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Diversity Management Program Strategies to Support Competitive Advantage and Sustainable Growth

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Alex R. Amegashie

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Walden University
2018

Abstract

Diversity Management Program Strategies to Support Competitive Advantage and

Sustainable Growth

by

Alex R. Amegashie

MBA, University of Alaska, 2012

BS, Liberty University, 2010

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

June 2018

Abstract

The study focuses on key characteristics that affect diversity management (DM) in the United States. Developing effective strategies to support and enhance workforce diversity is a competitive business advantage as diverse workforce economic and social contributions outpace homogeneous workgroups. The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore the strategies that service organization leaders (diversity practitioner-leaders) use to develop DM programs to support competitive business advantage and sustainable growth. The general systems theory and DM framework were the lens that guided the study. Five diversity practitioner-leaders from service organizations with business operations in the northwestern region of United States were interviewed. Participants responded to open-ended interview questions. Data collection processes included validating and triangulating the information gathered from participants via transcript review and use of archival business documents and peer-reviewed sources. Following the thematic data analysis, major themes emerged that include linking diversity programs to business goals, educating and creating diversity awareness, and implementing diversity reporting and accountability. Findings revealed strategies that diversity practitioner-leaders could use to enhance workplace DM practices and support sustainable business growth. The study findings could help organizational leaders to affect positive social change by building diverse, welcoming, and all-inclusive workplace cultures, whereby all employees can strive to achieve their full potential, thus improving employee engagement and productivity. As workplace diversity improves, employees' engagement and productivity increases as well as their socioeconomic contributions.

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Dedication

        To my family, for being my anchor and giving me a foundation strong enough to build on. "Your family loves you whatever you do," my family has truly come through with their love and support. Whether it is making me laugh, encouraging me to go and write the next section, or leading me closer to God, my family has loved me unconditionally and supported me tremendously. To them, I dedicate this study.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

The importance of diversity management (DM) has transcended beyond social and political arenas into boardrooms of corporate United States (Haywood, Trotter, Faccer, & Brent, 2013). As marketplace demographic data shift, workplace diversity practices have become essential for business growth (Tarus & Aime, 2014). The U.S. Census Bureau (2016) projected that by the 2050s ethnic minority groups (e.g., African American, Asian, and Hispanic) will make up over 50% of the population in United States. Successful development and management of workforce diversity could become a sustainable strategic path to preserve and enhance organizational long-term market relevancy and reputation (Roh & Kim, 2015). Thus, the focus of this study was to explore workplace DM program strategies to support business competitive advantage and sustainable growth.

Background of the Problem

The statistical growth of the ethnic minority population in the United States has a direct economic impact in the marketplace (Nelson, 2014). For example, between 2007 and 2012, the number of ethnic minority-owned businesses increased by 39%, which was more than twice the national average of 13% for all United States businesses (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Within that same period, total revenue of ethnic minority firms grew 53% compared to the national rate of 29% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). The growth in business demographics could affect the competitive advantage and sustainable growth of future businesses (Ross, Wells, & Clarke, 2014). Business leaders have a responsibility to execute programs and strategies to improve organizational market relevancy and

competitiveness, which could be enhanced through the implementation of diversity program strategies (Li, 2014; Sabharwal, 2014). A successful management of diversity in an organization could contribute to economic business advantages as marketplace demographic changes.

Problem Statement

Organizational leaders who support DM strategies could increase competitive advantage of their organization by approximately 49% (Nelson, 2014; Wondrak & Segert, 2015). Effective workplace diversity management practices can improve organizational performance in terms of productivity and quality of work by 53% however, approximately 37% of organizations have developed DM strategies to facilitate competitive business advantage and sustainable growth (Sabharwal, 2014; Wondrak & Segert, 2015). The general business problem is that business leaders lack strategies to develop DM programs to support competitive advantage and sustainable growth. The specific business problem is that some service organization leaders lack strategies to develop DM programs to support competitive advantage and sustainable growth.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies service organization leaders use to develop DM programs to support competitive advantage and sustainable growth. The targeted population included service organization leaders with experience in developing, implementing, or managing DM program strategies to catalyze organizational competitiveness and sustainable growth initiatives. Participants consisted of five leaders from service organizations with a formalized DM

strategic action plan and business service operations in the northwestern region of the United States. The potential social change could help leaders to improve an organizational culture of inclusion, openness, and diversity; which could promote career advancement and employment opportunities for ethnic minorities within the workplace, and thereby support local communities' economic and social growth.

Nature of the Study

I chose a qualitative research method for this study. The qualitative research approach includes the use of open-ended interview questions, direct observations, and interactions with participants in order to explore and gain an understanding of the phenomenon (Garcia & Gluesing, 2013). Alternatively, quantitative researchers examine variables and test hypotheses to establish statistical evidence for variables' relationships or differences (Rowley, 2014). The mixed method research approach involves both quantitative and qualitative methods in data collection to obtain holistic evidence, statistically and contextually (Ahn & Ettner, 2014). Neither the quantitative or mixed methods involved hypotheses testing of a phenomenon, were unsuitable for addressing the research question. The qualitative research approach of interviewing and contextualizing participants' feedback is the most appropriate choice for exploring effective DM development strategies (Kakabadse et al., 2015).

The qualitative case study design was an appropriate selection for this study. A researcher using case study design will conduct an in-depth exploration of organizational activities, dynamics, and interactions of participants to obtain information about a complex phenomenon (Elman et al., 2016). Alternative qualitative designs I considