention could have been improved when leaders understood their direct reports and created an environment promoting organizational equity (Trkulja et al., 2024). Practical diversity training from leadership could have mitigated organizational turnover due to a lack of diversity initiatives or organizational equity (El-Sayed et al., 2022).

### **Organizational Equity**

To reach organizational equity, all participants had to engage in the process with positive intent, refrained from judgment, and were willing to understand an individual outside of themselves (Yusof et al., 2018). One of the keys to organizational equity was not remaining stagnant regarding training development, so leadership could continue to make organizational improvements (Gill & Olson, 2023). The feedback and perspective from the employees were an essential part of this research study because understanding this helped solve the research question of how employees perceived leadership's diversity training in supporting organizational equity (Wang & Zhang, 2022). To create alignment

between people, equity within the workplace was defined as fair treatment, management, promotion, and equal access to all levels within the organization.

Diversity training was crucial in advancing organizational equity by raising awareness, promoting inclusive practices, empowering marginalized groups, strengthening accountability, and driving systemic change (Gonzales, 2023). Creating an equitable organization meant leadership ensured fairness and impartiality in every aspect of the workplace (Alabi & Mahmuda, 2024). For example, in hiring, compensation, and the overall treatment of employees, to build an equitable organization, the company held leaders accountable for promoting equity in their departments, where clear objectives and goals were set to track if the equity initiatives made a positive impact on the workplace environment (Javed, 2024).

Research by Simon (2024) challenged diversity training efforts regarding recruiting, hiring, and promotion of women in the United States police force. It was found that diversity initiatives did have a positive impact, but more emphasis should have been placed on the fair assessment and treatment of people (Nalwoga et al., 2024). Therefore, the organization would have benefited from ensuring the training remained consistent across all employment levels and applicable locations. Minkin (2023) found that 61% of companies had processes and policies to create an equitable organization. With processes and policies in place, company leaders began communicating with their employees about diversity to develop the workplace environment further.

Other areas of development from diversity training included employee retention and loyalty (Utete, 2024). Therefore, addressing these topics contributed to one of the

reasons an employee would have stayed with an organization that valued and prioritized equity (Wyland et al., 2024). When employees felt that their contributions were recognized and that they had opportunities for growth and advancement, trust continued to build between the employee and employer (Harsh & Prasad, 2021). They may not have felt the need to seek out employment outside of the company (Wang et al., 2024). This led to higher employee retention rates and greater organizational loyalty.

Organizational equity also contributed to a positive work environment where employees felt psychologically safe and supported (Munsell et al., 2024). This led to improved mental health and well-being among employees, as they experienced lower stress levels, anxiety, and burnout (Legate & Weinstein, 2024). Additionally, employees were more likely to feel satisfied and fulfilled (Soetianto et al., 2021). Achieving workplace equity motivated employees to perform better and contribute to the organization. Employees who believed their efforts were recognized and rewarded may have been encouraged to achieve their goals and excel in their roles, increasing workplace productivity and performance (Javed, 2024). After further understanding the implications of organizational equity in the workplace from leadership's diversity training, a more profound comprehension of what diversity meant and how it tied into workplace training was discussed in the following section.

### **Diversity**

As defined in Chapter One, organizational equity was the equal distribution of power, education, training, and resources among all employees within the company (Moreno et al., 2024). This included various groups of people regardless of their

background. The more diverse the organization was, the more differentiated points of view could be provided as constructive feedback to leadership (To et al., 2024).

Understanding the employees' perspectives allowed for the most effective decisions that could meet most employees' needs (May, 2023). Similar to the Pareto principle—meeting the needs of at least 80% of the target audience—organizational equity required consideration of the remaining 20% as well, because valuing this minority perspective enhanced managerial insight and provided a holistic view of diversity training (Ukai, 2022).

Diversity brought together individuals with different backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences, fostering creativity and innovation (Tseng et al., 2024). When employees with diverse viewpoints collaborated, they generated a broader range of ideas and solutions to workplace problems, leading to more innovative products, services, and processes (Martini, 2021). With the autonomy to generate ideas, employees developed additional skills to make effective decisions (The Management of Diversity: Designing an Effective Diversity Training Program, 2022). Diversity training enabled teams to consider a wider range of perspectives and insights. When diverse teams engaged in constructive dialogue and debate, they were more likely to identify blind spots, challenge assumptions, and arrive at well-rounded decisions that reflected the needs and interests of diverse stakeholders (Viererbl et al., 2021).

Including people from different backgrounds, mindsets, processes, beliefs, or speech could cultivate positive diversity habits, such as employing a diverse group internally and externally (Pizio, 2020). From representing inclusiveness in hiring to

building stronger teams for brainstorming, and demonstrating to customers that the organization valued individuality, diversity could improve hiring, retention, recruitment, and overall business performance (Raut & Gokhale, 2021).

Leadership needed to prioritize diversity training for several reasons. First and foremost, fostering diversity and inclusion was not just a matter of compliance with legal requirements; it was essential for organizational success (Lee, 2022). Embracing diversity allowed organizations to tap into broader perspectives, experiences, and talents, enhancing innovation, creativity, and problem-solving (Friedman et al., 2024). By creating a culture where all employees felt valued and respected, diversity training helped improve morale, engagement, and retention.

Moreover, diversity training was crucial for addressing systemic inequalities and promoting equity within the workplace (Moreno et al., 2024). Leaders who championed diversity sent a powerful message about the organization's values and commitment to fairness (Leslie & Flynn, 2024). They played a key role in ensuring that policies, practices, and decision-making processes were inclusive and equitable, reducing barriers to advancement and creating opportunities for all employees to thrive (Vachhar, 2023).

Ultimately, by investing in diversity training and embracing inclusive leadership practices, leaders could create a workplace culture that celebrated diversity, promoted equity, and fostered a more cohesive and successful organization (Jha et al., 2024). Diversity training encompassed many dimensions, including employees' backgrounds, perspectives, experiences, and identities. By recognizing the diversity of its workforce and promoting fairness, the training could unify employees and strengthen organizational

equity (Rosenzweig et al., 2024). The next section defined what diversity training entailed and explored its objectives and benefits for the organization.

### **What is Diversity Training**

People's differences made them unique (May, 2023). Diversity training stemmed from a company fostering an equitable workplace (Bair, 2022). Diversity training was a topic that covered a broad range of subjects within the discipline. This included race, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, disability, age, gender, culture, education, neurodiversity, parental status, personality, abilities, mental health, marital status, citizenship, and life experiences (Carter, 2023). The distinctions between people caused a wedge between employees and employers. This gap created barriers to a person's hiring, promotion, training, and employment status (Burrell, 2023). According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Committee (EEOC), 66% of claims filed in 2022 were labeled as retaliation. This research was essential to understand the employee perspective of leadership's diversity training, which created an equitable organization. Some cases could have been mitigated with practical training for situations like an employee's wrongful termination or following policies to reduce misalignment (Wang et al., 2024).

An imbalance of understanding diverse groups of employees created a disconnect between all levels within the organization that reduced the workforce, so diversity training needed to have appropriate measures in place to fairly and accurately educate employees consistently (Chien-Chin et al., 2022). Diversity training equipped employees with the knowledge, skills, and tools to create inclusive and equitable work

environments. This included strategies for promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in recruitment, hiring, promotion, and performance evaluation processes. Research by Inegbedion et al. (2020) found that diversity training to create an equitable organization equipped people with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to embrace differences among people and foster an inclusive workplace.

Multiple methods to implement diversity training existed, such as online courses, workshops, case studies, scenarios, seminars, and simulation exercises (Sweeting et al., 2024). Since these methods were presented by leadership, it was critical to understand what diversity meant in the organization and how the employees interpreted the presentation (Homan et al., 2020). Exploring diversity looked at multiple aspects of training; for example, the type of diversity training mattered because it helped the company and the presenter reach the objective of creating an equitable organization (Doolittle, 2021). The presentation format allowed a deeper exploration of diversity-related topics and applied concepts in real-life situations (Nachmias et al., 2022). Therefore, after attending the presentation, the knowledge from the session was translated into a person's interaction with other employees.

When businesses expanded on diversity training where multiple topics like age, religion, disability, nationality, gender, race, and more were discussed with employees, there were other opportunities to understand employee differences (Morfaki & Morfaki, 2022). Implementing diversity training first equipped the leader to understand the employees more humanely (Patton et al., 2019). Then, the training unified all employees on matters unrelated to the job description (El-Sayed et al., 2017). For example, how

people communicated with each other in a way that was not offensive to a culture or favored one gender's input over another during a brainstorming meeting were just a few examples of diversity training topics. Diversity training was used to explore the employee perception of diversity between leadership and their employees and how that tied into the organization (Gill & Olson, 2023).

Diversity training, facilitated by the leadership team, was pivotal in cultivating an equitable organization by fostering employee awareness, understanding, and appreciation of diversity (Kadam et al., 2020). These sessions were designed to educate staff on the significance of inclusivity and equity in the workplace, emphasizing the value of diverse perspectives and backgrounds (Miller et al., 2022). Through structured presentations and interactive discussions, leadership guided employees to recognize and mitigate biases, promote respectful communication, and embrace cultural differences (Aaby et al., 2020). By aligning organizational values with actionable practices, such as fair hiring processes and inclusive policies, diversity training led by leadership aimed to create an environment where all individuals felt valued, respected, and empowered to contribute to their fullest potential (Roberts, 2020). Ultimately, these efforts enhanced employee satisfaction and collaboration and positioned the organization to thrive globally, where diversity was increasingly recognized as a driver of innovation and organizational success (Aaby et al., 2020).

### **Diversity Training in Organizations**

Research by Cook et al. (2023) was very relevant to this research study because it was qualitative and addressed the perspective of a specific group within the workplace.

This research study was aligned with understanding diversity within the workplace and used interviews as one of its data collection methods. Another research article by An et al. (2019) reported on the effectiveness of an experiment involving diversity training and how that training from leadership was seen. This research tied into my research study because part of assessing training was understanding human behavior and exploring how the person interpreted the presentation. The research focused on two types of leadership behavior: transformational and transactional. The study assessed the leaders' leadership behavior based on a rating scale from a random sample of people who received the training (Devine & Ash, 2022).

Leadership could use diversity training in the workplace to set clear expectations regarding inclusive behaviors and practices (Onyeador et al., 2021). By articulating the organization's commitment to diversity and inclusion and outlining specific behaviors expected from employees, leaders provided a framework for accountability and promoted a culture of equity and respect (Javed, 2024). Training offered opportunities for skill development and practice in cross-cultural communication, unconscious bias awareness, and inclusive leadership (Carter et al., 2020). By providing interactive training like workshops, role-playing exercises, and real-world case studies, leaders helped employees develop the skills to navigate diverse work environments and contributed to an equitable organization (Minkin, 2023). Through diversity training, leaders modeled inclusive behaviors such as active listening, empathy, and respect for diverse perspectives. When these behaviors were consistently demonstrated, leaders set the tone for inclusive practices throughout the organization through their actions (Seijts & Milani, 2022).

Diversity training promoted cultural competence by helping employees understand and appreciate diverse cultural backgrounds, beliefs, and practices (Young & Guo, 2020). By fostering cultural competence, organizations better served diverse customers and clients and enhanced team collaboration while raising awareness of diversity. Diversity training helped employees understand the importance of diversity and its impact on organizational culture, performance, and success (Devine & Ash, 2022). Awareness training included interactive workshops, presentations, and discussions to explore unconscious bias, privilege, and microaggressions.

Research by Nachmias et al. (2022) explored the perception of diversity management and found that leadership was essential in managing diversity practices. This research and the findings aided in understanding employee perception as a contributing factor to answering how employees viewed diversity training from their leadership. Further evaluation of diversity training from the employee perspective was beneficial to help understand the key components that built and created a more equitable organization (Trolan & Rossmann, 2022). This research identified areas within an organization that profited from the alignment among its employees. Research by Ganesh (2024) showed that a positive impact on employee morale, engagement, performance, retention, and human resource metrics like employee satisfaction was a potential outcome of diversity training.

Diversity training was critical in embedding equity and fairness into the organizational culture. By integrating diversity and inclusion principles into policies, practices, and decision-making processes, organizations demonstrated a commitment to

equity and created a culture where all employees felt valued, respected, and empowered to contribute their best work (Mullin et al., 2021). This training often included content and resources tailored to the needs and experiences of underrepresented groups within the organization. By providing support, validation, and opportunities for advancement, diversity training helped address inequities and barriers to success faced by marginalized employees, leading to more significant equity and representation within the organization (Nishii & Leroy, 2022). With a better understanding of what diversity training involved, the next section examined the factors driving diversity's importance and its implementation of training in the organization.

### **Diversity Awareness and Factors**

Diversity training in organizations was driven by several key factors that underscored its importance in fostering inclusive workplaces and driving organizational success (Chaudhry et al., 2021). First, regulatory compliance played a significant role (Locke, 2022). Many jurisdictions required organizations to provide diversity training as part of efforts to prevent discrimination and harassment in the workplace (State of California, 2023). Compliance with these legal mandates ensured that organizations operated within the bounds of anti-discrimination laws and regulations, mitigating legal risks and liabilities. Another factor of diversity training was driven by the growing recognition of diversity as a strategic business imperative (Seliverstova, 2021).

Organizations increasingly understood that diverse teams were more innovative, adaptable, and capable of solving complex problems (Simon, 2024). By leveraging diverse perspectives, experiences, and talents, companies gained a competitive edge in

the marketplace and better met the needs of diverse customer bases (Afolabi et al., 2023). Companies utilizing and understanding diversity training equipped employees with the skills and awareness needed to collaborate effectively across differences, enhancing teamwork, creativity, and overall organizational performance (Jungmann et al., 2020).

Another aspect of diversity training was that it was driven considerably by society. According to Devine and Ash (2022), diversity training created another learning opportunity within the workplace to improve people's interaction skills inside and outside the workplace (Willard et al., 2023). Society benefited from diversity training because it increased the number of creative ideas, improved collaboration amongst different people, and fostered a better understanding of cultures (Roche & Passmore, 2023). Groups shared cross-cultural interactions and impacted society because of the potential to expand educational shared learning to future generations (Jain & Pareek, 2020).

Societal and demographic shifts also drove the need for diversity training (DiTomaso, 2021). As workplaces became more diverse, organizations ensured inclusive practices and cultures that attracted, retained, and engaged employees from various backgrounds (Ukai et al., 2022). By investing in diversity training, organizations demonstrated their commitment to creating environments where all individuals felt valued and respected, thereby improving employee morale, retention rates, and overall workplace satisfaction (Thakur et al., 2023). These drivers collectively reinforced the importance of diversity training as a proactive strategy to foster equity, innovation, and sustainable growth within organizations.

Employees were another contributor to driving diversity initiatives because the training improved team dynamics and prepared the person to operate within a multicultural workplace (Nachmias et al., 2022). Employees looked to employers for guidance, leadership, and workplace training (Lafair, 2024). By creating ways for employees to speak about their perception of diversity, the business benefited the people, the company, and its employees (Griswold & Ariss, 2022). An example of the impact employees had on the organization due to diversity training was referrals. Employee referrals were among the most effective ways to share company information (Sarkar, 2022). However, in a business, this referral could positively or negatively impact the employer and the employees, so employers created a fair environment that allowed people to be their authentic selves to drive equity (Jansen & Searle, 2021).

Employers were another driver of diversity, as they were held to the legal standards by local, state, and federal law, and there was a minimum requirement for diversity training (Carter et al., 2020). However, to improve the workplace culture and establish equity at all levels of the organization, educated employees aware of differences among their coworkers increased the sense of belonging for the employee and contributed to their alignment with the business (Wyland et al., 2024). Employers driving diversity was essential because leaders were employed to present training for their employees to understand the process better and stay up-to-date with the business culture (Byrd & Scott, 2024). A company saw improvements in its decision-making process, recruiting, retention, promotion, and leadership training based on the leadership level being educated on replacing subjective with objective communication strategies (Devine & Ash, 2022).

If a company enhanced the decision-making process, it became crucial to address the influence of unconscious and conscious biases, which significantly impacted the effectiveness of organizational decisions.

### **Unconscious and Conscious Bias**

Unconscious and conscious bias were critical concepts addressed in diversity training led by leadership teams to foster organizational equity (Carter et al., 2020). Unconscious bias was implicit, often automatic attitudes or stereotypes that influenced one's understanding, actions, and decisions towards others, often without conscious awareness (Mohan & Tompa, 2021). These biases manifested in hiring decisions, performance evaluations, and everyday interactions, leading to unintended discrimination and inequality within the workplace (O'Meara et al., 2024). Diversity training aimed to raise awareness about unconscious biases, helping employees recognize and mitigate their impact through self-reflection, education, and practical strategies (Devine & Ash, 2022). By fostering an environment where biases were acknowledged and addressed, leadership promoted fairness and inclusivity, ensuring all employees were evaluated and treated based on merit and objective metrics to incorporate for future calculations on the success of diversity training (Maxfield et al., 2021).

Conscious bias involved deliberate prejudices or discriminatory behaviors based on race, gender, religion, or sexual orientation (Storm et al., 2023). At the same time, intentionally less subtle than unconscious biases, conscious biases still detrimentally impacted workplace relationships, morale, and organizational culture (Easterly & Ricard, 2020). To solve this, effective diversity training led by leadership confronted conscious

biases by promoting empathy, cultural competence, and respectful communication. Diversity training encouraged open dialogue and educated employees on valuing diversity and embracing differences (Corsino & Fuller, 2021). By comprehensively addressing unconscious and conscious biases, leadership teams created a workplace where all individuals felt valued, respected, and empowered to contribute their unique perspectives, ultimately fostering a more equitable and inclusive organizational environment.

Employees experienced unconscious and conscious workplace bias (Rathore et al., 2022). This prohibited the employee from advancing within the company or limited a person's decision-making process. Generally, bias stemmed from making quick judgments and decisions without considering all the facts (Jun-Chen Chu et al., 2023). A biased mindset used personal experiences and stereotypes to create a preconceived interpretation of a person or group (Devine & Ash, 2022). This closed-minded thought process inhibited a person's potential and led to a gap in understanding a person's identity (Kiradoo, 2022). Unconscious and conscious bias affected the team dynamic, so diversity training allowed people with diverse perspectives to explain their perspectives and connect better with their leadership (Thompson, 2020).

Employees' and the leadership team's awareness impacted the recruitment process. Employers significantly influenced recruitment and hiring practices, directly impacting workforce diversity (Carter et al., 2020). Employers attracted and retained a more diverse talent pool by implementing inclusive hiring practices, such as diverse candidate sourcing, unbiased selection criteria, and diverse hiring teams (Vachhar, 2023).

Awareness of unconscious biases and stereotypes influenced workplace decision-making and behavior (Mohan & Tompa, 2021). By providing leadership education and training on topics such as unconscious bias, privilege, and microaggressions, diversity training helped employees recognize and mitigate biases that contributed to inequity and discrimination.

Diversity training included bias training to refine the leader's behavior towards employees, which fostered a positive work environment where direct reports felt comfortable working with their coworkers and managers (Rathore et al., 2022). By thoroughly understanding the potential bias, leadership began working on strategies and human resources to implement positive social change to create organizational equity (Pascalev et al., 2022). By looking towards diversity training for the leader, the employee also took away learning opportunities from the diversity training because they improved problem-solving and communication skills by utilizing fact-finding skills to obtain relevant information on the topic (Roberson et al., 2020). Exploring unconscious and conscious bias among employees required a multi-faceted approach that included diversity training, education, awareness, support, and accountability by investing in initiatives that promoted equity (To et al., 2024).

Unconscious and conscious bias training, when effectively integrated into diversity training led by leadership teams, profoundly impacted all employees within an organization (Thompson et al., 2023). By raising awareness about these biases, employees gained insights into how unconscious attitudes and stereotypes influenced decision-making and interactions in the workplace (Burmeister et al., 2021). This

awareness helped individuals recognize and challenge their biases, promoting a more inclusive and equitable environment where judgments were based on merit and capabilities rather than assumptions or stereotypes (Meidert et al., 2023). As a result, employees became more mindful of their behaviors and interactions, leading to improved collaboration, communication, and mutual respect across diverse teams (Atxert, 2023).

Bias training fostered a culture of continuous learning and personal growth within the organization (Willard et al., 2023). It encouraged employees to engage in ongoing self-reflection and education about diversity issues, empowering them to advocate for fairness and equity in their daily work practices (Easterly & Richard, 2020). By equipping employees with the tools and understanding to navigate diverse perspectives and experiences, leadership-led bias training promoted a sense of belonging and trust among team members (Vivek, 2023).

This fostered a positive work environment where individuals from all backgrounds felt valued and supported, leading to higher employee engagement, retention, and overall organizational effectiveness (Aroussi et al., 2024). Ultimately, bias training was not just about compliance or mitigating risks; it was about cultivating a workplace culture where diversity was celebrated and everyone could thrive and contribute to the organization's behavioral success (Howell et al., 2024). Building on the factors contributing to the employee perspective of diversity training, it was crucial to consider how organizational behavior influenced the effectiveness and integration of diversity training from leadership.

## **Organizational Behavior**

How the workforce dynamic worked in the organization was essential to this research study because understanding organizational behavior could aid in exploring the areas of potential improvement (Bair, 2022). Employee interaction with each other was an example of an area contributing to organizational behavior (Vu et al., 2022). This study investigated the interactions between employees and organizational leadership training. If misalignment existed among employees, the action of a person depended on their ethics, moral compass, and emotional awareness (Lima et al., 2022). Therefore, leadership viewed and coached a disagreement between employees objectively.

Organizational behavior looked at a few concepts: individual behavior, group behavior, organizational structure, leadership and management, organizational culture, change management, employee wellness, and work-life balance (Ukai et al., 2022). How people responded to workplace changes could be a pivotal factor in what areas needed more training and involvement from leaders.

Diversity training presented by leadership influenced organizational behavior by shaping norms and values within the workplace (Devine et al., 2022). When leaders actively participated in and endorsed diversity initiatives, they set a precedent for inclusive behaviors and attitudes throughout the organization (Morfaki & Morfaki, 2022). This commitment encouraged employees to align their actions with organizational values of equity and fairness, creating a supportive environment where everyone felt valued and respected (Portocarrero & Carter, 2022).

By integrating diversity training into organizational behavior, leadership teams drove positive change, inspired cultural transformation, and ultimately enhanced the organization's reputation as a diverse and inclusive employer of choice (Leslie & Flynn, 2024). This, in turn, strengthened employee engagement, boosted morale, and positioned the organization for long-term success in a diverse marketplace (Lee et al., 2020). Employees who gained awareness of diverse perspectives and experiences were better equipped to navigate cultural differences, manage conflicts effectively, and leverage diversity's strengths (Lewis & Shah, 2021).

Research on how groups of people interacted and influenced one another was an essential part of organizational behavior (Waldman & Sparr, 2023). Analyzing this behavior helped understand the organizational adaptability with the evolving societal change (Wadhwa & Aggarwal, 2023). How an organization treated its employees started at the top of the reporting hierarchy. Maintaining diversity and intelligent leadership, as Carter (2023) proposed for organizations to uphold, assisted in this endeavor. This goal was achieved by continuously educating the leadership team on cultural awareness, creating an environment where constructive feedback was warranted, leadership received coaching and timely developmental and organizational updates, and the leadership's behavior was evaluated to ensure the diversity training was presented to align with the company (Carter, 2023).

Organizational behavior was highly relevant for any organization that employed people (Widodo & Ciptaningsih, 2023). Understanding how individuals or groups interacted within the company built a positive work culture, promoted a sense of

ownership and individuality, and ultimately improved employee organizational equity (Soetjipto et al., 2021). As employees were the company's biggest asset, it was critical to focus on the human aspects like personality, motivation, behavior, experience, intuition, and ethics that impacted the business's success (Bowen, 2024).

The organization's behavioral goal was a driving factor for how leaders interacted with their employees. However, how the leadership relayed that information to the employee set the tone of the behavior (Hanlon et al., 2022). A person in leadership was always in the spotlight, meaning people were always watching (Carter, 2023). Therefore, to create and maintain organizational equity, a leader's behavior was essential to the outcome of the diversity training. Overall, further exploring the role organizational behavior had on the employee perspective was vital to highlight how leadership behavior explicitly impacted the sustainability of diversity training.

### **Leadership Behavior**

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, behavioral leadership weighed heavily on the employees' experience of training leadership because of how leaders presented themselves in front of a group and the daily interactions between direct reports instilled in the group (Closa, 2021). Therefore, the employees picked up on the leader's behavior, attitude, and communication with the team (Lee et al., 2021). As a critical component of this research study, understanding the range of people who could impact the workforce was essential because it paved the way for holding the correct people accountable for ensuring proper program execution (Tracy et al., 2023). Leadership's role in diversity was significant because they could hire, fire, promote, mentor, support, recommend, and

educate employees (Tripathy, 2019). The authority to make positive organizational changes fell into the leadership's responsibilities as they maintained employee responsibility.

How a leader behaved within an organization set the tone for the entire group, regardless of whether they reported directly to their manager/supervisor (Parmer & Dillard, 2019). A great representation of this was from a quote by Maya Angelou (2014), who stated that people forget what you said and did, but never how you made them feel. This was important for all levels of the organization to remember as employees continued to interact. Research by Meschitti (2019) addressed how leadership dynamics worked using an ethnographic study of how they operated. Leadership behavior played a crucial role in shaping the effectiveness of diversity training presented to employees in creating an equitable organization (Jungmann et al., 2020).

When leaders actively participated in and championed diversity training initiatives, they were committed to fostering an inclusive workplace culture (Vachhar, 2023). Their visible support sent a powerful message about the organization's values and priorities, encouraging employees to engage more deeply with the training content (Kossek et al., 2024). Leaders who role-modeled inclusive behaviors, such as listening actively to diverse viewpoints, valuing contributions from all team members, and making decisions that reflected equity, inspired confidence and trust among employees (Vachhar, 2023). This, in turn, enhanced the receptiveness and effectiveness of diversity training efforts by reinforcing the importance of diversity and inclusion as core organizational principles.

A business leader's actions impacted the organization because pondering a decision for too long could create anxiety for the team (Mayer et al., 2023). Lag time was seen as unsure in their decision making, showed a lack of authoritative confidence, and could decrease trust between the employee and employer (Sims et al., 2021). Since diversity was not limited to an individual's ethnicity, this included age, body type, and physical abilities (Munsell et al., 2024). Expanding the leadership mindset to recognize the differences between people opened the door to understanding and mitigating unconscious bias (Mohan, 2021).

Leadership behavior influenced the implementation and sustainability of diversity initiatives beyond the training sessions (KS et al., 2024). Leaders who integrated diversity and inclusion into their everyday leadership practices, such as setting clear diversity goals, holding themselves and others accountable for inclusive behaviors, and actively promoting diversity in hiring and promotion decisions, created an environment where diversity training was not seen as a one-time event but as an ongoing commitment to organizational equity (O'Meara et al., 2020). By aligning their actions with their words, leaders fostered a culture where diversity was valued as a strategic asset that enhanced innovation, decision-making, and organizational performance (Zahap et al., 2024). Ultimately, leadership behavior that supported and reinforced diversity training initiatives contributed to creating a workplace where all employees felt respected, valued, and empowered to contribute their unique perspectives to achieving shared goals of equity and success.

Research conducted by Aei-Kyung et al. (2022) addressed the impact of authentic leadership and how homing in on this behavior could reduce illegal activities from upper management due to a lack of understanding of social change. Differences existed within the organization, and leadership benefited from staying abreast with changes in their employees' situation, culture, style, and preferences. Research by Stoker et al. (2022) supported this because, during the COVID-19 pandemic, leadership behavior changed the uptick of remote roles within an organization (Follmer et al., 2024). Awareness of the content included in the training and who presented the information was essential because this contributed to how the employee perceived the training from their leadership.

The actions and behaviors of the leadership team played a pivotal role in shaping employee perspectives on equity within an organization (Thakur & Dhar, 2022). By embodying inclusive behaviors, aligning policies with equity principles, creating growth opportunities, and celebrating diversity, leaders fostered a workplace culture where equity was an aspiration and a lived reality for all employees (Nalwoga et al., 2024). The leadership team's actions and behaviors profoundly impacted how employees perceived and experienced equity within an organization (Jha et al., 2024).

When leaders consistently demonstrated inclusive behaviors and prioritized equity in their actions, they set the tone for the entire workplace culture, such as setting an example, building trust, building psychological safety, promoting diversity, creating growth opportunities, and aligning organizational policies and practices (Carter et al., 2020). For example, to identify an effective leader's contributions, an emphasis on educating leadership on the content of what, why, and how the information was presented

to the employees took precedence over which leader was selected for the training event. A leader's seniority, popularity, and job title were not the most efficient methods of determining the best-suited presenter (Kranz & Sale, 2022). While a leader's seniority, popularity, and job title may have established their authority, the individual's behavior and actions impacted their effectiveness and highlighted the importance of behavioral leadership.

Behavioral leadership was tied to this research because an effective leader combined personal skills, qualities, personalities, behavior, attitude, emotion, energy, and motivation (Miller et al., 2022). These areas combined to inspire and motivate employees to achieve a common goal within the organization. A leader was armed with a clear vision of the executive approved strategic diversity training goal (Seliverstova, 2021). Behavioral leadership played a crucial role in leadership diversity training, directly impacting the creation of an equitable organization because leadership focused on the actions and behaviors of leaders rather than their inherent traits, emphasizing the importance of what leaders did to influence and guide their teams (Megheirkouni & Mejheirkouni, 2020). When integrated into diversity training, behavioral leadership principles helped leaders adopt and model behaviors that promoted inclusivity and equity (Ambarwati et al., 2024). This involved demonstrating respect, empathy, active listening, and open communication, all of which were essential for fostering a diverse and inclusive work environment.

To further understand the leader's motivation, McGregor's Theory intertwined with the motivational portion of this theory because it focused on the leader's mindset on

how their employees were motivated (Bandhu et al., 2024). Since employees' willingness to participate in diversity training contributed to understanding the perception of leadership training, being aware of the leader's mindset aided in the responses in Chapter 3 (Evan et al., 2023). McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y, along with motivational and behavioral leadership theories, provided a framework for understanding how leadership effectively presented diversity training to its direct employees in a way that fostered motivation, engagement, and equity within the organization (Arobiolo & Chinyere, 2023).

McGregor's Theory X suggested that some leaders viewed employees as lazy and unmotivated, needing strict control and direction (Homan et al., 2020). In contrast, Theory Y proposed that employees were intrinsically motivated, capable of self-direction, and sought responsibility (Mullin et al., 2021). When leaders adopted Theory Y principles in presenting diversity training, they believed in the potential of employees to embrace diversity and actively contribute to an equitable workplace (McGinnity et al., 2021). This mindset encouraged leaders to facilitate training sessions that empowered employees to explore their biases, understand different perspectives, and take ownership of creating an inclusive environment.

Understanding motivational and behavioral leadership theories emphasized the role of leaders in motivating and inspiring their teams through their behaviors and actions (Bair, 2022). When presenting diversity training, leaders used motivational techniques such as setting clear goals, providing constructive feedback, and recognizing employee contributions to reinforce the importance of diversity and inclusion (Ali, 2023). By

aligning training content with organizational values and strategic objectives, leaders demonstrated how embracing diversity benefited individual growth and organizational success (Kadam et al., 2022).

Intertwining McGregor's Theory with motivational, behavioral leadership theory in diversity training involved cultivating a supportive and participative environment. Leaders encouraged open communication, fostered trust, and promoted collaboration among employees of diverse backgrounds (Alabi & Mahmuda, 2024). By treating employees as valuable assets and empowering them to contribute to a more equitable organization, leaders created a sense of purpose and belonging that motivated employees to engage in diversity initiatives actively (Sabat et al., 2013). In summary, integrating McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y with motivational, behavioral leadership theory in diversity training allowed leaders to cultivate a workplace culture where diversity was embraced, employees were motivated to contribute positively, and equity was prioritized in decision-making and organizational practices (Thompson et al., 2023). This approach enhanced employee satisfaction and retention, drove innovation, and strengthened the organization's competitive advantage in a diverse global marketplace (Devine & Ash, 2022). In a diverse global marketplace, organizations recognized the pivotal role leadership played in shaping the impact of diversity training on employees (Theodoros et al., 2022).

### **Leadership's Impact**

Leadership motivated, coached, and encouraged employees to reach personal and workplace goals (Chaudhry, 2023). The impact of people in positions who managed

people required providing constructive and objective information to their employees to increase productivity (Ambarwati et al., 2024). This connection between the business and employee needs was the solutions-oriented mindset that helped the team members understand how their work contributed to the organization. They were not seen as a number in the system but as humans working for a business (Dea, 2023). A leader who understood diversity was critical in retaining employees (Munsell et al., 2024). Leadership's commitment to understanding and arming their team with the information needed for meaningful positive conversations was critical to an equitable organization. To foster an equitable organization, leadership committed to diversity training initiatives and led by example.

Leadership played a pivotal role in shaping the organizational impact of diversity training to create an equitable workplace (Martins et al., 2023). Effective leadership in diversity initiatives set the tone and direction for the entire organization, influencing how diversity and inclusion were prioritized, practiced, and integrated into everyday operations (Wadhwa & Aggarwal, 2023). When leaders prioritized diversity training, they committed to fostering a culture where differences were celebrated, and all employees felt valued and respected (Kiradoo, 2022). This commitment permeated the organization, influencing policies, decision-making processes, and interpersonal dynamics.

A leader's involvement in diversity training enhanced organizational alignment and cohesion (Wyland et al., 2024). Leaders who actively participated in diversity training sessions reinforced the importance of diversity and inclusion and inspired

employees to embrace these principles (Jungmann et al., 2020). Leaders created a supportive environment where diverse perspectives contributed to innovation, problem-solving, and organizational effectiveness by promoting open dialogue, addressing biases, and advocating for equitable practices. In essence, leadership's engagement in diversity training enhanced employee engagement and satisfaction (Mayer et al., 2023). It strengthened the organization's reputation as an inclusive employer of choice, positioning it for sustained success in today's diverse and competitive business landscape (Ali, 2023).

Respect for differences at work to make objective business decisions regarding an employee's employment status contributed to the workplace culture (Triana et al., 2021). For example, a leader could have promoted an individual who spoke fluent English because the leadership understood them better. However, the person who applied who was not business-level fluent in English and had the skills and capabilities to perform the job was not considered for the role. This was an example that leadership could benefit from diversity training (Afolabi et al., 2023). The leader had to intentionally create a culture that fairly assessed, educated, promoted, hired, trained, and communicated with their employees (Bowen et al., 2024).

Leadership impacted the success of the employee's promotion, access to resources, interactions with coworkers, educational and training opportunities, and workplace relationships if the leadership team lacked an understanding of their influence within the organization (Acosta & Guthrie, 2021). Leadership diversity training reinforced the organization's commitment to diversity and inclusion and enhanced its reputation as an employer of choice that valued and respected all employees (Roberts,

2020). A strong reputation for diversity and inclusion helped attract top talent, enhanced customer loyalty, and differentiated the organization from competitors (Nishii & Leroy, 2022). Due to leadership involvement, research showed that diverse and inclusive workplaces were more innovative, creative, and competitive, leading to better business outcomes and performance (Bernstein et al., 2020).

Diversity training helped leaders understand the strategic importance of diversity and inclusion (Norman & Johnson, 2022). It provided them with the knowledge, skills, and tools needed to leverage diversity as a source of competitive advantage (Kiradoo, 2022). Leadership diversity training was driven by legal compliance, organizational values, business imperatives, talent management goals, employee engagement considerations, and reputation and brand image concerns (Kuknor & Bhattacharya, 2022). Organizations promoting diversity training developed inclusive and equitable leaders who were equipped to drive positive change, foster innovation, and create workplaces where all employees could thrive, so it was essential for the employer and employee viewpoints to align (Corsino & Fuller, 2021). Leadership's knowledge of diversity training in fostering an inclusive workplace was important when exploring the employee perspective amongst the employer to understand the components of supporting an equitable organization. The next section of this chapter dove further into the relationship between the employee and employer within the workplace.

### **Employee and Employer Relationship/Perspective/Communication**

The relationship between employees and the employer relied heavily on a healthy communication strategy (Lee, 2022). A lack of communication fostered misalignment of

processes, job duties, training, and other methods of verbal interaction. Breakdowns in communication led to misunderstandings, conflict, and legal issues (Flicht & Levashina, 2023). Communication was an integral component of the workplace, and company culture was understood by sharing knowledge across the organization (Roche & Passmore, 2023). To create organizational equity, exploring the differences between various groups of people was a crucial step for all levels of the organization to comprehend. Research by Lee et al. (2021) exemplified the employee and employer relationship. Lee's research focused on diversity-orientated leadership's effects on strategic communication during a crisis.

This research study was not based on a pandemic like Busey et al. (2023); however, it was helpful to view how other research studies had proven communication strategies regarding diversity and creating an equitable organization in and outside of a crisis (Munsell et al., 2024). The relationship between the employee and their leadership team was essential because when effective communication was consistently practiced, employers could bear witness to positive changes (Schwaiger & Zehrer, 2022). Retention, performance, recruitment, promotions, communication, and training in the workplace culture could be positively impacted by understanding the employees' perceptions (Tsachouridi & Nikandrou, 2023). Exploring the relationship between culture and the job shed light on how cultural differences surfaced in the workplace and educated leadership on handling many workplace scenarios that were not present in diversity training (Houdek, 2023).

The employer-employee relationship allowed people to pursue professional development and advancement within the organization (Harsh & Prasad, 2021). Employers could support creating an equitable organization by offering diversity training presentations that helped employees from underrepresented groups develop their skills and advance in their careers (Kranz & Sale, 2022). To advance in the workplace, communication and constructive employee feedback on diversity training was critical to share amongst the team (Cheol et al., 2019). Methods of communication opportunities included conducting regular surveys, stay or exit interviews, town hall meetings, or focus groups to gather input from employees and addressed concerns or suggestions for improvement. Feedback gave the employer the knowledge to understand which strategic direction worked best (Syed, 2020).

The employer set the tone for the organizational culture, which could promote or hinder diversity and equity efforts (Rummel et al., 2022). When employers prioritized diversity training initiatives, employees understood that diversity was highly valued and supported (DiTomaso, 2021). Promoting diversity training created a culture where employees felt empowered to bring their authentic selves to work and contributed to a more inclusive environment (McGinnity et al., 2021). Employers were responsible for ensuring fair treatment for all employees, regardless of their background or identity (Morfaki & Morfaki, 2022). Managing workforce diversity and inclusion: a critical review and future directions.

Therefore, employers had to understand how to address issues of discrimination, harassment, and bias in the workplace and provided avenues for employees to report

concerns without fear of retaliation (Onyeador et al., 2021). Upon receiving feedback and concerns, the employer relied on human resources to be a liaison for the connection between the employee and upper-level management to be a leader for maintaining equitable processes and holding all levels of the organization to the set standard (Tsachouridi & Nilkandrou, 2023). Overall, the employee-employer relationship in supporting organizational equity through diversity training was important; it was seen in the next section the impact human resources had in effectively supporting and implementing diversity initiatives.

### **Leveraging Human Resources in Diversity Training**

Human resources played a critical role in diversity training led by leadership because organizations had to abide by policies, laws, rules, and regulations (Rosenzweig et al., 2024). Human resources served as the single source of truth to consistently educate the team on diversity training and held the leadership accountable for continuous improvement efforts to ensure employees received a fair opportunity in organizational decisions like pay, employment, recognition, and training (Carter, 2023). Human resources provided diversity training for management and served as an employee advocate for creating an equitable organization by soliciting employee feedback to improve (Atto, 2023). Human resource professionals were typically responsible for designing, implementing, and coordinating diversity training programs in collaboration with leadership teams. They ensured that training content was relevant, comprehensive, and aligned with the organization's diversity and inclusion goals. HR also played a pivotal role in assessing the training needs of employees through surveys, feedback

sessions, and data analysis, ensuring that training programs addressed specific challenges and opportunities related to diversity (Asha et al., 2023).

Human resource professionals served as a resource and advocate for employees throughout the diversity training process (KS et al., 2024). They guided diversity policies, legal requirements, and best practices, helping create a safe and respectful learning environment. Human resources also facilitated discussions on sensitive topics, managed conflicts during training sessions, and supported employees with questions or concerns (Hughes, 2018). By fostering a culture of inclusivity and equity, human resources contributed to building a workplace where all individuals felt valued and empowered to contribute their unique perspectives and talents (May, 2023). Human resources' impact on diversity training extended beyond compliance to promoting a culture of continuous learning, growth, and respect within the organization, enhancing employee engagement and success (Roh & Sung, 2024).

Diversity training began with drafting the policies that fit the organization's equitable goal (Tillman et al., 2022). Human resources included inclusive language that respected diverse cultural backgrounds and avoided language that offended people. Human resources were responsible for implementing policies and practices that supported diversity throughout the employee lifecycle, such as recruitment, hiring, promotion, and retention (Waynick, 2023). A thorough review and procedure to update the content was required to promote equal opportunity, diversity training, and accommodations for employees with disabilities (Wu et al., 2023). This introductory evaluation of diversity training was significant because it mitigated and potentially eliminated bias that could

influence adverse outcomes (Onyeador et al., 2021). The awareness of creating inclusive policies and practices for employees helped them understand ways the company strived to be equitable for all employees (Haines et al., 2024). Human resources' involvement in leadership diversity training was critical because the possible results promoted teamwork and improved cooperation with different people.

Research by Trihapsari et al. (2021) analyzed the training and development program to enhance the quality of human resources. Diving into various training and learning methods helped the leadership team better connect with their direct reports. This study was critical because establishing educational goals aided in the proper development of the management team and enhanced their understanding of diversity training. Human resources served as a third party to the employee and the leadership team to assist in building upon the relationship between the two mentioned above (Harsh & Prasad, 2021). An additional set of eyes reviewing the diversity training helped catch errors, added essential information, or asked questions to open the discussion for further understanding (Mukhidinovich, 2024).

One of the roles human resources maintained was overseeing policies (Aguinis et al., 2022). By retaining all organizational policies, human resources ensured all employees followed the business guidelines and understood what was acceptable or unacceptable within the company and the workplace strategic goal for their employees (Haines et al., 2024). Acknowledging the grey area within some policies that could influence specific behaviors the executive team desired (Asha et al., 2023) was essential. Therefore, incorporating human resources in diversity training was beneficial because

this department held both leadership and employees accountable for the process and policy (Aguinis et al., 2022). Human resources also had the authority to make reasonable and objective updates to meet the business needs and promote organizational equity, which broke down potential barriers in people development (Matsutaka et al., 2024).

Human resources' ability to take a poll of the current employees through feedback surveys was advantageous to the organization because the results provided by the employees helped shape the improvements toward leadership diversity training (Waddill, 2022). Human resources assisted in the organization's competitive advantage by incorporating diversity management as part of the business strategy (Underwood, 2021). By adding a goal of creating an equitable organization, more emphasis was placed on maintaining the initiative and tracking the benefits, such as recruitment and employee retention, to provide executive leadership with a return on investment to the business for future development and continuous promotion of the training (Barnes & Grayer, 2023). With human resources playing a pivotal role in the implementation and routine maintenance of diversity training, it was important to address the obstacles and barriers that could hinder understanding of the employee perspective regarding their leadership's diversity training.

### **Obstacles and Barriers to Diversity Training**

It was essential to address the potential obstacles diversity training would encounter because this provided a more comprehensive review of various areas leadership addressed during their presentation to the employees (Syed, 2020). When leadership addressed the situation to the group, the presenter understood how sensitive

the topic could be for the attendees and had to present in a way that was objective, factual, and devoid of bias (Carter et al., 2020). Unconscious and conscious bias contributed to the employee's perspective on the training and were considered during the conversation (Easterly & Richard, 2020). However, during the presentation, the leader was capable of keeping the room engaged in the presentation as much as possible to avoid confusion and a disconnect after the meeting (Ganesh, 2024). Discussions about people's situations were sensitive; therefore, open dialogue on the subject could be uncomfortable.

Vulnerability was another hurdle that surfaced from diversity training (Geneviève et al., 2023). A human publicly expressing their feelings and emotions when exposed to an external group of people was a delicate situation for that individual (Roberson et al., 2020). Therefore, leaders refined their emotional awareness and intelligence skills to deliver diversity training effectively. A cheerful presenter created an environment where the audience could feel safe sharing their thoughts, feelings, perspectives, and suggestions to build stronger interpersonal relationships among the team (Rathore et al., 2022). A study by Legate and Weinstein (2024) showed that employees had a more positive outlook on their leadership team when included in diversity training. Employees were more productive and retained learning because they felt more engaged in the process (Imran et al., 2023).

Diversity training faced the barrier of people resisting change (Heyden et al., 2017). Employees tended to resist change when there was fear of the unknown, lack of communication, lack of consultation, low or no trust, a break in the routine, and

uncertainty about their status. Other barriers included failure to understand the purpose of the change and little to no reconnection before, during, and after the change to understand the person's thought process and allow them the opportunity to address and come to terms with the adjustments (Nachmias et al., 2022). Employees might conjure a preconceived negative outcome that prevented them from proceeding (Hu et al., 2024). A delay in proceeding caused further hindrance in an employee's retention of information from the diversity training.

Barriers to diversity training existed when a person did not fully understand the upcoming changes (Noluthando, 2023). Leadership had to give ample time for the employees to absorb the knowledge and ask questions. Letting employees know about an adjustment or training session at the last minute created friction between the employee and the employer. The employee needed more time to absorb the new information and ask fact-finding questions to understand the situation entirely (Barnes & Grayer, 2023). Another barrier was counterproductive diversity training. This occurred when the training adversely affected the employees (Gill & Olson, 2023). For example, an employer that enforced the training as mandatory and added a stipulation that if the employee failed to attend, it would hurt their performance review or other means of grading them, caused a disconnect.

Therefore, the employee only participated in the event to check the box and avoid a potential monetary consequence (Griswold & Ariss, 2022). Employers who pitched the initiative to obtain new knowledge and a greater understanding of the employee's colleagues sounded more appealing and brought a positive mindset to the diversity

training presentation (Kranz & Sale, 2022). By acknowledging the obstacles and barriers to diversity training, a deeper understanding of the employee perspective on their leadership's diversity training was accepted. The next segment of this chapter dived into the employee engagement component of diversity training.

### **Employee Engagement**

Engagement represented many situations that occurred within the workplace; for example, an engaged employee was more likely to perform better than a colleague who had zero interactions with their leadership (Legate & Weinstein, 2024). Engagement in education and training allowed professional development and self-improvement, in which more than half of employees were motivated and engaged at work (Javed, 2024). Lack of motivation led to a decline in performance, low productivity, and an increased error rate (Legate & Weinstein, 2024). Therefore, a better quality of life balance was achieved through leadership's connection with the employees to build an equitable organization (Alabi & Mahmuda, 2024).

Employees were engaged in the diversity training process because they witnessed the leadership team's level of interest in diversity training. A motivated leader inspired and encouraged others to understand the training (Aei-Kyung et al., 2022). Since employees looked towards their leadership to serve as coaches to guide them through workplace situations and provide relevant updates on organizational changes, they held leadership to higher standards than their coworkers (Imran et al., 2023). Therefore, trust between employees and their managers was beneficial for improving engagement among the employees (Byrd, 2024).

Leadership kept employees engaged before diversity training by setting the stage and creating a positive, anticipatory environment (Jungmann et al., 2020). Clear communication from leaders about the purpose, goals, and benefits of diversity training helped employees understand its value and relevance (Wang et al., 2024). Leaders articulated how the training aligned with the organization's core values and strategic objectives, emphasizing the positive impact on the workplace culture and individual growth (Thakur & Dhar, 2022).

Employees were involved in the planning process, such as providing input on topics of interest or concerns, which fostered a sense of ownership and involvement (Wadhwa & Aggarwal, 2023). Additionally, leaders built excitement by sharing success stories or testimonials from past training sessions, highlighting the transformative experiences of colleagues. Opportunities for pre-training discussions or informational sessions helped employees feel more prepared and invested (Gund & Swaroop, 2024). By actively engaging with employees, demonstrating the importance of the training, and fostering a supportive environment, leaders ensured a high level of engagement and readiness for diversity training initiatives (Lima et al., 2022).

Leadership was crucial in keeping employees engaged during diversity training (Javed, 2024). Leaders demonstrated their commitment by actively participating in training sessions themselves, signaling the importance of the initiative (Waynick, 2023). Leaders created an open and inclusive environment where employees felt safe to express their thoughts and concerns during the training (Simon, 2024). Using interactive and

varied training methods, such as group discussions, role-playing, and real-life scenarios, made the sessions more engaging and relatable (Tracey et al., 2023).

Leaders provided continuous learning opportunities beyond the initial training, such as follow-up workshops, discussion groups, and resource sharing, to reinforce the concepts and maintain momentum (Vachhar, 2023). Recognizing and rewarding employees who actively engaged in and applied the principles of diversity training motivated others to participate. By fostering a culture of inclusion and demonstrating a genuine commitment to diversity, leadership enhanced employee engagement in diversity training programs (Roberson et al., 2024).

After diversity training, leadership played a vital role in maintaining employee engagement and ensuring the long-term impact of the training (Kadam et al., 2020). Leaders incorporated diversity and inclusion principles into everyday practices and policies, making them an integral part of the organizational culture (Rathore et al., 2022). Regular follow-up sessions, discussions, and workshops reinforced the training content and provided ongoing learning opportunities (Roberson et al., 2024). Leaders established mechanisms for feedback, encouraging employees to share their experiences and suggestions for improvement. Recognizing and celebrating achievements related to diversity and inclusion kept the momentum going and motivated employees to continue their efforts (Zahp et al., 2024). Additionally, employee resource groups or diversity councils provided platforms for continuous engagement and peer support (Leslie & Flynn, 2024). Leadership sustained the enthusiasm and commitment generated during the initial training by visibly supporting and participating in diversity initiatives, addressing

challenges, and ensuring that diversity and inclusion remained a priority (Megheirkouni & Mejheirkouni, 2020).

Maintaining employee engagement and attention in diversity training over several years required a strategic and ongoing commitment from leadership (Jackson et al., 2022). Leaders consistently demonstrated their dedication to diversity and inclusion by integrating these values into the organization's culture, policies, and practices (Shukla, 2019). They provided continuous learning opportunities through regular workshops, interactive sessions, and access to diverse educational resources. Leaders created a supportive environment where open dialogue was encouraged and employees felt safe to share their experiences and perspectives (Kadam et al., 2020). Establishing employee resource groups (ERGs) and diversity councils fostered peer support and sustained interest (Trenerry & Rossman, 2022). Recognizing and rewarding employee participation in diversity initiatives and linking these efforts to performance evaluations and career advancement motivated employees to stay engaged (Ukai et al., 2022).

The benefits of maintaining long-term engagement in diversity training were substantial (Onyeador et al., 2021). Consistent engagement helped embed diversity and inclusion into the organizational culture, leading to a more inclusive and respectful workplace (Roberts, 2020). This enhanced teamwork and collaboration as employees learned to appreciate and leverage diverse perspectives. Over time, a diverse and inclusive environment drove innovation and creativity as different viewpoints contributed to problem-solving and decision-making (Devine & Ash, 2022).

Additionally, organizations prioritizing diversity were more likely to attract and retain top talent as employees increasingly sought workplaces that valued and promoted inclusivity (Ambarwati et al., 2024). Ultimately, sustained engagement in diversity training improved employee satisfaction and morale and contributed to the organization's overall success and competitiveness. Overall, it was important to explore the various levels of employee engagement and examine the different forms of diversity training and the potential benefits that impacted the employee perception of leadership's commitment to supporting organizational equity.

### **Forms of Diversity Training and Benefits**

Diversity training took various forms when the leadership team delivered it, each tailored to address specific organizational needs and goals (May, 2023). One common approach was interactive workshops, where leaders facilitated group discussions, role-playing, and case studies to help employees understand and navigate diverse perspectives (Jansen & Searle, 2021). Another form was mentorship programs, where leaders paired with employees from different backgrounds to provide guidance and support, fostering mutual learning and growth (Roberson et al., 2024). Panel discussions featuring leaders and external experts offered insights into diversity issues and showcased best practices. Additionally, online training modules and e-learning courses designed and endorsed by leadership provided flexible, on-demand learning opportunities for employees (Vachhar, 2023). Leadership also implemented continuous learning initiatives, such as regular follow-up sessions and diversity councils, to ensure ongoing engagement and reinforcement of diversity principles.

Diversity training went beyond a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation. Various methods were used, including workshops, seminars, videos, online lectures, self-paced learning, mobile platforms, roundtable conversations, one-on-one or group meetings, or a combination of multiple methods (Khuzaiyah et al., 2023). As long as the content remained consistent across each meeting, the delivery was modified to fit the audience's needs (Underwood, 2021). For example, the introductory section was delivered as a lecture, and the presenter later transitioned to a role-play scenario to capture visual and kinesthetic learners.

Research showed that companies with diversity training experienced internal and external growth in their employees and organizational culture (Wyland et al., 2024). Employees observed short-term benefits through immediate recognition and training on diversity among colleagues (O'Meara et al., 2020). Long-term impact occurred when the employer consistently applied and provided diversity training to the workforce. The benefits of diversity training extended beyond the workplace, impacting individual growth and organizational success (Kuknor & Bhattacharya, 2022). Internally, diversity training fostered a more inclusive work environment where employees felt valued, respected, and empowered to contribute their diverse perspectives and talents (Burrell, 2023).

This, in turn, enhanced teamwork, collaboration, and creativity, leading to improved productivity and morale. Externally, diversity training strengthened an organization's reputation as an inclusive employer of choice, attracting top talent from diverse backgrounds and building stronger relationships with clients, customers, and

stakeholders who valued diversity (Miller et al., 2022). By investing in diversity training, organizations complied with legal requirements and cultivated a continuous learning and respect culture that contributed to long-term sustainability and competitiveness.

Other benefits of diversity training included providing a competitive advantage (Wu et al., 2023). With consistency and positive impact, diversity training became a selling point for the business (Ali, 2023). Other companies, employees, customers, or potential prospects looked beyond financial gain to understand how the company operated (Chaudhry et al., 2021). Diversity training brought humanity into organizational decision-making, ensuring outcomes considered the impacts on employees, their families, colleagues, and others close to them. Companies utilized the positive work environment as a selling point for business negotiations or to attract potential talent (Jun-Chen Chu et al., 2023). The more attractive the company appeared financially and culturally, as well as in its reputation, the more it influenced decision-making (Hanlon et al., 2022).

Employees and employers witnessed the benefits of diversity training (Johnson et al., 2021). Engagement from all organizational levels increased, retention of employees improved, recruiting strengthened, and company training became more robust and inclusive (King et al., 2023). Referral rates rose because applicants perceived the company as a great place to work, respectful, and employee-centric (Houdek, 2023). Employees experienced more comprehensive and objective performance reviews (Vivek, 2023). Conversations between employees and employers became more professional, and employers developed cultural awareness and sensitivity to non-work-related comments.

Diversity training covered many topics to build an equitable workplace (Waddill, 2022). It often began with workplace demographics and a review of the company's mission, vision, and values, aligning employees with organizational culture and purpose (Mukhidinovich, 2024). Other topics focused on different diversity components, such as gender, race, ethnicity, disability, bystander intervention, harassment, stereotypes, microaggressions, and religion, while educating employees about fostering equity in the workplace (Adewumi, 2023). Narrowing the focus allowed leaders to provide detailed examples and equip employees to handle specific situations effectively.

General diversity training provided a high-level overview of differences among people (Kiradoo, 2022). However, training became more meaningful when content allowed time for workplace-specific examples, giving employees tools to manage sensitive situations (Serang et al., 2024). Workshop formats benefited kinesthetic learners through in-person learning. Interactive training tended to stay in employees' minds longer than reading PowerPoint slides alone (Burmeister et al., 2021). Presenting a slide-only format often caused participants to disconnect, daydream, or disengage (KS et al., 2024).

Job rotation or shadowing offered another method for delivering diversity training by expanding employee interactions (Kim et al., 2019). In siloed workplaces, employees typically only interacted with people they knew. Job rotation allowed employees to communicate with others they normally would not, breaking physical and social barriers, fostering stronger relationships, and promoting organizational equity (Viererbl et al., 2021). However, not all relationships became long-lasting (Harsh & Prasad, 2021).

Video training provided a broader perspective of diversity examples and included multiple languages and subtitles for accessibility (Munsell et al., 2024). Visual content ensured consistency and could be replayed across multiple sessions, mitigating liability and reducing the burden on leadership to create content from scratch (Wu et al., 2023).

Leadership-led diversity training yielded significant benefits (Corsino & Fuller, 2021). When leaders actively presented training, it underscored the initiative's importance and demonstrated organizational commitment to inclusion (Wyland et al., 2024). Leadership involvement enhanced training credibility and effectiveness, as employees were more likely to engage with content delivered by senior leaders (Miller et al., 2022). Leaders modeled inclusive behaviors and attitudes, setting a positive example for the organization (Bowen, 2024). This approach-built trust, encouraged participation, and fostered a cohesive workplace where employees felt valued, respected, and empowered, ultimately improving teamwork, innovation, and organizational performance (Corsino & Fuller, 2021).

Understanding diversity training and its myriad benefits was critical to exploring how effective communication empowered employees to share their perspectives on leadership's diversity training and support an equitable organization.

### **Diversity Feedback and Diversity Communication**

Research by Thakur and Pyar (2023) found that employees who participated in diversity training programs were more engaged, better understood their peers, felt more included, and were more likely to remain with their current employer when diversity training was part of the workplace culture. Feedback proved critical to organizational

growth and establishing equity across all levels. Companies could experience a 15% reduction in employee turnover (SHRM, 2019). By communicating with employees and setting actionable goals, leadership could establish stronger relationships and a more positive working environment with their teams. Over 75% of employees valued feedback, but the action plan and follow-up determined how employees perceived employer surveys (Atto, 2023). Information was valuable when it was timely, appropriate, meaningful, and relevant, as it could be translated into data, compared to historical information, and used to forecast future outcomes and identify trends.

Feedback was received when employees felt the environment was safe and employed people who encouraged open and honest discussions (Kranz & Sale, 2022). The input would lack substance without a space for a more profound emotional conversation (Arias-Pastor et al., 2023). Trust and the timing of the feedback request were also important because this could contribute to more accurate data from the leadership team (Aei-Kyung et al., 2022). Trust, safety, and timing of the diversity feedback were considered by assuring the confidentiality of information. Leadership reiterating the diversity training's goal, purpose, and strategic vision aided in reinforcing the employee's confidence in the program and added comfort to the process (Locke, 2022).

Research showed that employee feedback could strengthen the connection between supervisors and their direct reports because employees felt like their voice was heard (Syed, 2020). The employer gained valuable knowledge about their employees to make sound, objective decisions for their team. Creating an equitable organization relied

on the perspective of the people working in that particular environment. To further understand where the gaps lay in diversity training, feedback via in-person discussions, surveys, focus groups, and in-person or online programs could effectively pull critical information for the researcher to compile (Syed, 2020).

Feedback was most valuable when the entire process was followed—for example, from the beginning, where an employer determined the questions they needed to ask the employee, to collecting feedback, then creating an action plan based on the data collected, and answering the employee's responses on whether an adjustment was in order or if a change could not be made. Next, follow-up with the team fully communicated the status of the action items and tracked the data to review for comparison with prior diversity training. Feedback shared amongst the entire team was beneficial because although the employee did not ask the same question out loud, another coworker had a similar unasked question that was a great learning opportunity to address with the team at once. Feedback shared with the team strengthened the culture to create a more equitable organization. When employees shared information, communication, trust, knowledge, understanding, relationships, and awareness of others' perspectives improved.

Feedback could also risk including negative comments because human emotions were involved in the process (Lee et al., 2020). Not all feedback was positive or always showed positive intent, so it was essential for leadership to understand and hear both the positive and negative feedback to gain a fully comprehensive view of how employees perceived the organization's diversity training from leaders. Employers could further

research connecting the dots from that feedback to create organizational equity. Low reviews also showed the employer that 20% of the employees' opinions should be considered, despite the majority, 80% of employees, agreeing (WorldatWork, 2021). For the organizational goal of creating equity amongst employees, leadership needed to obtain a 360-degree view of their current diversity training to ensure that the proper adjustments and modifications for improvement were made.

Employee feedback to the leadership team was crucial for the success of diversity training and creating an equitable organization (Howell et al., 2024). First, feedback provided leaders with direct insights into the effectiveness of diversity training programs (Roberson et al., 2024). Employees could share what aspects of the training resonated with them and which areas needed improvement (Sakar, 2022). This real-time input helped leaders refine and adapt training materials to meet workforce needs (Trihapsari et al., 2021). Feedback could uncover hidden issues or concerns that might not have been immediately apparent to leadership, such as subtle biases or cultural misunderstandings (Whitburn & Corcoran, 2021). By addressing these issues proactively, leaders could create a more inclusive and supportive environment that truly reflected the diverse perspectives of all employees (Devine & Ash, 2022).

Moreover, soliciting and acting on employee feedback demonstrated a commitment to continuous improvement and inclusivity (Young & Guo, 2020). When employees saw that their voices were heard and their suggestions led to tangible changes, trust was built, and further participation in diversity initiatives was encouraged (Devine & Ash, 2022). This two-way communication fostered a culture of openness and

collaboration, where everyone felt empowered to contribute to the organization's diversity and inclusion goals (Gill & Olson, 2023). Ultimately, this feedback loop enhanced the quality of diversity training and promoted a sense of ownership and shared responsibility among employees and leaders alike (Kossek et al., 2024). This collective effort created a more equitable organization where diverse talents were recognized, valued, and leveraged to drive innovation and growth.

### **Skill Development for Leaders**

They trained employees to interact respectfully and inclusively with everyone, regardless of background. The workplace was a multicultural environment where various groups were employed to achieve a similar goal (Vachhar, 2023). One of the potential outcomes from diversity training that benefited the organization and its people was another level of leaders who upheld equity, educating the employees not to become bystanders and instead stand amongst the positive and influential leaders who aimed to ensure the team's unity and success within the organization. Skill development tied into the conceptual framework of this research (Willard et al., 2023). Understanding behavioral leadership had great significance in this study because there were various ways of leadership and numerous styles a leader could exhibit.

Diversity training in creating an equitable organization significantly enhanced skill development for leaders by broadening their understanding and appreciation of diverse perspectives (Morfaki & Morfaki, 2022). This training helped leaders develop cultural competence, empathy, and active listening skills (Tran et al., 2024). Leaders became more adept at navigating and managing a diverse workforce by engaging with

various cultural norms, values, and experiences (Underwood, 2021). This cultural awareness was crucial in today's globalized business environment, where leaders needed to effectively communicate and collaborate with employees, clients, and partners from diverse backgrounds (Daplyn, 2022). Enhanced cultural competence allowed leaders to create an inclusive atmosphere that fostered innovation and creativity, as team members felt respected and valued for their unique contributions (Imran et al., 2023).

Diversity training equipped leaders with advanced conflict resolution and problem-solving skills (Willard et al., 2023). As leaders learned about the challenges and biases that diverse employees might face, they became more proficient in addressing and resolving conflicts arising from misunderstandings or cultural differences (Meidert et al., 2023). This training also encouraged leaders to adopt inclusive decision-making processes, ensuring that diverse viewpoints were considered and integrated (Chikwe et al., 2024). Leaders could identify and mitigate potential issues before they escalated, fostering a more harmonious and productive workplace (Hu et al., 2024). The ability to manage and resolve conflicts effectively not only improved team dynamics but also enhanced overall organizational performance (Okatta et al., 2024).

Additionally, diversity training promoted adaptability and flexibility among leaders, critical skills in an ever-changing business landscape (Simon, 2024). As leaders were exposed to various perspectives and approaches, they learned to be more open-minded and adaptable to new ideas and working methods (Burmeister et al., 2021). This flexibility allowed leaders to pivot strategies and initiatives to better align with the diverse needs of their workforce and market (Alabi & Mahmuda, 2024). Furthermore,

diversity training encouraged leaders to champion inclusive policies and practices, demonstrating a commitment to equity and fairness (Munsell et al., 2024). This enhanced their leadership capabilities and positioned them as role models, inspiring others to follow suit (Kiradoo, 2022). Diversity training fostered a culture of continuous learning and improvement, where leaders were better equipped to drive organizational success through inclusivity and equity (Nalwoga et al., 2024).

### **Commitment to Diversity Training**

The more the executive leadership team committed to diversity training across the organization, the more included and connected the employees felt toward the company (Jungmann et al., 2020). Employers that consistently updated and presented diversity training for their employees found that 70% of employees surveyed in the United States believed diversity training was essential as long as the information was meaningful and progressed positively (SHRM, 2023).

Continuous commitment from executive leadership was critical to building diversity training because a project needing more executive leadership support received no funding or drive from the other levels of management to their direct reports (Okatta et al., 2024). Holding the employees responsible for following processes was on the leader, who needed to be equipped to handle people's situations within their department (Kanitz et al., 2024). The manager could collaborate with human resources (Javed, 2024). Once the executive leadership team showcased support for implementing diversity training across the entire site, the executive team worked with their direct leadership to ensure proper and efficient diversity training was passed on to the next leadership level to

present the diversity training strategy (Roberson, 2024). Leadership also maintained the company's commitment to diversity training because they directly showed the information to the employees, so the content had to be objective, current, and relevant (Kossek et al., 2024).

Commitment from the leadership team meant being a continuous resource for the employees as they looked to their leaders for guidance on people situational matters (Rosenzweig et al., 2024). Leaders continued to actively promote diversity training and became a visible endorsement of positive training (Nishii & Leroy, 2022). Management could show their commitment to staying abreast with diversity training by attending diversity programs and endorsing their significance in the workplace (Jungmann et al., 2022). Serving as a role model exemplifying inclusive behavior was critical to promoting leadership commitment to diversity training (Arobiolè & Chinyere, 2023). The commitment to training was not only one-sided because the employee contributed to the success of the diversity training initiative (Kuknor & Bhattacharya, 2022). Employees engaged in training were more likely to retain the information and effectively leveraged the knowledge acquired (Nakvosaitė & Sondaitė, 2021).

According to Gund and Swaroop (2024), diversity training was most effective when employees regularly trained and learned about the subject. The leadership team needed to be cognizant of the diverse employees around them and continued to update the group with any newfound changes (Acosta & Guthrie, 2021). For example, management or human resources did not have to wait until the next diversity training to inform the employees of the new information.

Long periods to notify the team of significant changes, content, or updates could hinder the growth of the organizational culture because the employees would need to catch up on the knowledge and might use outdated information, which could offend another employee (Carter, 2023). Commitment from leadership also meant holding those higher up in the reporting hierarchy accountable for making changes and interpreting the data for the executive team to understand the return on investment (ROI) (Gonzales, 2023). Return on investment was significant to the executive team because, without it, the issue plagued the leadership commitment and would cause problems for the diversity training implementation (Ambarwati et al., 2024).

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Chapter 2 contained the literature review, which addressed the literature search strategy, conceptual framework, legal requirements, employment dilemma, organizational equity, diversity, diversity training, diversity drivers, unconscious and conscious bias, organizational behavior, leadership's impact, employee and employer relationship, human resources, diversity barriers and obstacles, employee engagement, forms of diversity training and its benefits, diversity feedback, skill development for leaders, commitment to diversity training and summary. Chapter 3 details the research method.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative interpretative phenomenological study is to explore the employees' perceptions of their leadership's diversity training in supporting organizational equity. This chapter includes the research design and rationale, role of the researcher, research methodology, participant selection logic, instrumentation, pilot study, procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection, data analysis plan, issues with trustworthiness, including credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, ethical guidelines, and lastly, the chapter summary.

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

This section provides a detailed explanation of the chosen research design, including phenomenology and its rationale. This approach aligned with the study's objective and ensured that the voices and experiences of participants were authentically represented, providing valuable insights into the phenomenon examined in this study.

The research question for this qualitative study is as follows: How did employees perceive leadership's diversity training in supporting organizational equity? This study investigated how employees perceived leadership's diversity training in supporting organizational equity. The study's conceptual framework included critical race theory (Giles & Harrison, 2023) and behavioral leadership theories (Shillingford et al., 2022). The study employed an interpretative phenomenological method to investigate the employee experience.

The interpretative phenomenological method was appropriate for this research because it further explored how the employees made sense of their experiences to provide

detailed descriptions by asking questions (Van Manen, 2017). Questions were predetermined before the interview to give a structure to maintain a relevant conversation on the topic of their leadership's diversity training. Therefore, to understand the employee perspective, data collected directly from the employee were most aligned with the qualitative nature of this study (Nguyen, 2024). Quantitative research methods would not have been suitable for this research because the research process did not require the incorporation of specific numerical data and a thorough analysis of quantity (Ali et al., 2024).

This qualitative, interpretative phenomenological study explored employees' perceptions of their leadership's diversity training in supporting organizational equity. Interpretative phenomenological methods were best suited for this research (Robinson & Williams, 2024). Interpretative phenomenology identified and understood people's perceptions of moments (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). Therefore, an interpretative phenomenological study was appropriate for this research because it allowed for a detailed exploration of the employees' perspectives on their opinions after diversity training (Smith et al., 2022). Exploring the extent to which employees perceive diversity training sheds light on real-time employee feedback, enabling leadership to understand the current organizational equity that could be improved for future studies (Hughes, 2018).

Multiple qualitative research methods were considered for this study, including narrative analysis, case study, content analysis, historical observation, ethnography, and phenomenology. After reviewing each technique, phenomenology was chosen for this

research because it is uniquely suited to explore and understand individual perceptions of human experience (Neubauer et al., 2017). Unlike other qualitative methods that might have focused on social processes like grounded theory, cultural contexts that aligned with ethnography, or individual life stories from a narrative inquiry method, phenomenology seek to uncover the essence and meaning of a shared experience (Lingis, 2017).

This approach aligned with the study's goal of examining employees' perceptions of leaders' diversity training and its impact on leadership that supports organizational equity (Kadam et al., 2020). By bracketing preconceived notions and exploring participants' perspectives, phenomenology allowed me to capture the rich, nuanced insight necessary to understand how diversity training influenced perceptions and equity within the organization (Schellenberg, 2010). This depth of understanding is critical for addressing the study's purpose and providing a foundation for actionable recommendations in Chapter 5.

Phenomenology emerged as a philosophical movement in the early 20th century, primarily developed by the German philosopher Edmund Husserl (Litvin, 2019), who created an approach that focused on phenomena as they appeared to consciousness, free from assumptions and biases. Edmund Husserl's work emphasized the importance of returning 'to the things themselves,' advocating for the study of lived experiences to uncover their essence and meaning (Busygina, 2009). Years later, phenomenology expanded from contributions by Martin Heidegger, who explored the existential and ontological dimensions of human experience, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who emphasized the role of embodiment and perception (Kidd, 2019). Research utilizing

phenomenology provided profound insights into human experiences, making it invaluable across disciplines (Qutoshi, 2018). By focusing on how individuals perceive and make sense of their world, phenomenology provides a framework for understanding the complexities of human existence and addressing deeply rooted issues in social and cultural contexts (Monaro et al., 2022).

Other possible methods, such as grounded theory or narrative analysis, would have been less effective in this context (Meng et al., 2022). Grounded theory, which aims to develop a theory grounded in data, shifts the focus away from understanding individual experiences to generating a broader theoretical framework, a goal that was not the primary aim of this study (Cena et al., 2024). While helpful in understanding people's stories about their experiences, narrative analysis provides a deeper exploration of the meanings and interpretations that employees attached to their experiences with diversity training (Namiki, 2024).

A qualitative interpretative phenomenological method focuses on individual meaning (Zahavi, 2019). It offers a more precise approach to capturing the essence of employees' perceptions, making it the most effective method for this research. Overall, the research design for this study employed a qualitative, interpretative phenomenological approach, aligning with the theoretical framework and conceptual models of critical race theory and behavioral leadership theory. This design and method explored employees' perception of their leadership's diversity training in supporting organizational equity. With the research design established, it was crucial to consider the role of the researcher in a qualitative study, as their responsibilities, reflexivity, and data

collection methods with participants could have influenced the assembly, interpretation, and presentation of data.

### **Role of the Researcher**

As a qualitative researcher, it was my responsibility to collect, maintain, and analyze objective and impartial data (Roberson et al., 2024). In exploring employees' perspectives on diversity training, being a primary researcher meant meticulously writing field notes obtained from consenting and eligible participants. I was also tasked with creating the interview process and questionnaires for the introduction, recruiting, selection, interview, and conclusion processes (Patric-Smith et al., 2024).

Outlining the process of this study ensured clear guidelines for the study's procedures from start to finish, allowing for the analysis of participant behaviors, interactions, and feedback without influencing the interviewees (Hennessy et al., 2022). This stance was crucial as it ensured the findings were not influenced by biases stemming from the researcher's experiences or opinions (Evan et al., 2023). One of my goals in this study was to provide a clear and unbiased research perspective that focused on the participants' experiences and viewpoints, which was essential for the credibility and reliability of the study (Viererbl et al., 2021).

The significance of my role as a researcher is the ability to ensure the validity and depth of the research (Holter, 2022). While gathering feedback and analyzing patterns, I avoided altering employees' natural dynamics and authentic responses during diversity training sessions (Kennedy et al., 2022). This non-intrusive approach allowed participants to express their genuine thoughts and feelings, providing more accurate and rich data

(Stacey & Cage, 2023). Maintaining an objective professional role independent from the study fostered comprehensive and systematic documentation of processes critical for identifying patterns, themes, and insights that were not apparent with an actively involved researcher (Montgomery et al., 2022). This detachment also enabled me to critically reflect on the findings, drawing connections and conclusions based on observed realities rather than personal engagement (Cairns-Lee et al., 2022).

I had to remain unbiased and objective during the data collection process to ensure the integrity and credibility of the findings (Wang et al., 2021). Bias could significantly distort the data, leading to inaccurate conclusions and undermining the validity of the research (Ali & Yusof, 2011). When researchers allowed personal beliefs, preferences, or expectations to influence the data collection process, there is an increased risk of introducing errors and inconsistencies that could have skewed the results (Foste & Ng, 2022). Remaining unbiased also enhances the research's ethical standards.

Participants had to trust that their responses and behaviors would be recorded and analyzed impartially (Sharma et al., 2019). Trust was crucial for obtaining honest and accurate data from participants. Objectivity played a crucial role in building this trust, ensuring that participants felt respected and that their contributions were valued without judgment or manipulation (Alabi & Mahmuda, 2024).

Managing researcher biases and power relationships was crucial to maintaining the integrity and validity of the research process (Murphy, 2022). Several strategies, such as flexibility, addressed these issues effectively. Thus, I continuously self-reflect to recognize and mitigate biases (Chenail, 2011). Keeping a reflexive journal throughout the

research process helped me document my thoughts, feelings, and potential biases, helping me remain aware of how these factors might have influenced my work, such as triangulation, peer review, and collaboration, member checking, clear protocols, power dynamic awareness, and ethical considerations (Lignou et al., 2024). I effectively managed biases and power relationships by implementing these strategies, ensuring a more objective, ethical, and credible research process (Morgan, 2024).

Other ethical issues include conflict of interest if a researcher knows the participant or if personal or professional relationships influence the study's design, data collection, or interpretation (Nakvosaitė & Sondaitė, 2021). I disclosed potential conflicts of interest to relevant oversight bodies, such as IRBs, to mitigate this and maintain transparency (Hu et al., 2023). Another issue was conducting research in one's work environment. Maintaining a strict boundary between the researcher's role as an employee and researcher was essential (Waheed et al., 2020). Therefore, maintaining the participant's safety in terms of their privacy and confidentiality was critical for this study (Elhami & Khoshnevisan, 2022).

All stages of the interview process, from consenting procedures, non-disclosure of their names, how the data were used, duration of the interview, questions that were asked, process to opt-out of the research at any time with no repercussions, and any potential risks or beneficial outcomes from participating in the study were communicated upfront (Kågström et al., 2023). I ensured that the research remained focused on the participants' perspectives and excluded myself from the data, thereby providing a more authentic and insightful understanding of the impact and effectiveness of diversity training (Buery-

Joyner et al., 2023). Understanding the role of the researcher offered a critical foundation for ensuring the integrity and rigor of the study, which was further supported by the selection and application of the methodology detailed in the following section (Dash & Verma, 2019).

### **Methodology**

A systematic methodology guided the research design, process, and data analysis (Woodend & Arthur, 2024). This research employed a qualitative, interpretative phenomenological approach. This method delved into the essence of employees' perceptions and how they made sense of them. This study focused on understanding employees' perception of diversity training presented by their leadership team in the workplace (Timulak & Elliott, 2019). The study aimed to gain deep insights into exploring the employees' perceptions of their leadership's diversity training in supporting organizational equity. Through the participant's interview process, they identified patterns from their responses (Khatri et al., 2024).

### **Participant Selection Logic**

The selection of participants for this study was guided by a purposeful strategy designed to identify employees with direct, relevant experience of the phenomenon under investigation, ensuring the richness and depth of the data collected (Dong et al., 2024). The population for a qualitative interpretative phenomenological research focused on obtaining feedback from employees within Kentucky, Ohio, and Indiana, and comprised a diverse cross-section of individuals working across various industries and organizations in these states. This population comprised employees from various levels within

organizational hierarchies, spanning from entry-level staff to senior management, thereby ensuring a broad spectrum of perspectives and experiences. The diversity within this population was crucial for capturing a wide range of insights into how employees perceived and experienced diversity training within their workplaces. By including participants from multiple sectors, such as healthcare, education, manufacturing, and services, the study explored how industry-specific contexts influenced the effectiveness and reception of diversity training programs (Singh et al., 2024).

Purposive sampling techniques were employed to identify participants who had undergone diversity training within their organizations. This approach allowed for including individuals who provided rich, detailed accounts of their experiences. Additionally, efforts were made to ensure that the sample included employees from urban, suburban, and rural settings to capture geographic variations in diversity training experiences. Including employees from various demographic backgrounds, such as different ages, genders, ethnicities, and socioeconomic statuses, was also essential to understand how these factors intersected with and impacted the perception and effectiveness of diversity training (Karunarathna et al., 2024)—identifying a clear research aim and questions that aligned with the phenomenological focus on meaning and experience. Purposeful sampling was used to select participants who had direct and relevant experiences, ensuring their narratives provided rich and meaningful data. By focusing on this tri-state area, the study provided region-specific insights that informed tailored approaches to diversity training within these states.

Identifying, contacting, and recruiting participants for a qualitative interpretative phenomenological research involved several carefully planned steps to ensure a diverse and representative sample while maintaining ethical standards (Polavarapu et al., 2022). Participants in this study were chosen based on geographic convenience and snowball sampling to avoid personal bias during the selection process (Cox, 2023). To provide clarity on the participant selection process, it was essential to explore the definitions and applications of convenience sampling and snowball sampling, both of which were considered for their practicality and relevance to this study (Alshaabani & Rudnák, 2020). Convenience sampling involves the researcher reaching out to participants from locations or groups that are convenient, such as potential participants found through social media (e.g., LinkedIn), employees within a company, or individuals in public spaces like shopping centers (Scholtz, 2021). Snowball sampling enabled the researcher to leverage social connections within the community, thereby expanding the sample size to 10–15 participants (Sendze, 2023).

Participants selected to participate in the research process had to meet specific criteria to be considered for the semistructured interview. Criteria included employees who had undergone diversity training within the last year and were employed in Kentucky, Ohio, or Indiana. Participants who did not meet this criterion were excluded from the data collection process (Van Niekerk et al., 2022). Professional networks and industry associations helped identify eligible participants. To expand the participant pool for this research, snowball sampling was used to target initial participants who were asked to refer colleagues, friends, family members, or other individuals they knew who

met the study criteria (Moroe, 2020). With the participant criteria established, the next step involved outlining the data collection process and detailing the approach used to effectively reach and engage potential employees for this study (Bhardwaj et al., 2024).

The approach used to contact participants included an initial email, and more direct contact was also made through professional networks, using work emails, LinkedIn messages, and other communication channels to introduce the study and invite participants to participate in the data collection process (Moody, 2024). Recruitment of participants involved a systematic process to ensure informed and voluntary participation. Informative materials, such as detailed information sheets and email attachments, were provided to explain the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits (Firdaus et al., 2024).

Informed consent was obtained from each participant, ensuring they understood their rights, including the confidentiality of their responses and their ability to withdraw at any time (Lim, 2024). The semistructured interviews were scheduled for participants in person or via web-based platforms at convenient times. Follow-up communications and reminders were sent to maintain engagement and ensure attendance at scheduled interviews (Gupta & Pathak, 2024). After the semistructured interviews, it was important to address the ethical considerations involved in collecting data directly from participants, ensuring their rights, privacy, and well-being were protected throughout the research process.

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the identification, contact, and recruitment (Okorie et al., 2024). Confidentiality was strictly maintained, with

participants' identities protected through pseudonyms or codes. The voluntary nature of participation was emphasized, assuring participants that they could withdraw without any repercussions. If incentives were offered, they were reasonable and communicated to avoid coercion (Surmiak, 2020). By adhering to these ethical principles, the study protected participants' rights and the integrity of the research process. After defining the participant selection process and rationale, the next section discussed the instrumentation used in the study, detailing the tools and techniques employed to gather meaningful and reliable data.

### **Instrumentation**

In research, the concept of "instrumentation" played a critical role as it referred to the specific tools, methods, or procedures used to collect data, essentially encompassing the devices and techniques employed to measure variables in this research (Researchrundowns, 2018). The interview protocol was the primary data collection instrument for this qualitative interpretative phenomenological research (Weerasinghe et al., 2024). Semistructured interviews were conducted using an interview guide that included pre-selected questions designed to elicit detailed, personal experiences of participants regarding diversity training (Olmo-Extremera et al., 2024). The protocol was flexible, allowing probing questions to explore participants' responses further (De Paoli, 2024). This approach enabled collecting in-depth data that captured the nuances of employees' perceptions and experiences (Daplyn, 2022). The interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent to ensure accuracy in capturing their responses and to facilitate detailed transcription and analysis.

Notes were used as a supplementary data collection instrument to capture non-verbal cues and contextual information during interviews or diversity training sessions (Nalwoga et al., 2024). This sheet included fields for noting body language, facial expressions, and other relevant behaviors that provided additional insights into participants' experiences (Kossek et al., 2024). Feedback was recorded systematically to maintain consistency and reliability (Kinyota & Kavenuke, 2022). These notes complemented the interview data, ensuring a full understanding of the participants' reactions and interactions during diversity training (Roberson et al., 2024).

An additional resource included both audiotapes and videotapes utilized to capture the full range of data during interviews and focus groups (Gupta et al., 2024). Audio recordings ensured that all verbal responses were accurately captured, while video recordings provided visual context, such as participants' body language and group dynamics during focus groups (Nielsen & Yarker, 2024). These recordings were transcribed verbatim, and key critical visual elements were noted in the analysis to enhance understanding. Using audio and video recordings allowed for comprehensive documentation of the data collection sessions, facilitating thorough and nuanced analysis (Radonjić et al., 2024).

The interview protocol for this study was developed based on a comprehensive review of existing literature on diversity training, organizational behavior, and employee perceptions found in Appendix A: Research Questions. Key sources included academic articles, books, and prior studies investigating similar topics. Additionally, a pilot study was conducted with a small group of employees to test the clarity and relevance of the

interview questions (Ficht & Levashina, 2023). The feedback from this pilot study informed the final development of the interview protocol, ensuring that the questions effectively captured the depth and breadth of employees' experiences and perceptions of diversity training (Bay et al., 2023). Content validity for the interview protocol was established through a multi-step process listed below.

- **Literature Review:** Questions were grounded in established theories and empirical findings from the literature, ensuring they were relevant to the study's objectives.
- **Expert Review:** Draft questions were reviewed by experts in diversity training, organizational psychology, and qualitative research methods. Experts assessed the questions for relevance, clarity, and comprehensiveness, providing feedback for refinement (Rich, 2017).
- **Pilot Testing:** One pilot study was conducted with one person. The pilot helped identify any ambiguities or gaps in the questions, and participant feedback was used to adjust the protocol accordingly.
- **Iterative Refinement:** Based on expert review and pilot testing feedback, the interview protocol was refined to ensure it captured the critical aspects of employees' perceptions and experiences with diversity training.

### **Pilot Study**

The pilot study involved recruiting a small, representative sample of one to two employees who had undergone diversity training at their company within the past year. Recruitment focused on ensuring diversity in job roles, industries, and demographic

characteristics to reflect the broader population intended for the main study. Potential participants were identified through professional social media networks and targeted outreach via email, text, or phone call. Potential participants were sent messages via professional associations, workplace groups, and LinkedIn connections to expand the recruiting pool. Invitations were sent via email, explaining the pilot study's purpose, the importance of their feedback in refining the research instruments, and how their information was protected.

The selected participant was asked to provide informed consent, with assurances of confidentiality and the voluntary nature of their participation. The message was delivered via email to avoid duplicate messages to participants. Participants then received a questionnaire that filtered out the applicable participants by location, age, and one year of diversity experience. Then, an individual interview was scheduled depending on their availability and the study's needs.

Data collection for the pilot study mirrored the methods planned for the main research, including semistructured interviews. All sessions with the participants' consent were audio recorded to ensure accurate transcription and analysis. The notes sheet captured non-verbal cues, contextual factors during the interviews, and feedback forms on the research instruments, highlighting any parts of the process that were unclear or difficult to answer. Data collected in the pilot study underwent preliminary analysis to identify patterns, issues, and unanticipated themes with the research instruments. The pilot study was integral to refining the research instruments for the main study. Feedback and preliminary findings from the pilot study informed revisions to the interview

protocol, questions, and notes sheet. Any identified issues, such as unclear questions or missing key themes, were addressed before the main study began. The pilot study ensured that the instruments were valid, reliable, and capable of capturing rich, meaningful data in the main study.

The main study recruited a larger and more diverse sample of 10 to 15 employees from Kentucky, Ohio, and Indiana. Recruitment involved utilizing professional networks like LinkedIn, including participants from various industries, job levels, and demographic backgrounds. Interested employees were invited to contact the interviewer via email to identify if the participant was eligible to continue through the research to learn more about the study and proceed with the next steps to complete the data collection process, which had been refined during the pilot study.

Throughout both the pilot and main studies, ethical considerations were paramount. This included ensuring participant confidentiality, obtaining informed consent, and emphasizing the voluntary nature of participation. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study without any consequences. Any incentives provided were reasonable and communicated. Data protection measures like document encryption were also implemented to secure the privacy of all collected data. By carefully designing and executing the pilot study, the researcher ensured the study was well-grounded with validated and reliable instruments capable of effectively capturing employees' perceptions of diversity training presented by their leadership.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

For a qualitative interpretative phenomenological study focused on employees' perceptions of diversity training, the following data collection instruments were used: semistructured interviews, audio recordings, consent forms, field notes, demographic questionnaires, pilot study feedback forms, and transcription software. In qualitative interpretative phenomenological research, the data collection technique was designed to deeply explore and understand participants' lived experiences and perceptions. This approach employed semistructured interviews as the data collection method. Interviews were guided by an interview schedule with open-ended questions, allowing participants to share their thoughts, feelings, and reflections in their own words.

This technique facilitated a rich and nuanced exploration of participants' experiences regarding the phenomenon under study. Audio recordings ensured accurate capture of participants' verbal expressions, which were then transcribed for detailed analysis. Researchers also took field notes during and after interviews to document non-verbal cues and contextual details that enriched the data. Additionally, reflexivity journals were maintained to help researchers reflect on their biases and perspectives, which could have influenced the interpretation of the data. This combination of techniques ensured a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the participant's experiences and perceptions, aligning with the interpretative phenomenological approach's focus on meaning-making and subjective experience.

For the qualitative interpretative phenomenological research focusing on employee feedback regarding their leadership's diversity training in the workplace, the data collection was conducted as follows for semistructured interviews. Data was collected from current employees who had participated in the diversity training program led by their leadership team. This included a range of employees from various departments and levels within the organization to ensure diverse perspectives. The researcher collected data from 10 participants until saturation was reached in the study. The researcher solely conducted the interviews and managed the data collection process. The frequency of the data collection occurred over a set period of one month and allowed a week of flexibility to account for scheduling availability. Interviews were scheduled at times convenient for the researcher and the participants, ensuring flexibility to accommodate their work commitments. The interview was expected to last between 45 and 50 minutes. This timeframe allowed for an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and perceptions without causing undue fatigue and scheduling conflicts.

Recordings only occurred upon the participant's consent and were transcribed verbatim using transcription software from Microsoft Office. In addition, the researcher took field notes during and after interviews to capture non-verbal cues and contextual observations contributing to the overall data collection process. Next, the researcher had a backup or follow-up plan. Additional outreach efforts were made if recruitment resulted in too few participants, including sending follow-up emails, posting reminders in internal communication channels, or extending the recruitment period to reach a broader audience

within a 50-mile radius of the interviewer with participants based in Ohio, Kentucky, or Indiana.

Lastly, participant exit procedures and follow-up procedures occurred upon interview completion. The participants were debriefed about the study's purpose and how their data was used. They were allowed to ask any questions and were provided with contact information for follow-up inquiries; participants were not required to return for follow-up interviews unless new information emerged during the initial data collection that necessitated further clarification. If additional follow-up was needed, participants were informed and provided clear instructions and scheduling options.

Any questions for the interviewee to respond to came with an approved disclosure approved by the IRB to inform the participant of what happened with the data, the confidentiality of the process, and their ability to drop out of the process with no repercussions. The researcher administered and collected the demographic questionnaires to ensure the data. When completing the demographic questionnaire, the data collection process took no more than two or three minutes. This brief duration ensured that participants could provide essential background information without significant time investment. If issues arose with the virtual platform, the responses were manually entered into a secure database, such as a Microsoft Excel-protected and encrypted spreadsheet. The data was stored confidentially to protect participants' privacy. Next, after the participants completed the demographic questionnaire, they began the next step with the researcher to set up the actual interview. Participants were debriefed about the study's purpose and how their data was used. They had the opportunity to ask any questions and

were informed about the next steps in the study. Finally, for the follow-up procedure for this data collection, the participants were not required to return for additional follow-up unless specific follow-up questions or clarifications were necessary based on the initial findings. In such cases, participants were contacted with clear instructions and scheduling options for additional interviews.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

To interpret the data collected from the employees after the interview process, an analysis was conducted to understand the individual and collective perspectives of the employees. The interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) method was appropriate for this study on diversity training for all employees because it focused on understanding the lived experiences of individuals (Evan et al., 2023). Diversity training involved complex personal and social dynamics, and IPA allowed researchers to delve deeply into how employees perceived and made sense of these experiences (Rajasinghe et al., 2024). By employing IPA, researchers captured employees' experiences about how diversity training impacted their attitudes, behaviors, and interactions in the workplace (Groenewald & Odendaal, 2021). This approach provided rich, detailed insights crucial for understanding the effectiveness of diversity training programs from the perspective of those directly affected by them.

IPA's emphasis on the participant's viewpoint aligned well with the diversity training goals, which aimed to address personal biases and foster a more inclusive environment (Scheepers & Schutte, 2024). Through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, IPA enabled researchers to explore the personal significance and meaning

employees attached to diversity training (Tan et al., 2023). Unlike a quantitative study, this method helped identify specific factors that contributed to or hindered the success of such programs from an individual's perspective, as opposed to analyzing numerical data (Rajasinghe et al., 2024). Understanding these personal experiences informed the development of more specific and impactful training initiatives, ultimately leading to a more equitable and inclusive organizational culture.

Data analysis was critical in the research process because it transformed raw data into meaningful insights, allowing researchers to identify patterns, themes, and relationships relevant to the study's objectives (Oliveira, 2023). This process enabled a deeper understanding of the research problem and supported the development of well-founded conclusions and recommendations. For this research, the researcher used an interpretive analysis. This method analyzed content gathered from various sources, such as personal interviews, field observations, and surveys. Most of the time, stories or opinions shared by people focused on finding answers to the research questions. After obtaining the responses from the participants via one-on-one in-person interviews, the thematic analysis method was used to explore themes based on employee feedback.

In a qualitative phenomenological research exploring employees' perceptions of their leadership's diversity training, interpretive analysis was crucial for understanding individual experiences and perceptions (Trolan & Rossmann, 2022). This method involved examining and interpreting the meaning that participants assigned to their experiences with the diversity training program. By analyzing interview transcripts and other qualitative data, researchers identified recurring themes, patterns, and nuances in

how employees perceived the effectiveness and impact of the training (Lafair, 2024). Interpretive analysis sought to understand these experiences and aimed to uncover the underlying meanings and implications for the organization's diversity efforts (Bay et al., 2023).

This approach helped researchers contextualize participants' feedback within their broader experiences and organizational culture, revealing how leadership actions and training programs influenced employees' attitudes and behaviors (Bhattacharyya & Berdahl, 2023). Through interpretive analysis, researchers gained insights into how employees perceived the sincerity, effectiveness, and relevance of diversity training and identified areas for improvement (Bolling, 2019). This detailed understanding supported the development of actionable recommendations for enhancing the training program and improving overall organizational practices related to diversity and equity.

Interpretive analysis was pivotal in linking data to the research questions in a qualitative phenomenological study to understand employees' perceptions of their leadership's diversity training to foster an equitable organization. The analysis began with coding, a systematic process of categorizing data into meaningful themes and patterns (Mercer & Gulseren, 2024). This involved inductive coding, where themes emerged from the data, and deductive coding, where predefined categories related to the research questions were applied (Raj et al., 2023). The coding procedure was iterative, requiring multiple rounds of reviewing and refining codes to ensure accuracy and depth of understanding. Software tools such as NVivo or ATLAS.ti often facilitated the coding

process, allowing researchers to organize, visualize, and analyze large volumes of qualitative data efficiently.

However, for this research, the data collected was from a maximum of 15 people. Therefore, the sample data was not large enough to deem a software tool other than Microsoft Excel necessary for this study, as this tool aided in systematically managing and visualizing the complex qualitative data, enhancing the reliability and depth of the analysis. Discrepant cases, or responses that did not align with the dominant themes, were carefully examined rather than ignored. This approach ensured that outlier perspectives were understood and integrated into the analysis, providing a more comprehensive view of employee feedback. By addressing these variations, the thematic analysis offered a richer, more nuanced understanding of how diversity training impacted employees and informed strategies for fostering an equitable organizational environment.

In qualitative phenomenological research, thematic analysis was valuable for exploring and interpreting themes emerging from employee feedback about their leadership's diversity training (Naeem et al., 2024). This method systematically identified, analyzed, and reported patterns. The process began with the initial coding of data, where researchers read through transcripts and highlighted significant statements or segments that related to the research questions. These codes were then organized into broader categories during the axial coding phase, helping to group similar ideas and identify recurring themes (Jowsey et al., 2021). Finally, researchers refined and consolidated these themes during selective coding to provide a coherent narrative that answered the study's questions.

Thematic analysis enabled researchers to gain insights into how employees perceived the effectiveness of diversity training, identified areas of concern, and understood the training's impact on creating an equitable workplace (Naeem et al., 2024). By systematically organizing and analyzing qualitative data, thematic analysis offered a structured approach to interpreting complex feedback and deriving meaningful conclusions that informed improvements in diversity training programs and organizational practices. The data analysis for this research included familiarization. The researcher reviewed the interview transcripts to immerse themselves in the data better to understand each employee's perception of diversity training (Khuzaiwah et al., 2023). This was followed by initial coding, incorporating descriptive and exploratory notes to capture key phrases, recurring concepts, and contextual nuances. The notes were a foundation for identifying patterns and insights unique to each consenting participant's experience (López-Estrada & Elizondo-Mejías, 2024). Throughout this phase, the researcher practiced reflexivity to acknowledge and minimize personal biases that could have influenced interpretation.

After establishing coding from the data analysis, the emergent themes were developed by grouping related codes and exploring any patterns (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). Next, themes were organized to distinguish between superordinate and subordinate themes and reflected the complexity of the employee perspective. The iterative process ensured that interpretations remained grounded in the data (Smith et al., 2022). Lastly, the data was analyzed to compare themes across interviewees to identify shared meanings and critical variations (Naeem et al., 2024). This study aimed to capture

individual perspectives and broader experience patterns, comprehensively understanding how employees perceived their leadership's diversity training in supporting organizational equity.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness was critical in qualitative research (Kakar et al., 2023). This study aimed to interpret and understand the employees' perspectives on their leadership's diversity training. Unlike quantitative research, which relies on statistical validity, qualitative research demanded rigor to ensure that the findings accurately represented participants' voices and provided meaningful insights into the phenomenon being studied (Pitney et al., 2024). For this study, trustworthiness was achieved through strategies such as triangulation of data sources, all of which enhanced the credibility and authenticity of the findings (Shapland et al., 2024).

In addition to credibility, ensuring the research's transferability, dependability, and confirmability was equally important. Transferability referred to how the findings could be applied to other settings or contexts, supported through rich descriptions of employees' experiences (Ahmed, 2024). Dependability involved maintaining consistency in the research process, such as how data was collected and analyzed (Bonakdeh et al., 2024). Confirmability ensured that the findings were grounded in the data rather than the researcher's biases or preconceptions (Rees & Ottrey, 2024). Through these measures, this study upheld the trustworthiness of its findings and provided a reliable, valid interpretation of employees' perceptions of leadership's diversity training in supporting an equitable organization (Zia et al., 2023).

## **Credibility**

In qualitative interpretive phenomenological research examining employees' perceptions of their leaders' diversity training, establishing credibility was crucial for ensuring that the findings accurately reflected participants' experiences (Closa, 2021). One effective strategy was triangulation, which involved using multiple data sources or methods to validate the results (Rybnikova & Weigel, 2024). For instance, combining in-depth interviews with employee feedback surveys or internal training documents provided a more comprehensive perspective on how diversity training was perceived and its impact on organizational equity (Wang et al., 2024). By cross-referencing data from various sources, researchers enhanced the validity of their findings and ensured a deeper understanding of the training's effectiveness (Kossek et al., 2024).

Another critical strategy was prolonged contact with participants (Wang et al., 2024). By engaging employees over an extended period, such as through multiple interviews or follow-up sessions, researchers developed a deeper rapport and gained insights into their perceptions of diversity training (Jukes et al., 2024). Extended engagement helped capture the complexities of employees' experiences and perceptions, ensuring that the data collected was thorough and reflective of their actual views (Kakar et al., 2023). Building a trusting relationship with participants also encouraged more honest and detailed feedback, which was critical for understanding the training's impact on organizational equity (Ambarwati et al., 2024).

Member checks, saturation, reflexivity, and peer review further enhanced the credibility of the research (Closa, 2021). Member checks involved returning to participants with preliminary findings to confirm that their perspectives had been accurately represented and to address any inconsistencies (Polavarapu et al., 2022). Achieving saturation ensured that data collection had thoroughly explored the topic, as no new themes or information emerged, indicating comprehensive coverage of employees' perceptions (Naeem et al., 2024). Reflexivity required researchers to critically examine their biases and how they may have influenced the research process and interpretations, ensuring greater transparency (Khuzaiyah et al., 2023).

Lastly, peer review involved having other researchers or experts review the study's methodology and findings to provide external validation and ensure the research's rigor and objectivity (Rahimi & Khatoomi, 2024). These strategies collectively contributed to a robust and credible analysis of employees' perceptions of diversity training and its role in promoting organizational equity. Building on the importance of credibility in ensuring the accuracy and trustworthiness of research findings, it was equally essential to consider the concept of transferability, which examined how the study's results could be applied to other contexts or settings (Ferrando et al., 2019).

### ***Transferability***

Establishing transferability involved ensuring the findings applied to other contexts or settings (Ahmed, 2024). Thick description was a crucial strategy for achieving this, as it provided detailed and comprehensive accounts of the research context, participants' experiences, and the specific conditions under which the study was

conducted. By offering contextualized descriptions of employees' perceptions and the organizational environment, researchers enabled readers to understand the nuances of the findings and assess whether they were relevant to similar contexts or settings (Ferrando et al., 2019).

Variation in participant selection was another crucial strategy to enhance transferability (Levitt, 2021). By including diverse participants from different departments, roles, or levels within the organization, researchers captured a broad spectrum of experiences and perspectives regarding diversity training (Gupta & Pathak, 2024). This variation helped to ensure that the findings were not limited to a specific group but reflected a more comprehensive range of employee perceptions (Lim et al., 2023). By demonstrating how different groups responded to diversity training, the study provided a more robust basis for assessing the applicability of the findings to other organizations or similar training programs, thereby enhancing the transferability of the research outcomes (Levitt, 2021). While transferability focused on the applicability of research findings to other contexts, dependability ensured that the research process was consistent and reliable over time, providing a solid foundation for this study.

### **Dependability**

Audit trails and triangulation were crucial strategies to establish dependability in a qualitative interpretive phenomenological study focused on employees' perceptions of their leaders' diversity training for supporting organizational equity (Morgan, 2024). An audit trail involved meticulously documenting each step of the research process, including data collection, analysis decisions, and the development of findings. This

comprehensive record allowed for an external review of the research process, enabling other researchers to trace how conclusions were reached and to assess the consistency and reliability of the study's procedures (Wang et al., 2024). By maintaining detailed logs of methodological decisions and data handling, researchers ensured their study could be scrutinized and replicated, enhancing its dependability (Ali & Yusof, 2011).

Triangulation further supported dependability by integrating multiple data sources or methods to cross-verify findings (Morgan, 2024). For instance, combining qualitative interviews with participant feedback surveys or reviewing related documents provided a more comprehensive view of employees' perceptions and reduced potential bias (Chenail, 2011). By comparing and contrasting data from different sources, researchers confirmed the consistency of their findings and enhanced the reliability of their conclusions (Natow, 2020).

This approach strengthened the credibility of the results and ensured that the interpretations were robust and grounded in diverse evidence (Rahimi, 2024). Audit trails and triangulation contributed to the overall dependability of the research, providing a solid foundation for understanding the effectiveness of diversity training in promoting organizational equity (Alabi & Mahmuda, 2024). Overall, dependability and the consistency of the research process aligned with confirmability. This ensured that the findings were shaped by data and not influenced by the researcher's biases or preconceptions.

## **Confirmability**

Reflexivity was vital for establishing confirmability (Khuzaiyah et al., 2023). Reflexivity involved researchers critically reflecting on their biases and assumptions and how these may have influenced the research process and outcomes (Akinlar, 2024). By maintaining a reflexive journal, researchers documented their thoughts, decisions, and potential influences on data interpretation (Adewumi, 2023). This self-awareness helped ensure that findings were not unduly shaped by the researchers' preconceptions but were grounded in the participants' perspectives. Reflexivity promoted transparency and accountability, allowing readers to understand how personal and contextual factors may have affected the study and ensured that the research focused on accurately representing employees' experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2024).

Another complementary strategy to enhance confirmability was member checks, where researchers returned to participants with preliminary findings to verify that their views and experiences had been accurately represented (Ahmed, 2024). This process allowed participants to review and provide feedback on the researchers' interpretations, helping to confirm that the findings truly reflected their perceptions (Coleman et al., 2024). By incorporating participant feedback, researchers ensured that their conclusions were grounded in the data and not influenced by their own biases or assumptions.

Together, reflexivity and member checks contributed to a more objective and credible portrayal of employees' perceptions, thereby reinforcing the confirmability of the research findings (Lee, 2024). Lastly, confirmability, which upheld the ethical integrity of the research, was paramount to this study (Rybnikova & Weigel, 2024).

Therefore, the next section discussed adhering to ethical procedures and obtaining approval from an IRB to safeguard the rights and well-being of participants throughout the study.

### **Ethical Procedures**

In the IRB application for research, the treatment of human participants was described comprehensively to ensure ethical standards were met (Walden University, n.d.). Informed consent was fundamental, and providing participants with a clear and detailed consent form was crucial. This form outlined the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, benefits, and participants' rights, including their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The IRB application included a copy of the informed consent form, demonstrating that participants were adequately informed about their participation before consent.

Confidentiality and privacy measures were also essential to the IRB application (Perlstadt, 2024). Researchers detailed how participants' data was protected, including procedures for de-identification and secure data storage (Stegenga et al., 2024). This involved describing how personal information was kept confidential, who had access to the data, and how data was anonymized for reporting and publication purposes (Polavarapu et al., 2022). The application included a data management plan that outlined these protocols, ensuring that participants' privacy was maintained throughout the research process and after the study concluded.

The IRB application also addressed risk and benefit assessments by outlining potential risks to participants and the strategies in place to minimize these risks (Sadeghi

& Smith, 2024). This included describing any physical, psychological, or social risks and the measures taken to mitigate them. Additionally, the application highlighted the benefits of the study to participants and the broader community, including any support resources available to participants if adverse effects occurred. Debriefing procedures were detailed, including how participants were provided with additional information about the study's aims, their role, and how they received support if needed. Any compensation offered to participants was also clearly outlined, including the amount and method of distribution, ensuring that it was ethically appropriate and did not coerce participation. Including these documents and details in the IRB application helped ensure participants' ethical treatment and adherence to research standards (Pascalev et al., 2022).

Ethical concerns related to recruitment materials primarily revolved around ensuring that these materials were transparent and provided sufficient information about the study (Prosser et al., 2024). Recruitment materials, such as flyers, emails, and advertisements, clearly stated the purpose of the research, what participation entailed, and potential risks and benefits. These materials avoided misleading information and were written in plain language to ensure potential participants fully understood what they consented to (Kwame & Petruca, 2024). Misleading or ambiguous materials could have resulted in participants needing to be more adequately informed about the study, raising ethical issues related to informed consent (Serang et al., 2024). Therefore, all documents were thoroughly explained to anyone receiving the survey or outreach communication.

Another significant ethical concern was avoiding coercion and ensuring participation was voluntary. All stages of the research process were designed to prevent

undue influence or pressure, especially when there might have been a power imbalance, such as between supervisors and their subordinates (Serang et al., 2024). To address this concern, the researcher ensured that recruitment was conducted by a person who was not directly involved in the study's data collection or analysis and maintained an objective lens. This separation helped reduce the potential for coercion and ensured that participants were not pressured into joining the study. Clear communication about the voluntary nature of participation and the right to withdraw at any time without negative consequences was emphasized in all recruitment materials.

Data treatment was crucial for maintaining ethical standards and protecting participants' privacy in a study involving human participants. Data anonymity was a high priority for researchers when handling sensitive information (Al Halbushi, 2022). Anonymity meant that participants' identities were not linked to the data collected, preventing any possibility of identifying individuals from the research findings (Khuzaiyah et al., 2023). To ensure anonymity, the researcher gave participants pseudonyms or codes to replace personal identifiers and avoided including any direct identifiers in the dataset.

However, complete anonymity was not always feasible, especially in studies involving detailed personal experiences. In such cases, confidentiality became paramount (Surmiak, 2020). Confidential data meant that while participants' identities were known to the researchers, the information was protected from unauthorized access and disclosure (Patricia López-Estrada & Jonathan Elizondo-Mejías, 2024). The researcher implemented

robust measures to safeguard this confidentiality, such as de-identifying data and using secure storage methods.

The protection of confidential data involved several essential procedures. First, data storage was secured, with physical data kept in locked files or cabinets and digital data stored on encrypted servers or protected by strong passwords (Assya et al., 2022). Access to confidential data was restricted to authorized personnel only, such as the primary researchers and those involved in data analysis, who had been trained in confidentiality procedures. Electronic data was backed up regularly and stored in secure, password-protected environments to prevent data loss or breaches. Data dissemination was carefully controlled to ensure that any information sharing, such as in publications or reports, did not include identifiable details and adhered to ethical guidelines for privacy (Grande Ratti et al., 2024).

Data destruction was another critical aspect of data management. Once the study was completed and the data were no longer needed for research purposes, they were securely destroyed to prevent future misuse (Mozersky et al., 2020). Physical records were shredded, while digital data was permanently deleted using data-wiping software that ensured it was never recovered. The timing of data destruction aligned with institutional policies and ethical guidelines, which often required data to be retained for a specific period for verification or follow-up purposes before being destroyed (Mozersky et al., 2020). By adhering to these procedures, researchers upheld the ethical standards of data treatment and protected participants' privacy throughout and beyond the study.

### **Summary**

Chapter 3 covered details of the research design and rationale, role of the researcher, methodology, participant selection logic, instrumentation, pilot study, procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection, data analysis plan, issues with trustworthiness, including transferability, dependability, confirmability, ethical procedures, and ending with a summary. Chapter 4 contained the findings of the research analysis.

## Chapter 4: Results

This qualitative interpretative phenomenological study aimed to explore the employees' perceptions of their leadership's diversity training in supporting organizational equity. The overarching question for this research study was as follows: How do employees perceive leadership's diversity training in supporting organizational equity? This study aimed to understand how the employee experience and interpretation of their leaders' diversity training contributed to an equitable workplace culture. Chapter 4 includes the pilot study, explains the research setting, provides relevant contextual details about the study's environment, describes participants' demographics, and summarizes key characteristics relevant to the study.

This chapter elucidates the data collection and analysis procedures used throughout the study, including a description of the semistructured interviews, and how field notes and memos, coding process, identification of themes, and the steps taken to uncover meaning from the employees' perception of their leadership's diversity training contributed towards the data collection process. Chapter 4 presents evidence of trustworthiness, encompassing topics such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Visual representations, such as charts or graphs, displayed the frequencies, themes, and positive, negative, or neutral relationships of the collected data. Chapter 4 concludes with a summary highlighting the overall findings.

### **Pilot Study**

This research incorporated a pilot study with one volunteer to evaluate the effectiveness and clarity of research instruments, process, and procedures before

conducting the official study. One of the objectives for this pilot study was to simulate a real interview. The pilot study was intended to test and evaluate the semistructured interview process from beginning to end for relevance, comprehensibility, and alignment with the study's purpose to explore the employees' perceptions of leadership's diversity training in supporting organizational equity (Bay et al., 2023).

The process to begin the pilot study started with deciding who would be willing to participate in a mock interview. The individual chosen for this study included a family volunteer whom I entrusted to give honest and constructive criticism. The participant went through the same process as the actual interviews to ensure consistency and to identify where modifications were needed. During the pilot study, the participant provided valuable feedback regarding the clarity of questions, the flow of the interview, and the extent to which they felt comfortable discussing the topics (Elhami & Khoshnevisan, 2022). Their responses also offered early insights into emerging themes, which helped ensure the interview process would elicit rich and meaningful data (Olmo-Extremera et al., 2024). As a result of the pilot study, minor adjustments were made to the wording and sequence of certain interview questions to improve clarity and encourage deeper reflection. After asking a question, it was helpful to explain a general idea to aid the participant in recalling their personal experience.

Additionally, the pilot helped identify potential logistical issues in the interview process, such as time management and recording procedures. For example, the interview questions were provided in written format or via a secure chat, allowing the person to review all the questions during the process. Overall, the pilot study confirmed that the

research design was sound, the interview guide was informative, and the procedures were appropriate for capturing employees' perceptions about their leadership diversity training in supporting organizational equity.

### **Research Setting**

The research setting for this study consisted of private conference rooms booked specifically for the semistructured interviews. This study had one phone interview, and all participants were informed of the recording requirements to complete the study. To ensure the volunteer felt comfortable knowing there was no video recording, the interviewer purchased a tape recorder for this specific study.

The research setting for this study involved conducting face-to-face, semistructured interviews in a private and professional environment to foster comfort, confidentiality, and trust. Interviews were scheduled in a quiet office or conference room that minimized external distractions and provided participants with a neutral space to share their perspectives openly. Creating a safe and non-threatening atmosphere was essential in qualitative research to encourage participants to disclose their lived experiences honestly and without fear of judgment or repercussion. The interview space was arranged to support participant accessibility, physical comfort, and privacy, ensuring the data collection process aligned with ethical research practices and respected each participant's dignity.

This setting was particularly suitable for an interpretative phenomenological study, as it enabled the researcher to establish rapport, attend to participants' verbal and non-verbal cues, and engage in active listening, all of which were crucial for

understanding employee perceptions in depth. Interviews in person allowed for richer data collection than remote methods, as the researcher could build a stronger interpersonal connection with participants. The semistructured format further enabled consistency across interviews while allowing participants the flexibility to elaborate on their unique experiences of leadership's diversity training and its influence on organizational equity. Lastly, data saturation was reached for this research after collecting information from the tenth participant.

This setting was particularly appropriate for an interpretative phenomenological study, as it provided the researcher with the opportunity to establish rapport, attend to participants' verbal and non-verbal cues, and engage in active listening, which were critical to understand employee perceptions in depth. Interviews conducted in person allowed for richer data collection compared to remote methods, as the researcher could build a stronger interpersonal connection with participants. The semistructured format further enabled consistency across interviews while allowing participants the flexibility to elaborate on their unique experiences of leadership's diversity training and its influence on organizational equity. Lastly, for this research, data saturation was reached after the collection of information from the tenth participant.

### **Demographics**

This study used convenience sampling and snowball sampling. The participants in this study consisted of employees who met the inclusion criteria: having direct experience with leadership diversity training initiatives within their workplace, being 18 years of age or older, residing in the states of Kentucky, Indiana, or Ohio, and being currently

employed. Participants represented a range of employment titles, roles, and levels within their organizations, as this showed the range of perspectives and not solely one particular group. This study captured perspectives on how leadership's engagement in diversity training was perceived across different levels of the organization.

**Table 1**

*Participant Demographics*

Participants EE	Role	Company size	Tenure
EE 1	Executive	500 – 1,000	5-10 years
EE 2	Manager	1,000 – 5,000	10-15 years
EE 3	Manager	500 – 1,000	5-10 years
EE 4	Supervisor	500 – 1,000	1-5 years
EE 5	Manager	100,000+	5-10 years
EE 6	Supervisor	500 – 1,000	15-20 years
EE 7	Supervisor	1-100	10-15 years
EE 8	Supervisor	1-100	1-5 years
EE 9	Manager	5,000 – 10,000	15-20 years
EE 10	Manager	100,000+	15-20 years

Demographic data, including age, gender, race, ethnicity, and educational background, were not collected in this research. This research did not require a partnership with an organization to conduct the study. The sample reflected variation in these characteristics, providing an opportunity to explore how different social and professional identities shaped interpretations of diversity training and their relationship to organizational equity (Barzegar, 2020). This representation was important for understanding how perceptions of leadership's diversity training may have differed across social identity groups, particularly in contexts where issues of equity, inclusion, and belonging were present.

Participants shared their perspectives and did not delve into details about the specifics of their employment unless they were willing to provide them. This varied considerably, with some employees having only a few years of tenure in the organization and others possessing several years of service. This range of experiences enriched the data by allowing for comparisons between newer employee perspectives and those of more seasoned employees with one or more companies who may have observed shifts in leadership practices over time. To maintain confidentiality, participants were randomly assigned a unique identifier to conceal any identifiable personal information from their employers, coworkers, or other participants. All participants were 18 years or older, employed within the states of Indiana, Kentucky, or Ohio, and had experienced some form of diversity training within their organizations.

Overall, the study captured a comprehensive perspective of how employees perceived leadership's role in diversity training and its impact on organizational equity. The exclusion of demographic details and a focused direction on interview questions tailored towards exploring the interviewee's individual perspective provided transparency in the research process. They supported interpretative analysis by correlating the findings within the lived contexts of the participants.

### **Data Collection**

This research included 10 participants who met the criteria to proceed with the entire research process. The outreach process began in August 2025 and was scheduled to conclude at the end of August and the first week of October. However, minor conflicts

with the volunteer's schedule caused some interviews to be rescheduled from the end of August to September and the first week of October. Interviews were conducted face-to-face at a confidential location, and one phone interview was also held.

This research study included 10 participants who met the established criteria and completed the full data collection process. The participants were selected by snowball and purposeful sampling to align with the study's focus. Following Walden University's approval number for this study, 08-05-25-1146265, recruitment efforts began in early August 2025. Data collection was scheduled for the last week of August and the first week of September. Due to schedule conflicts and limited availability among volunteers, several interviews were rescheduled. As a result, interviews took place over a longer period, extending into the second and third weeks of September. Despite the slight delay, all participants completed their individual interviews within 3 weeks, maintaining the study's timeline integrity.

The primary data collection method involved semistructured, face-to-face interviews conducted in person at a secure and confidential location agreed upon by both the researcher and participant. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, depending on the depth of the responses and the participant's engagement. The face-to-face setting was selected to encourage objective rapport and facilitate more objective and nuanced discussions. In one instance, a participant expressed a scheduling constraint and requested a remote interview. As a result, one phone interview was arranged. This variation from the original plan was documented to maintain transparency and consistency in data tracking.

All interviews were audio-recorded using a digital recorder to ensure accuracy during transcription. In addition to audio recordings, I took observational notes during and immediately after each interview to capture non-verbal cues and contextual details that may have informed the interpretation of verbal data. These notes were securely stored along with the digital files in an encrypted Microsoft Excel file and were later incorporated into the data analysis process. Transcriptions were generated manually to ensure data transmission consistency and maintain confidentiality.

Aligned with Walden University's IRB criteria, confidentiality agreements, and ethical considerations, data collection instruments included a pen and paper for note-taking, a digital audio recorder for capturing the full dialogue, and no video recording. Notes were used to record non-verbal cues, initial reflections, and follow-up prompts. I transcribed the audio recordings manually to maintain confidentiality and accuracy. All collected data were compiled into a secure, encrypted Microsoft Excel file. This file was stored on a password-protected device and backed up in an encrypted digital storage system. According to research ethics guidelines, the data retention followed a minimum timeline of 5 years. After 5 years, the data will be permanently deleted to ensure participant confidentiality and data protection. This research involved no other data sources outside of the individual participants. Therefore, no school, organization, local, state, federal documentation, or database was acquired for this research.

The data collection process proceeded smoothly, with only a few unexpected challenges. The most notable variation was the need to extend the interview period beyond the originally planned timeframe, which was the end of September. Additionally,

the previously scheduled phone interview slightly deviated from the originally intended in-person format. These minor adjustments had no impact on the research's integrity, outcome, or scope. No other unusual circumstances or disruptions were encountered. Overall, the data collection process remained consistent with the methodology presented in Chapter 3, with only slight scheduling adaptations made to accommodate participants' availability.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis for the qualitative study included 10 participants for a semistructured interview, arranged into specific codes, categories, and themes that emerged from the data. Example participant quotations were used to emphasize the importance of the subject at hand. Any quotes were limited to ensure the confidentiality of the individuals who participated in the study and to ensure their coworkers, colleagues, family, friends, and employers could not identify the participating volunteers.

The purpose of this qualitative interpretative phenomenological study was to explore employees' perceptions of their leadership's diversity training in supporting organizational equity. The data analysis aimed to understand how employees experienced, interpreted, and made meaning of leadership-led diversity training initiatives, and how such training influenced their perceptions of equity within the organization. Semistructured, one-on-one interviews were conducted in person with participants who voluntarily agreed to share their perspectives under conditions of confidentiality. Each interview provided a detailed narrative about personal experiences

with diversity training, perceptions of leadership commitment, and how these efforts contributed to equitable treatment across the organization.

The data analysis process for this qualitative research was conducted using a systematic process from specific coded units of meaning to broader categories and overarching themes. This method allowed the researcher to remain grounded in the participants' perspectives while gradually constructing a conceptual understanding of employees' perceptions regarding leadership diversity training. The analytic process began with closely reading the interview transcripts, followed by line-by-line coding. The researcher manually transcribed all interviews from digital audio recordings. Notes taken during the interviews were also integrated into the analysis, providing non-verbal cues and contextual context that helped shape coding decisions.

To preserve the confidentiality and integrity of participant responses, each individual was assigned a unique identification code in a random order (e.g., EE 1; EE 2, etc.). Transcriptions were generated manually by the researcher to ensure precision and alignment with the audio data, maintaining consistency throughout the transcription process. All identifiable information was omitted or replaced with pseudonyms to maintain participant confidentiality. Transcripts were stored on a password-protected device; only the researcher could access the encrypted data. Upon transcription, each interview was carefully reviewed multiple times to ensure accuracy and familiarity with the content, allowing the researcher to immerse themselves in the data before coding began fully.

Open coding was the first stage of the process, where significant statements, repeated phrases, or noteworthy ideas were assigned initial codes. These codes represented the smallest units of meaning derived directly from participant feedback and expressions. The researcher then engaged in axial coding, grouping similar codes to form broader conceptual categories. Then, through selective coding, larger themes emerged that encapsulated the central ideas expressed across all interviews. This multi-step process ensured the analysis was data-driven and reflected the participants' experiences, rather than imposing any pre-existing frameworks.

### **Codes, Categories, and Themes**

All 10 participants shared their perspectives on leadership's diversity training with the interviewer. Each of the 16 questions asked during the semistructured interview yielded meaningful data, as themes related to this study emerged after coding. The analysis began with open coding, where the researcher read each transcript to identify significant statements, words, and phrases that captured the essence of participants' experiences. These initial codes represented discrete ideas such as "leadership awareness," "inclusive communication," "relevance of training," "token representation," and "unequal follow-through." During this stage, the researcher sought to bracket personal assumptions to focus solely on participants' perspectives.

After initial coding, related codes were clustered into broader categories that reflected emerging patterns across participants. A thorough analysis of the data was conducted to determine categories and themes such as "training quality," "leadership engagement," "employee inclusion," and "organizational accountability" began to

surface. Repeated comparison and refinement evolved these categories into major themes that represented the collective meaning of participants' perspectives. The process involved constant reflection and reorganization of codes as new relationships and insights emerged. An encrypted Microsoft Excel spreadsheet was used to organize coded data and facilitated pattern recognition, but it did not replace the researcher's interpretive judgment. Many codes emerged from the data, many clustered around several key concepts. Observed codes included: "lack of representation," "communication," "surface-level training," "unconscious bias," "unsupportive and supportive leadership," "inconsistent application," "meaningful inclusion," "problem solving," and "visible commitment." From these codes, a few categories emerged:

1. Perceived authenticity of leadership commitment and engagement
2. Training gaps and ineffectiveness
3. Effectiveness and relevance of diversity training
4. Leadership representation and visibility
5. Employee voice and inclusion in equity practices
6. Equity as an ongoing practice, not a policy

These categories were further synthesized into overarching themes that defined the study's core findings. Each theme represented a deeper understanding of how employees perceived and interpreted leadership's diversity training efforts in supporting organizational equity. The themes captured shared experiences and revealed how participants made meaning of their organizational environments and interactions. To illustrate these findings, participants' quotes were presented throughout the following

sections, providing vivid examples that lent authenticity and depth to the analysis. Their quotations emphasized the emotional and experiential dimensions of the data, grounding the themes from employees' perspectives.

### **Participant Quotes and Emphasis**

Throughout the analysis, direct quotations from participants were used to underscore the emotional weight and personal significance of the issues raised. For instance, EE described their frustration: "...We sit through these workshops, and then return to teams where nothing has changed. What is the point?" EE 4 remarked, "...It feels like leadership was doing this for optics, not for us..." These quotes represented broader themes and helped to humanize the data and illustrate the nuanced ways employees experienced leadership's role in diversity efforts. Quotations were carefully selected and contextualized during the coding process to avoid decontextualization, eliminate subjective incorporation, or misinterpretation. Each excerpt was linked back to its corresponding code and category tables to maintain the integrity of the charts and tables. This approach helped ensure that the emergent themes were truly grounded in the data and reflected the collective voice of the participants.

**Table 2***Semistructured Interview Questions*

Theme	Quote
Leadership's Influence and Authenticity	"Leadership's involvement in DEI training makes me feel the company is serious about fairness."
Leadership's Influence and Authenticity	"When diversity training is authentic and ongoing, I feel more included and valued."
Leadership's Influence and Authenticity	"Mentorship and open dialogue led by leaders help break down barriers and support equity."
Leadership's Influence and Authenticity	"Training that is just a checkbox doesn't change anything. We need real conversations and action."
Respect for Individual Uniqueness & Empathy	"We see things not as they are, but as we are."
Respect for Individual Uniqueness & Empathy	"There's no substitute for getting to know somebody...we are a kaleidoscope."
Respect for Individual Uniqueness & Empathy	"Genuine respect for individuals in diversity and inclusion efforts is crucial; superficial approaches are ineffective."
Safe Spaces & Open Dialogue	"Creating safe spaces for open dialogue and understanding is essential."
Safe Spaces & Open Dialogue	"Facilitators need to maintain neutrality while encouraging participants to share their experiences."
Practicality and Ongoing Commitment	"DEI training should be practical and impactful, not just a checkbox exercise, and designed by knowledgeable leaders."
Practicality and Ongoing Commitment	"DEI training should be ongoing, not a one-time event, and integrated into employee relations, orientation, and onboarding processes."
Challenges and Barriers	"Some employees expressed skepticism about superficial or repetitive training methods, emphasizing the need for practical, solution-oriented approaches."
Challenges and Barriers	"Barriers such as language, ability, and exclusion were identified, highlighting the importance of accessible and culturally sensitive training materials."
Practicality & Ongoing Effort	"DEI training should be ongoing, not a one-time event."
Visible Leadership Commitment	"Leadership's involvement in DEI training makes me feel the company is serious about fairness."
Visible Leadership Commitment	"When leaders actively participate and model inclusive behaviors, employees report greater trust in the fairness of workplace policies and practices."
Visible Leadership Commitment	"Leadership accountability such as setting DEI goals and supporting mentorship programs—was cited as a driver of positive change."
Visible Leadership Commitment	"Mentorship and open dialogue led by leaders help break down barriers and support equity."
Visible Leadership Commitment	"When diversity training is authentic and ongoing, I feel more included and valued."
Visible Leadership Commitment	"Leadership-driven diversity training is essential for building an equitable workplace."
Visible Leadership Commitment	"Employees are more likely to perceive the organization as fair and inclusive when leaders actively support and participate in DEI initiatives."
Authenticity and Modeling Behavior	"When leaders actively participate and model inclusive behaviors, employees report greater trust in the fairness of workplace policies and practices."
Authenticity and Modeling Behavior	"Leadership's involvement in DEI training makes me feel the company is serious about fairness."
Authenticity and Modeling Behavior	"Leadership's involvement in DEI training makes me feel the company is serious about fairness."
Authenticity and Modeling Behavior	"Leadership's involvement in DEI training makes me feel the company is serious about fairness."
Ongoing Engagement and Accountability	"DEI training should be ongoing, not a one-time event, and integrated into employee relations, orientation, and onboarding processes."
Ongoing Engagement and Accountability	"Leadership accountability such as setting DEI goals and supporting mentorship programs is a driver of positive change."
Ongoing Engagement and Accountability	"Employees called for more consistent leadership involvement and integration of DEI principles into company culture."

## **Conclusion of Analysis**

The data analysis in this study yielded rich and multifaceted insights into employees' perceptions of leadership's diversity efforts in training and organizational equity. Themes like performative leadership commitment, inadequate training follow-through, and the centrality of representation highlighted critical areas where organizations could improve to foster meaningful and sustainable equity. Including discrepant cases added nuance and depth to the findings, showing that while challenges were common, effective leadership engagement was possible and impactful.

This analysis presented information on potential future organizational strategies but also contributed to the broader discourse on equity in the workplace. Grounded findings in employee perspectives and using a systematic inductive process, the study provided an actionable framework for understanding the potential disconnect between diversity goals and workplace realities. The information combined indicated that the employee perception of their leadership's diversity training could support organizational equity. This conclusion was drawn from the common themes identified in the responses, like communication skills, leadership, team collaboration, problem-solving, and adaptability. There were also disconnections and differences in technical skills, time management, innovation, creativity, customer focus, and conflict resolution. These themes suggested there might be areas for improvement in the training to ensure it fully supported organizational equity. To ensure that these findings accurately reflected participants' perspectives and were interpreted with integrity, the next section outlined the evidence of trustworthiness established throughout the research process.

## **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

### **Credibility**

The credibility of this qualitative research study was ensured using several strategies outlined in Chapter 3 and, where necessary, was adjusted during data collection and analysis. The use of semistructured, one-on-one interviews allowed participants to share their perceptions in a confidential setting, which enhanced the authenticity and depth of responses. Probing questions and follow-up prompts were used consistently to encourage elaboration and clarity, supporting the development of rich, meaningful data. However, follow-up questions were not needed for this study. Additionally, the researcher maintained a detailed audit trail of decisions made during the coding and theme development process, which added transparency and consistency to the analysis. Credibility was also strengthened through triangulation, using multiple data sources such as interview transcripts, researcher notes, and observational details to cross-verify interpretations. This process allowed the researcher to identify patterns, reduce bias, and ensure that the themes emerged organically from participant experiences rather than researcher assumptions.

The original process included only in-person interviews, but one participant was scheduled for a phone interview due to availability conflicts. This variation was documented, and steps were taken to ensure consistency in asking questions and recording responses. This adjustment did not compromise the study's credibility, as the interview protocol remained unchanged, and the data quality was preserved through audio recording and transcription. Overall, the implementation of credibility strategies

paired with reflexivity and ethical rigor ensured that the study findings were grounded in the real perspectives of participants.

### **Transferability**

Strategies were implemented to support the transferability of this study and ensure that readers could determine the relevance of the findings to other contexts. One of the primary strategies was the use of thick, rich description throughout data collection and analysis. Participants' backgrounds, roles within their organizations, and contextual factors surrounding leadership and diversity efforts were carefully excluded to ensure no compromise of confidentiality. The presentation of direct participant quotations in the findings allowed readers to hear their voices directly and understand the nuanced ways they experienced leadership diversity training. This detail offered insight into the specific social and professional environments in which the study occurred, which made it possible for readers to assess the similarity to their own settings.

The study's use of a purposeful sampling strategy and snowball method contributed to transferability by selecting participants with direct experience with leadership diversity initiatives and training within their organizations. This ensured that the data reflected various perspectives from individuals well-positioned to speak on the topic. While the study was not intended to be generalizable in the statistical sense, it provided meaningful insights that could resonate with similar organizational environments or leadership groups. No significant adjustments to transferability strategies were required during the study. The original plan aligned well with the goals of providing context-rich and experience-based findings. By providing a clear account of participant

experiences and organizational settings, this study supported the reader's ability to make informed judgments about the applicability of its conclusions to other contexts.

### **Dependability**

To ensure the consistency of this study, the research process followed a clearly defined, repeatable methodology. All semistructured interviews were conducted using the same open-ended questions, ensuring that each participant was given the same opportunity to share their experiences, while allowing flexibility for individualized follow-up. This approach promoted uniformity in data collection while respecting the unique perspectives of each participant. An audit trail was maintained throughout the research process, including documentation of coding decisions, changes in scheduling, and researcher reflections in an encrypted Microsoft Excel file.

Minor adjustments were made to the data collection process, primarily due to participant availability. Originally, all interviews had been planned to be conducted in person. However, due to scheduling conflicts, one interview was moved to a phone call. Although this was a deviation from the original plan, the same interview protocol, confidentiality safeguards, and data recording procedures were used to maintain consistency in the collection and treatment of data. Additionally, manual coding procedures were applied uniformly to all transcripts, and categories and themes were developed inductively through repeated data reviews, ensuring that the analysis process remained methodical and transparent. These strategies reinforced the study's dependability by demonstrating that findings emerged from a consistent, well-documented process.

### **Confirmability**

The consistency of this study was carefully maintained through the implementation of strategies detailed in Chapter 3, with minor adjustments made as necessary to accommodate unforeseen circumstances. A critical strategy was using a standardized semistructured interview guide applied uniformly across all participants to ensure that the data collection process was systematic and comparable. This approach helped maintain a consistent line of inquiry while allowing participants the flexibility to elaborate on their individual experiences and for the interviewer to aid in explaining why the questions were broad. A comprehensive audit trail was kept throughout data collection and analysis, documenting all procedures, decisions, and any deviations from the original plan, thereby enhancing transparency and enabling external review of the research process.

An adjustment occurred when one face-to-face interview had to be shifted to a phone call format due to participant availability constraints. Despite this change in modality, all other consistency measures remained intact: the same interview protocol was used, the interview was audio recorded, and transcription procedures were followed as with in-person interviews. Furthermore, coding was conducted manually and consistently across all transcripts using an inductive approach to identify codes, categories, and themes. Regular reflection and cross-checking of codes ensured that the analysis process was dependable and not subject to researcher bias. Combined with careful documentation, these practices reinforced the study's dependability, ensuring that

findings were rooted in a repeatable, transparent process even when minor procedural adjustments were necessary.

### **Study Results**

Building upon the data analysis detailed in Chapter 4, this chapter presented the results of the study to answer the research question and included additional relevant feedback from the participants to highlight the patterns and themes derived from participants' perspectives. The findings were supported by rich, descriptive evidence drawn from participant quotations that illustrated the depth of their perceptions and interpretations. Each theme reflected the essence of employees' views regarding their leadership's diversity training and its role in supporting organizational equity. Discrepant cases and nonconfirming data were also discussed to provide a balanced interpretation and to demonstrate the rigor and credibility of the analytic process. These findings provided meaningful insight into how employees perceived, experienced, and evaluated diversity training as a mechanism for supporting equity within their organizations.

Guided by the overarching question for this research: How do employees perceive leadership's diversity training in supporting organizational equity? This study explored how employee experiences could inform more meaningful and inclusive training practices. Research showed that at the employee and organizational level, employees could experience greater inclusion and belonging as leaders used insights from diversity training to foster more equitable work environments (Follmer et al., 2024). Broader societal implications included advancing dialogue on workplace equity and supporting fair, inclusive practices across all levels of the organization (King et al., 2023). Overall,

this study emphasized the value of ongoing, reflective diversity training that empowered both leaders and employees to build and sustain equity-driven workplaces.

**Table 3**

*Interview Coding Quotes From Participants*

Category	Sub-Code/ Description	Example Quote
Training Approach	Prescriptive vs. Reflective	"It's telling, not teaching...present the scenario, then tell people how to respond"
Grouping & Labels	Feature-Based Grouping	"Grouped just because of some feature...call that diverse. Diverse from what?"
Inclusion & Exclusion	Alienation, Tokenism	"I wasn't included in this training. I was just the product of the training."
Personal Impact	Rejection, Identity	"Training gave them those labels just as much as it gave me labels."
Historical Framing	Past Injustices, Media Stereotypes	"They tied it to slavery...never talked about how do I move forward."
Equity & Fairness	Objective Measurement, Skepticism	"Fairness is that everybody gets a shot...measured by objective things."
Communication	Barriers, Empathy	"Addressing communication barriers...ensuring everyone has the opportunity."
Conflict Management	Team Dynamics, Diversity as Conflict Management	"Diversity is conflict management...how do we think, how do we act?"
Accountability & Change	Responsibility, Empowerment	"I want to make you capable, enable you and empower you."
Individuality & Uniqueness	Celebrating Differences, Avoiding Assumptions	"There's no substitute for getting to know somebody."

Table 4

*Interview Coding Results From Participants*

Category	Topic	Synonym/Related Concept
Training Methods & Impact	Training design, interactive methods, continuous learning, onboarding, orientation	Experiential, microlearning, modular, integrated
Diversity, Equity, Inclusion	DEI training, equity, fairness, inclusion, belonging, empowerment	Diversity, justice, equal opportunity, representation
Communication & Relationships	Open dialogue, empathy, understanding, personal connections, safe spaces	Accessibility, listening, honest discussions
Personal Experience & Identity	Personal stories, backgrounds, uniqueness, self-awareness, identity	Reflection, authenticity, lived experience
Leadership & Facilitation	Knowledgeable leaders, mentorship, facilitator neutrality, accountability	Support, empowerment, role modeling
Conflict Resolution	Addressing conflicts, team dynamics, neutrality, group discussions	Mediation, problem-solving, resilience
Workplace Culture	Inclusive environment, cultural sensitivity, global work environment	Welcoming, belonging, diversity, respect
Policy & Operational Topics	Pay transparency, equitable hiring, anti-bullying, safety, policies	Compliance, HR, operational procedures
Challenges & Barriers	Barriers to inclusion, language, ability, exclusion, fear, tokenism	Obstacles, alienation, bias, stereotypes
Historical & Cultural Framing	Past injustices, cultural disturbance, media stereotypes, legislation	Historical context, cultural norms, representation

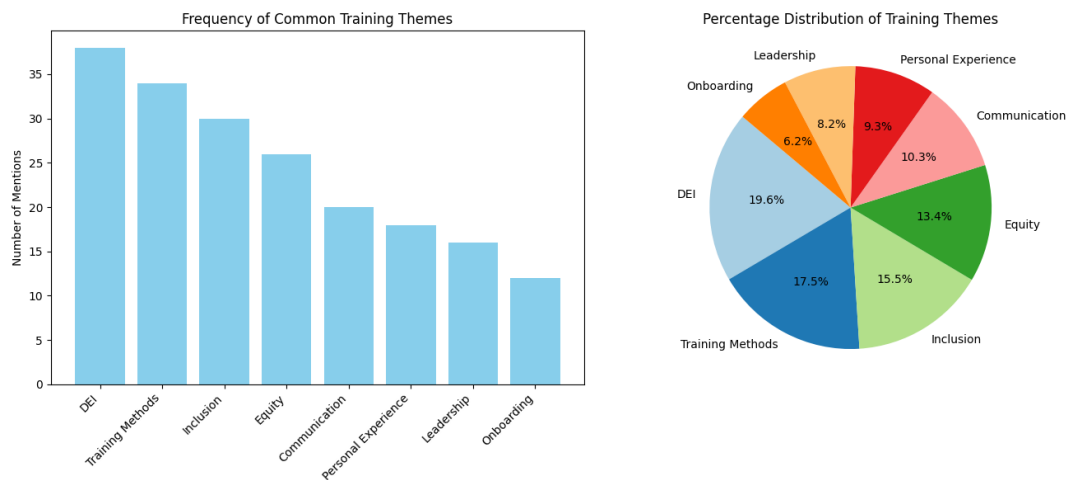
Table 5

*Interview Topics From Participants*

Theme	Code	Description / Example
Training Methods	Interactive Methods	Role-play, simulations, group discussions
DEI	Equity & Fairness	Objective measurement, equal opportunity
Inclusion	Belonging	Feeling valued, participation, accessibility
Communication Personal Experience	Empathy & Understanding Authenticity	Listening, open dialogue, safe spaces Sharing personal stories, personal experience
Leadership	Mentorship	Support for underrepresented groups, facilitator neutrality
Conflict Resolution Workplace Culture	Addressing Conflicts Cultural Sensitivity	Team dynamics, mediation, resilience Bilingual leaders, global norms, welcoming environment
Policy	Transparency	HR policies, anti-bullying, safety procedures
Barriers	Language & Ability	Exclusion, communication barriers, tokenism
Historical	Past Injustices	Slavery, media stereotypes, legislation

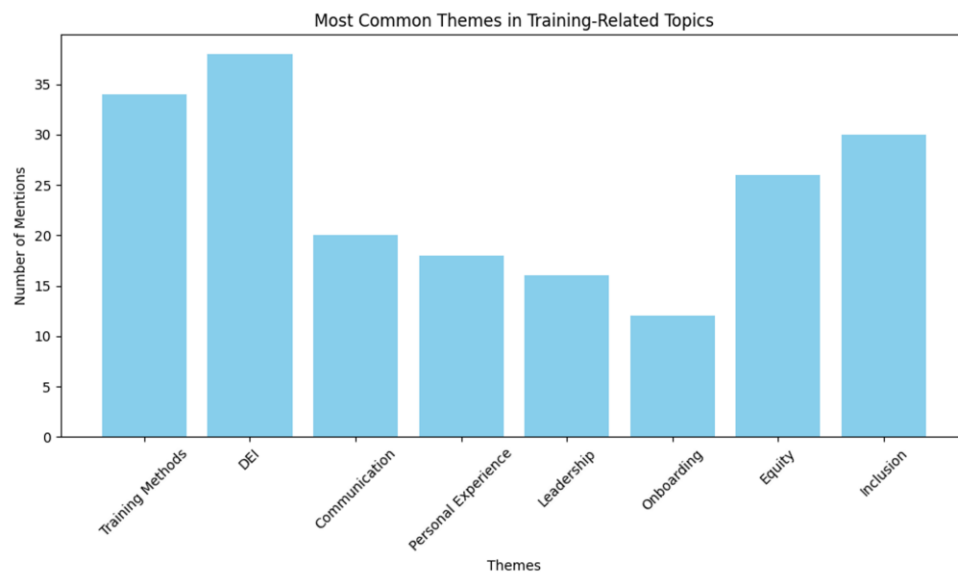
**Figure 2**

*Frequency and Training Themes Charts From Participants*



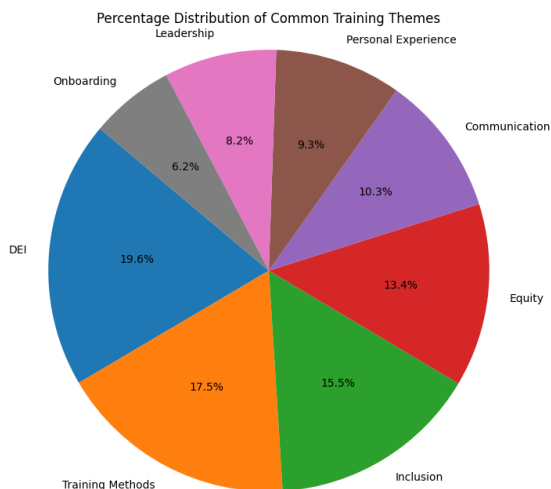
**Figure 3**

*Most Common Themes From Participants*



**Figure 4**

*Percentage of Common Training Themes From Participants*



Most participants viewed leadership diversity training as a necessary and valuable step in promoting equity. They described the training as raising leaders' awareness, encouraging cultural sensitivity, and providing a shared organizational language around inclusion. For example, one participant explained, "The fact that they go through training shows me that leadership is at least trying to change the system. It doesn't solve everything, but it makes me feel seen." Another participant highlighted the symbolic value of the training, noting that, "It sends a message that diversity is not just an HR thing it's something leaders are expected to do." However, several participants expressed concerns that training alone was insufficient. They emphasized that while workshops created awareness, real equity required systemic reforms in hiring, promotion, and decision-making practices.

A small number of participants questioned the utility of training altogether. One participant described the training as “corporate theater,” suggesting that leaders were going through the motions without genuine engagement. Another participant added, “We sit here year after year, and nothing changes. You can’t train away bias that’s baked into the culture.” These discrepant perspectives challenged the assumption that training was universally valued and underscored the skepticism that some employees felt when initiatives were not paired with structural change.

Employees consistently linked the effectiveness of diversity training to leadership accountability. Participants stressed that training had value only when leaders demonstrated follow-through. Visible behaviors such as referencing training in team discussions, acknowledging bias, or setting measurable diversity goals enhanced employee trust. One participant reflected, “I could tell my supervisor was taking it seriously because she started asking people who usually don’t speak up for their input. That was new for her.” Another participant noted, “When our director admitted he had blind spots and asked for feedback, it showed me he was applying what he learned.” Not all participants observed accountability in action. Several noted that some leaders resisted the training or quickly reverted to old habits. One participant explained, “They attend the training, but afterward it’s business as usual same people getting promoted, same cliques in decision-making.” Another participant observed, “I didn’t notice any difference in my manager. If anything, they seemed annoyed that they had to take the training.” These nonconfirming accounts highlighted the uneven application of training principles across

leaders and departments. They also suggested that without accountability structures, the impact of training may have been inconsistent.

Participants generally described diversity training as having the potential to shift organizational culture, particularly by encouraging dialogue and increasing inclusivity. Employees reported feeling more comfortable voicing perspectives when they believed leaders were attempting to apply lessons from training. For instance, one employee said, “When leaders started talking more openly about bias, it made me feel like I could share my story without being judged.” Another shared, “I’ve noticed small changes like meetings being more balanced and not just dominated by the same few people.”

Similarities from participants framed training as an entry point to broader equity efforts. One participant emphasized, “The training is like planting a seed, but culture changes when that seed is watered through daily actions.” However, the discrepant cases yielded results from employees who did not perceive any cultural changes resulting from training. One employee bluntly stated, “The training has not changed the culture here at all. It still feels like who you know matters more than fairness.” Another commented, “It feels like leaders talk about equity, but they still make decisions behind closed doors.” These discrepant views underscored the gap between organizational aspirations and lived employee experiences, suggesting that while some cultural shifts may have been occurring, they were uneven and not universally felt (Legate & Weinstein, 2024).

While each research question highlighted distinct findings, several cross-cutting themes emerged.:

- Symbolic vs. practical value – Training was valued as a symbolic step, but its practical impact depended on visible behavioral changes.
- Accountability as a key driver – Employees repeatedly emphasized that accountability determined whether training had credibility.
- Trust and culture – Trust in leadership and perceptions of equity were shaped by how training translated into daily organizational practices.
- Resistance and fatigue – Some leaders resisted training, while employees described fatigue when initiatives lacked tangible results.

The findings suggested that employees perceived leadership diversity training as both valuable and limited. While many recognized its role in raising awareness and signaling organizational priorities, they emphasized that training had to be followed by accountability, systemic reforms, and cultural transformation to achieve equity.

Discrepant cases highlighted skepticism, resistance, and perceptions of inauthenticity, reminded us that not all employees interpreted training in positive terms. These nonconfirming data points underscored the importance of examining not only the intended outcomes of diversity initiatives but also their limitations and unintended effects.

The next chapter discussed these findings in relation to existing literature, considering the implications for organizational practice and recommendations for future research.

For example, research question one, employees recognized symbolic and practical benefits of training but noted skepticism when changes in leadership behavior or

decision-making were not apparent. Then question two revealed that accountability was viewed as the determining factor in whether training had impact. Employees expressed greater trust when leaders demonstrated follow-through such as referencing training concepts, admitting blind spots, or actively engaging diverse perspectives, whereas nonconfirming accounts highlighted resistance, disengagement, and inconsistency across leaders. Question three resulted in themes where participants described training as planting “seeds” of cultural change, with some reported greater inclusivity and openness, while others observed little or no improvement in organizational practices, pointing to a disconnect between training and systemic equity. The interviews collectively emphasized the transformative role of training particularly in diversity, equity, and inclusion in shaping workplace culture and employee engagement.

The findings from the study revealed several key insights regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training in the workplace. Participants consistently emphasized that effective diversity training was essential for fostering empathy, respect, and understanding across diverse teams. Rather than a one-time checkbox exercise, participants viewed DEI initiatives as most impactful when they were practical, continuous, and deeply embedded into the organization’s culture. In an increasingly global work environment, understanding different personalities, communication styles, and cultural backgrounds was seen as vital for building inclusive, globally minded teams.

In the area of people management and conflict resolution, participants noted that current training methods were often insufficient to address real-world challenges. Many employees expressed that they learned more about managing interpersonal dynamics and

resolving conflicts through on-the-job experiences and open communication than through formal training programs. Authenticity and engagement emerged as another central theme, as employees valued training that felt genuine, participatory, and relatable. In contrast, superficial or punitive approaches were described as counterproductive and unlikely to foster lasting change.

Additionally, mentorship and support systems for underrepresented groups were highlighted as critical components of equitable workplace cultures. Employees believed that mentorship programs and peer networks could play an essential role in promoting inclusion and career development. Cultural sensitivity was also identified as a necessary aspect of effective training, with participants recommended the inclusion of bilingual resources, diverse examples, and facilitators who demonstrated cultural awareness. Finally, personal connection was viewed as a powerful catalyst for meaningful DEI progress. Participants emphasized that empathy-driven storytelling, open dialogue, and the creation of safe spaces for discussion could significantly enhance employees' understanding of one another and strengthened organizational commitment to equity and inclusion.

### **Summary**

Chapter 4 presented the findings from interviews with 10 employees, organized by the study's semistructured interview questions. The participants perceived leadership diversity training as a valuable in supporting organizational equity, particularly in raising awareness and signaling organizational priorities. However, they emphasized that training alone was insufficient without concrete action. The findings suggest that

employees viewed leadership diversity training as necessary but limited in advancing equity unless accompanied by accountability, transparency, and structural change. The inclusion of discrepant perspectives underscored the complexities of employee trust and the unevenness of cultural transformation across the organization. These results provided the foundation for Chapter 5, which interpreted the findings in relation to existing literature, considered their implications for leadership and organizational practice, and identify recommendations for strengthening equity initiatives and future research directions.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative interpretative phenomenological study was to explore employees' perceptions of leadership diversity training and its role in supporting organizational equity. Chapter 4 presented the findings from interviews with 10 employee volunteers, highlighting both areas of agreement and divergence across participants' experiences. This chapter builds on those results by interpreting the findings in relation to the existing body of literature and the study's conceptual framework. This chapter discusses how the findings confirmed, extended, or challenged previous research, and it drew conclusions about the significance of leadership diversity training for advancing organizational equity. The chapter presents practical recommendations for leaders, organizations, and policymakers, as well as suggestions for future research. By situating the perceptions of employees within a broader scholarly and practical context, Chapter 5 seeks to provide actionable insights that could guide efforts to strengthen equity and inclusion in the workplace.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

The purpose of this qualitative interpretative phenomenological study was to explore employees' perceptions of leadership diversity training and its role in supporting organizational equity. Using semistructured interviews with 10 participants, the study revealed that while employees generally perceived leadership diversity training as a valuable first step, its effectiveness was seen as limited unless supported by leadership accountability, structural alignment, and cultural reinforcement. In this section, the findings are interpreted in light of the peer-reviewed literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

Specifically, the discussion addresses the ways in which the findings confirmed, disconfirmed, or extended existing knowledge regarding leadership, diversity training, and organizational equity.

The first major finding of the study was that employees largely perceived leadership diversity training as important for raising awareness and signaling organizational priorities, but insufficient as a standalone intervention. This finding aligns with prior research suggesting that diversity training can increase knowledge and sensitivity, but is rarely transformative on its own (Dobbin & Kalev, 2018; Bezrukova et al., 2016). Employees' accounts of training as "planting a seed" echoed the scholarly consensus that training was most effective when paired with long-term strategies and systemic changes. The study confirmed that employees recognized both the symbolic and practical value of training; however, their lived experiences reinforced critiques in the literature that training without structural reform risked becoming performative or superficial (Kulik & Roberson, 2008).

This study extended the literature by illustrating how employees differentiated between symbolic and practical value. While existing scholarship frequently critiqued diversity training as symbolic or compliance-driven, this study revealed that employees themselves made nuanced distinctions (Barnes & Grayer, 2023). Research by Grund and Swaroop (2024) acknowledged symbolic value as important, while simultaneously demanding practical outcomes. For example, participants noted that training was perceived as the leadership's responsibility, even if no immediate changes followed. This

dual perception expanded upon prior findings by demonstrating that employees could appreciate symbolic gestures while still holding leaders accountable for deeper change.

The second major finding was that employees perceived leadership accountability as the critical factor determining whether training had credibility and impact (Closa, 2021). This finding strongly confirms prior research, which emphasizes that leadership behaviors, rather than training content alone, shape the outcomes of diversity initiatives (Aei-Kyung et al., 2022). Participants reported greater trust and optimism when leaders applied lessons from training by soliciting input, admitting biases, or referencing equity goals. Conversely, when leaders failed to demonstrate accountability or resisted training, employees expressed skepticism and disengagement. These findings reinforced the well-documented link between leadership commitment and successful diversity outcomes (Ali, 2023). This study contributes to the literature by presenting the employee perspective on accountability.

Much of the existing research emphasized organizational-level metrics, such as representation or retention rates, to evaluate the effectiveness of leadership training (Ganesh, 2024). In contrast, the findings highlighted how employees interpreted accountability through leaders' day-to-day behaviors and communications. Employees did not expect immediate systemic reform, but they sought evidence that leaders had internalized the training and applied it in their interpersonal interactions. An employee-centered view extended knowledge by showing how accountability was experienced subjectively, measured objectively.

The discrepant cases in which employees perceived no accountability aligned with research indicating that leaders often attended training without genuine engagement (Ganesh, 2024). The frustration and cynicism expressed by these participants confirmed critiques that diversity training could backfire if employees perceived it as insincere. By documenting these lived experiences, the study contributed to an understanding of how skepticism develops when accountability is absent, further supporting calls in the literature for linking diversity goals to performance evaluations and organizational accountability structures (Linnes et al., 2024).

Another major finding was that employees perceived diversity training as influencing organizational culture only when leaders consistently modeled inclusive behaviors. This finding supported prior studies, which have shown that leadership plays a central role in shaping organizational norms around equity (Sweeting et al., 2024). Participants' descriptions of leaders inviting input from underrepresented voices or acknowledging biases aligned with research that identified inclusive leadership behaviors as essential for fostering a sense of belonging (Hogan et al., 2023).

However, the study also revealed that cultural shifts could be uneven and, for some participants, imperceptible. This partially disconfirmed optimistic claims in the literature that diversity training could reliably transform organizational cultures (Roche & Passmore, 2023). Instead, the findings aligned more closely with research cautioning that cultural change required sustained reinforcement beyond training interventions (Burrell, 2023). The employee narratives of fatigue and skepticism during training that lacked

follow-through underscored the risk that diversity initiatives might be perceived as repetitive or hollow if disconnected from structural changes.

This study extended the literature by documenting the nuanced ways employees interpreted cultural impact. Including small shifts in dialogue, such as leaders acknowledging diverse perspectives, was perceived as meaningful cultural progress (Legate & Weinstein, 2024). For others, the absence of systemic change in hiring and promotion overshadowed any perceived improvements (Follmer et al., 2024). Divergent perspectives suggested that cultural change was not only uneven across organizations but also interpreted differently across individuals (Miller et al., 2022). Such complexity added depth to existing knowledge by highlighting the need to consider multiple vantage points when evaluating cultural impact.

A cross-cutting theme across research questions was the distinction between symbolic and practical outcomes of leadership diversity training. Employees valued symbolic gestures, such as leadership participation in training, but demanded practical outcomes, such as equitable decision-making and structural reform (Imran et al., 2023). This finding confirmed prior literature that critiqued symbolic diversity efforts as insufficient (López-Estrada & Elizondo-Mejías, 2024). At the same time, it extended understanding by showing that employees did not dismiss symbolic gestures outright; rather, they viewed them as necessary but incomplete (Young & Guo, 2020). This duality complicated the binary framing often present in the literature, which tended to pit symbolic versus substantive actions against each other. The perspectives captured in this

study suggested that both mattered, but practical outcomes were essential for building trust (Batmomolin et al., 2022).

The study also documented discrepant cases where employees perceived resistance among leaders or expressed doubts about training altogether. These nonconfirming perspectives aligned with scholarship documenting backlash against diversity initiatives (Lewis & Shah, 2021). Some participants described leaders as dismissive or resistant, which resonated with research on defensive responses to diversity training (Zweni, 2023). Others questioned whether training could ever meaningfully address systemic inequities, echoing critiques in the literature that diversity initiatives had the opportunity to further understand structural power dynamics (Ahmad et al., 2024).

These discrepant accounts were significant because they highlighted the risks of over-relying on training as a solution (May, 2023). They confirmed concerns raised in the literature that diversity training, when implemented without accountability and systemic change, could reinforce employee cynicism rather than build trust (Seliverstova, 2021). At the same time, these findings extended knowledge by showing how skepticism emerged from leaders and from employees who had repeatedly witnessed limited impact (Tajeddini et al., 2023). This added another dimension to existing critiques, suggesting that perceptions of ineffectiveness accumulated over time when initiatives lacked tangible results (Wadhwa & Aggarwal, 2023).

The findings collectively contributed to the broader literature on organizational equity. Employees consistently emphasized that equity could not be achieved through training alone but required alignment between symbolic gestures, leadership

accountability, and structural reforms (Majczyk, 2022). This confirmed research that equity outcomes depended on systemic integration rather than isolated interventions (Burrell, 2023). The study also reinforced the importance of linking diversity training with broader strategies, such as equitable hiring, transparent promotion pathways, and inclusive decision-making structures (Thompson et al., 2023).

This study contributed an employee-centered account of how these dynamics were perceived. By foregrounding employees' voices, the study extended knowledge by illustrating how organizational equity was experienced as both an individual perception and a collective outcome (Kim et al., 2019). Employees' narratives demonstrated that equity was not only about policies and metrics but also about trust, authenticity, and daily experiences of inclusion (Lewis & Shah, 2021). This perspective underscored the value of qualitative research in capturing the lived realities that quantitative metrics could overlook.

The findings of this study both confirmed and extended existing scholarship on leadership diversity training and organizational equity, while also disconfirming overly optimistic claims about the effectiveness of training alone. This study confirmed that training could raise awareness and indicate other potentially valuable priorities, and extended understanding by showing how employees differentiated between symbolic and practical outcomes. It reinforced the literature on accountability as a central driver of success, while adding the perspective that accountability was experienced at the workplace. Research confirmed the importance of leadership in shaping culture but challenged assumptions about training's ability to transform culture without sustained

reinforcement. Finally, it documented discrepant cases that aligned with critiques of resistance and skepticism, extending knowledge by showing how cynicism developed over time. Overall, the study contributed to the discipline by providing nuanced insights into how employees interpreted the promises and limitations of leadership diversity training, thereby enriching theoretical and practical understandings of organizational equity.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Despite careful design and execution, this study had several limitations that may have influenced the interpretation and application of its findings. First, the study was limited by its small, context-specific sample of 10 employees, all drawn from various organizations, locations, and parent companies. While the sample size was appropriate for interpretative phenomenological analysis, it restricted generalizability, and the findings may not have reflected the experiences of employees in other locations, organizations, industries, or geographic regions (Devine & Ash, 2022). Additionally, the voluntary nature of participation may have introduced self-selection bias, as those with strong opinions, either positive or negative, about leadership diversity training may have been more likely to participate, potentially limiting the diversity of perspectives captured (Cox, 2023).

Second, the study relied on self-reported data obtained through semistructured interviews. While this method allowed for in-depth exploration of participants' perceptions, it was inherently subjective and may have been influenced by memory recall, social desirability, or reluctance to disclose negative experiences about leadership

(Mercer & Gulseren, 2024). Efforts were made to maintain confidentiality and create a safe interview environment, yet the sensitive nature of discussing organizational equity and leadership behaviors may have constrained full disclosure (Aei-Kyung et al., 2022).

Third, the study's scope was limited to employee perceptions and did not include the employee's leadership perspectives, their direct report perspective, organizational documents, or quantitative measures of equity outcomes. As a result, conclusions about the broader effectiveness of leadership diversity training or its impact on measurable organizational outcomes were restricted (Ahad et al., 2024). Similarly, the study captured perceptions at a single point in time, and employee attitudes or organizational practices may have changed over time, limiting the temporal applicability of the findings (De Paikum, 2024).

Finally, while rigorous qualitative methods, including thematic coding and audit trails, were employed to ensure trustworthiness, researcher interpretation inevitably influenced the analysis. Despite reflexivity and peer review, the possibility remained that personal biases shaped theme development or emphasis, and certain nuanced perspectives may have been underrepresented (Alabi & Mahmuda, 2024). In summary, the study's limitations included its small, context-specific sample, reliance on self-reported data, exclusion of additional data sources, temporal constraints, and the inherent subjectivity of qualitative analysis (Carter et al., 2020). Recognizing these limitations allowed for a cautious interpretation of the findings and highlighted opportunities for future research to expand understanding by including larger, more diverse samples, multiple data sources, and longitudinal designs.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations for further research emerged. These recommendations were grounded in both the strengths and limitations of the current study, as well as insights from the peer-reviewed literature reviewed in Chapter 2. The study highlighted leadership diversity training was perceived as a meaningful but limited intervention in promoting organizational equity. Employees valued training for raising awareness and signaling organizational priorities; however, the effectiveness of diversity training was closely tied to visible leadership accountability, systemic alignment, and consistent cultural reinforcement. While the study provided rich, context-specific insights, the scope and design also revealed areas where further research could enhance understanding of diversity training and the impact on organizational equity.

First, future research should have explored leadership diversity training across multiple organizational contexts and industries. The current study was confined to a single organization with 10 employee participants, which provided in-depth, nuanced data but limited generalizability. Exploring perceptions of training in varied industries, such as healthcare, education, technology, and government, would have provided a broader understanding of how organizational culture, structure, and leadership norms influenced employee experiences. Comparative studies could have identified patterns of effective training practices and contextual barriers that could have affected implementation, contributing to a more robust framework for understanding organizational equity initiatives (Ali et al., 2024). Such research built on the current

study's strength of obtaining rich phenomenological data while addressing its limitation related to context-specific findings.

Second, longitudinal research was recommended to examine how employee perceptions of leadership diversity training evolved over time (Chaubey & Kuknor, 2024). This study captured perceptions at a single point in time, during a period when diversity initiatives were particularly visible within the organization. While this allowed for timely insights, employee attitudes and organizational practices could have changed as leaders implemented or failed to implement lessons from training. Longitudinal designs could have tracked the durability of leadership behaviors, the persistence of cultural shifts, and the long-term impact on equity outcomes, providing a more dynamic understanding of how training translated into practice. Such studies could also have investigated whether initial optimism or skepticism among employees changed over time and how these shifts related to trust in leadership and perceptions of organizational fairness. This recommendation was consistent with prior literature emphasizing the importance of sustained and reinforced diversity efforts to achieve meaningful outcomes (Davis et al., 2022).

Third, future research could have included larger and more demographically diverse samples to enhance transferability. The current study relied on a small volunteer sample, which limited the representation of diverse employee experiences and had the potential to introduce self-selection bias (Mohan & Tompa, 2021). Expanding sample sizes across different roles, departments, and demographic backgrounds would have provided a more comprehensive understanding of how diversity training was perceived

across organizational hierarchies and identity groups (Reizer et al., 2021). For example, comparing perceptions between managerial and non-managerial staff, or across racial, gender, and generational groups, could have revealed how intersecting identities shaped experiences of training and its impact on perceived equity. Such research aligned with the literature emphasizing the role of intersectionality in diversity and inclusion initiatives and could have extended the findings of this study by providing a more nuanced account of how training outcomes varied among employees (Acosta & Guthrie, 2021).

Fourth, it was recommended to incorporate multiple perspectives within future studies. While this study focused exclusively on employee perceptions, including leadership perspectives would have allowed for a more holistic understanding of the implementation and perceived effectiveness of diversity training (Roche & Passmore, 2023). Research could have explored how leaders interpreted training, what challenges they faced in applying lessons to daily practice, and how they perceived organizational support for equity initiatives. Additionally, incorporating human resources professionals or diversity and inclusion officers could have provided insights into organizational strategies, policies, and barriers that influenced the success of training programs. Multi-perspective research would have enabled triangulation of data, strengthened trustworthiness, and provided a more comprehensive picture of training outcomes, while also addressing limitations identified in this study related to scope and singular data sources (SHRM, 2019).

Fifth, future research could have examined the relationship between diversity training and measurable organizational outcomes. While the present study highlighted

employee perceptions of accountability, inclusion, and equity, it did not assess quantitative outcomes such as retention, promotion, representation, or employee engagement metrics (Tsachouridi & Nikandrou, 2023). Mixed-methods research that combined qualitative perceptions with quantitative indicators could have illuminated the practical impact of leadership diversity training. Research could have explored correlations between leadership behaviors observed by employees and measurable outcomes, providing evidence-based recommendations for organizational practice (Morfaki & Morfaki, 2022). This recommendation aligned with literature suggesting that the integration of qualitative and quantitative approaches enhanced understanding of complex phenomena such as diversity, equity, and inclusion (Singh et al., 2024).

Sixth, further research could have investigated the influence of accountability mechanisms on the effectiveness of diversity training. Findings from this study highlighted accountability as a critical mediator of training impact (Linnes et al., 2024). Future research could have examined how different accountability structures, such as performance evaluations tied to equity outcomes, public reporting of progress, or structured feedback mechanisms, affected employee perceptions and the sustainability of behavioral change among leaders (Mayer et al., 2023). Linking training to tangible measures of accountability, researchers could have provided actionable insights into how organizations ensured that training translated into meaningful practice (Soren & Ryff, 2023). Research could have extended existing literature on the role of leadership in shaping inclusive organizational cultures and would have addressed the current study's limitation regarding the absence of objective measures of accountability.

Seventh, research exploring training design and delivery methods was recommended. Employees in this study expressed varying degrees of engagement and skepticism depending on how training was delivered, its relevance to organizational context, and the opportunities for interaction and reflection (Bowen, 2024). Future research could have investigated which training formats, such as in-person workshops, virtual modules, experiential exercises, or blended approaches, were most effective in producing lasting changes in leader behavior and employee perceptions (Johnson et al., 2021). Comparative studies examining traditional didactic approaches versus experiential or scenario-based methods could have provided evidence for best practices in training design, helping organizations optimize the impact of diversity initiatives. This aligned with literature emphasizing that effective training was context-specific, interactive, and reinforced by organizational culture (Wyland et al., 2024).

Finally, future research could have explored the interplay between employee perceptions of diversity training and organizational culture more deeply. While this study documented that training could have influenced culture when leaders modeled inclusive behaviors, some participants reported minimal or no perceptible change (DiTomaso, 2021). Investigating how organizational culture either facilitated or constrained the translation of training into practice could have illuminated the mechanisms by which leadership diversity initiatives succeeded or failed (Ezeafulukwe et al., 2024). Such studies could have employed case study designs across multiple organizations to identify cultural factors that amplified or impeded the effectiveness of training, thereby extending

current knowledge on the relationship between leadership behaviors, training, and organizational equity (Gill & Olsen, 2023).

In conclusion, recommendations for future research included examining leadership diversity training across multiple organizational contexts and industries, implementing longitudinal designs to track perceptions over time, expanding sample sizes and diversity, incorporating multiple organizational perspectives, linking perceptions to measurable outcomes, exploring accountability mechanisms, evaluating training design and delivery, and investigating the interaction between culture and training effectiveness. These recommendations were grounded in the strengths of the current study its in-depth phenomenological insights and its limitations, including sample size, scope, and reliance on self-reported data. By pursuing these avenues, future research could have built on the current study's contributions while addressing gaps in understanding how leadership diversity training influenced employee perceptions and organizational equity outcomes.

### **Implications**

The findings from this study had the potential to promote positive social change by deepening awareness and application of diversity and equity principles across various organizations. At the individual level, employees could have experienced greater inclusion and belonging as leaders used insights from diversity training to foster more equitable environments. Organizationally, the results could have informed the development of culturally responsive and sustainable training programs that moved beyond basic compliance. Broader societal implications included advancing dialogue on

workplace equity and supporting fair, inclusive practices across industries. Overall, this study highlighted the value of ongoing, reflective diversity training that empowered both leaders and employees to build and sustain equity-driven workplace cultures.

### **Implications for Positive Social Change**

The findings of this study carried important implications for positive social change across individual, organizational, and broader societal levels. Exploring employees' perceptions of leadership diversity training, the study identified opportunities to enhance inclusion, fairness, and equity within the workplace (Haines et al., 2024). The implications were grounded in the data collected and interpreted, reflecting the perspectives of employees while remaining within the boundaries of this research. This study did not directly examine policy outcomes or societal change (Simon, 2024). The findings provided insight into how organizational practices and leadership behaviors could have contributed to more equitable work environments, which in turn, could have influenced broader social patterns.

### **Individual-Level Implications**

At the individual level, the study highlighted that leadership diversity training had the potential to improve employee awareness, engagement, and perceptions of equity. Participants described increased understanding of equity concepts and greater confidence in voicing concerns when leaders applied lessons from training. Research findings uncovered that effective training, coupled with visible accountability, could have empowered employees to participate more fully in organizational decision-making, contribute diverse perspectives, and develop a stronger sense of belonging (Thompson et

al., 2023). The implications for positive social change were supported by fostering environments in which employees felt seen, valued, and heard (Miller et al., 2022). Organizations could enhance individual well-being, job satisfaction, and professional development (Arobiolè & Chinyere, 2023). Employees who perceived equitable practices were also more likely to advocate for inclusive behaviors among peers, amplifying the impact of training beyond formal programs (Bay et al., 2023).

The study suggested that leadership modeling of inclusive behaviors provided tangible improvements in day-to-day workplace interactions. When leaders demonstrated accountability and actively incorporated diversity training principles, employees reported feeling more confident to engage in respectful dialogue, challenge inequitable practices, and support colleagues from underrepresented groups (Hogan et al., 2023). These changes had practical implications for social change at the individual level, as employees developed interpersonal skills, cultural competence, and ethical awareness that extended beyond the immediate workplace (Willard et al., 2023). Skills were transferable to broader social contexts, contributing to more equitable interactions in community, volunteer, and professional networks.

### **Organizational-Level Implications**

At the organizational level, the study underscored the potential for leadership diversity training to foster inclusive cultures, improve trust, and enhance organizational equity (Widodo & Ciptaningsih, 2023). Findings indicated that employees perceived training as most effective when leaders demonstrated accountability through consistent behaviors, transparent decision-making, and inclusive practices (Linnes et al., 2024).

Organizations responded to these insights could have implemented strategies to embed equity principles into their policies, processes, and leadership development programs (Majczyk, 2022). For example, integrating accountability metrics into performance evaluations, creating structured feedback loops, and reinforcing inclusive behaviors during team meetings were tangible improvements that could be informed by this study (Mayer et al., 2023).

Positive social change within organizations also manifested as increased collaboration, higher employee engagement, and reduced turnover. Employees who perceived that leadership was committed to equity were more likely to feel valued and motivated to contribute meaningfully to organizational goals (Waynick, 2023). By translating diversity training into measurable practices and cultural norms, organizations could create environments in which underrepresented employees experienced equitable opportunities for advancement, inclusion in decision-making, and recognition for contributions (Polavarapu et al., 2022). These outcomes aligned with existing literature demonstrating that equitable workplaces not only supported social justice but also enhanced productivity, retention, and innovation (Devine & Ash, 2022).

Furthermore, the study's findings highlighted that symbolic gestures alone were insufficient to have produced sustained organizational change. Training had to be accompanied by structural and systemic reforms to generate meaningful impact (Gonzales, 2023). Organizations that leveraged these insights could enact policies that formalized equity goals, monitored progress, and held leaders accountable, ensuring that diversity initiatives moved beyond performative measures toward tangible outcomes.

Such approaches promoted a culture of fairness that reinforced positive social change at both the employee and organizational levels (Heifetz et al., 2009).

### **Societal and Policy-Level Implications**

Although the study's scope was limited to employee perceptions within a single organization, the findings suggested broader implications for societal and policy-level change. Organizations served as microcosms of broader social systems, and equitable practices at work could influence societal norms, expectations, and policies related to inclusion and diversity (Lim et al., 2023). By demonstrating the effectiveness of leadership accountability, cultural reinforcement, and structural alignment in promoting equity, this study provided insights that could inform policy development within organizations, industry standards, and professional best practices (Martini, 2021). For example, regulatory agencies, professional associations, or industry consortia might have developed guidelines or frameworks for implementing diversity training that incorporated accountability mechanisms and evaluated impact systematically (Buery-Joyner et al., 2023).

The study also contributed to social change by highlighting the importance of translating training into practice. Policy-level initiatives that encouraged or mandated transparency, reporting, and accountability in diversity efforts could help prevent tokenistic or symbolic implementations (Alshaabani & Rudnák, 2020). As organizations adopted evidence-informed practices, societal expectations of equity and inclusion may have shifted, creating environments in which fairness, representation, and inclusivity became standard rather than exceptional (Aguinis et al., 2022). While this study did not

directly examine public policy, its findings provided foundational knowledge for organizations seeking to align internal equity initiatives with broader social and ethical responsibilities.

### **Methodological Implications**

From a methodological perspective, the study demonstrated the value of qualitative, interpretative phenomenological approaches for understanding employees' lived experiences with leadership diversity training. By capturing nuanced perspectives and including discrepant cases, the study highlighted the complexity of employee perceptions and the limitations of relying solely on quantitative metrics (Waheed et al., 2020). Future research could have built on this methodological approach by incorporating larger, more diverse samples, longitudinal designs, or mixed-methods approaches to further examine how perceptions evolved over time and how they correlated with organizational outcomes (Gupta et al., 2024). The methodological implication for practice was clear: to implement effective diversity initiatives, organizations had to consider employees' subjective experiences instead of a focus on solely diversity training policy, compliance, or attendance.

### **Theoretical Implications**

The study also contributed to theory by extending understanding of the relationship between leadership diversity training, accountability, and organizational equity. Existing frameworks often focused on training content or structural interventions without fully addressing the employee perspective on leadership behaviors (Tsachouridi & Nikandrou, 2023). By centering employees' perceptions, the study demonstrated that

the effectiveness of diversity initiatives was mediated not only by the formal program design but also by leaders' ability to model and reinforce inclusive behaviors (Harsh & Prasad, 2021). This insight supported the integration of employee-centered constructs into leadership and organizational equity theories to encourage scholars to examine equity interventions as dynamic processes shaped by both organizational structures and individual experiences (Neubauer et al., 2019).

### **Empirical Implications**

The study confirmed with prior research indicated that leadership accountability was essential for the perceived effectiveness of diversity training while extending knowledge by detailing how employees interpreted and responded to leaders' behaviors (Linnes et al., 2024). Findings revealed tangible mechanisms through which training influenced perceptions of inclusion, such as active solicitation of input, acknowledgment of bias, and equitable decision-making practices (Seliverstova, 2021). These empirical insights provided a foundation for developing measurement tools that assessed not only the presence of training programs but also their application and impact in organizational settings..

### **Recommendations for Practice**

Practical implications of this study were substantial. Organizations could ensure that leadership diversity training was integrated with accountability structures, policy alignment, and ongoing cultural reinforcement. Leaders should have been trained not only in diversity concepts but also in how to apply these lessons consistently in decision-making, communication, and team interactions (Skaggs et al., 2020). Organizations could

implement feedback mechanisms to monitor progress, encourage inclusive practices, and measure outcomes related to equity and employee engagement (Ukai et al., 2022). By focusing on observable behaviors and systemic support rather than solely on attendance or compliance, organizations could translate training into tangible improvements that fostered positive social change.

In conclusion, the study's implications for positive social change were multifaceted, spanning individual, organizational, and societal levels. At the individual level, employees gained awareness, empowerment, and inclusion; at the organizational level, training linked to accountability enhanced culture, engagement, and equity; and at the societal level, effective practices informed policy, professional standards, and broader norms around inclusion. Methodologically, theoretically, and empirically, the study reinforced the importance of grounding diversity initiatives in both employee experience and evidence-based practices (Vu et al., 2022). Practically, organizations were encouraged to adopt structured, accountable approaches to diversity training, ensuring that interventions produced meaningful, sustainable outcomes. Organizations could foster environments that supported fairness, equity, and inclusion, contributing to tangible positive social change within workplaces and beyond.

### **Conclusions**

The key take-home message of this study was that employees perceived leadership diversity training as a necessary but not sufficient tool for promoting organizational equity. Its effectiveness depended on visible leadership accountability, consistent application of inclusive behaviors, and alignment with structural and cultural

practices. While training could raise awareness, signal organizational priorities, and empower employees, it produced meaningful change only when leaders modeled equity in decision-making, communication, and daily interactions. Discrepant perspectives highlighted that symbolic or superficial initiatives may have fostered skepticism, emphasizing the need for sustained action, systemic reinforcement, and transparent accountability. Overall, the study underscored that advancing organizational equity required an integrated approach in which leadership engagement, employee experiences, and organizational systems worked in concert to foster inclusion, trust, and lasting positive social change.

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## Appendix A: Interview Questions

Date:  
 Time:  
 Location:  
 Duration of Interview:  
 Interviewer's name:  
 Participant's name:  
 Confirmation of consent to audio recording: Yes/No

Hello, participant name, I greatly appreciate you taking the time and effort, to participate in this research. To review on our previous communications, this study is about your perception of leaders' diversity training for supporting organizational equity. Before we begin, you have previously acknowledged and agreed to me recording the audio of this interview. I will also take additional notes during the interview. With that said, at any point of time during this process you may decline answering questions or completely cease the interview, please let me know immediately.

Do you have any questions before we begin the recording and interview questions?

### **Semistructured interview questions:**

- 1) What do you believe are the goals of diversity and inclusion training?
- 2) What aspects of the diversity training stood out to you as most impactful or meaningful?
- 3) What training methods are used to educate the employees and how does each method contribute to your perception?
- 4) Why do you think diversity training is important for creating an inclusive and equitable work environment?
- 5) What is your perception regarding how diversity and inclusion questions or scenarios are addressed?
- 6) Can you share a moment or insight from any diversity training that stood out to you or changed your thinking?
- 7) Please share what diversity, equity, and inclusion mean to you.
- 8) What is your current approach to understanding the perception of your coworkers from different backgrounds?
- 9) Please explain how you feel a sense of inclusion, belonging, and equity. When and how did this occur?
- 10) Can you share your thoughts on what makes diversity training feel meaningful or authentic?
- 11) Can you describe any specific actions or initiatives during the diversity training that stood out to you?
- 12) What, if anything, makes diversity training feel disconnected or less impactful from your perspective?

- 13) In what ways do you feel it is appropriate to incorporate topics related to diversity, equity, and inclusion into training?
- 14) In what ways, if any, do you believe the diversity training has contributed to equity?
- 15) How has diversity training shaped the way you think about workplace relationships and collaboration with others from different backgrounds?
- 16) If you were designing diversity training for leaders, what elements would you prioritize to make it impactful?

**Follow up Semistructured interview questions:**

- 1) Have you noticed any changes in following the diversity training?
- 2) How have your interactions with people changed, if at all, since participating in the diversity training?
- 3) What feedback, if any, have you shared with others regarding the diversity training and its impact on equity?
- 4) What are your thoughts on culture if diversity training was a part, or not a part of your training?

## Appendix B: Invitation Email to Participants

Dear Participant Name,

**Subject line:**

Interviewing Current Employees in Ohio, Indiana, or Kentucky.

**Email message:**

There is a new study titled “Employees’ Perceptions of Leaders’ Diversity Training for Supporting Organizational Equity” that seeks to better understand and help support organizational equity. For this study, you are invited to describe your perceptions of leadership’s diversity training.

**About the study:**

- One 45-50 minute in-person or web-based platform interview that will be audio recorded
- There is no financial incentive, compensation, or gifts offered for participating in this voluntary study.
- To protect your privacy, the published study will not share any names or details that identify you.

**Volunteers must meet these requirements:**

- 18 years old or older
- Currently employed
- Reside within the state of Ohio, Kentucky, or Indiana
- Undergone diversity training within the past year

This interview is part of the doctoral study for Michelle Burchfield, a Ph.D. student at Walden University. Interviews will take place during August 2025.

Please email (redacted) to let the researcher know of your interest. You are welcome to forward it to others who might be interested.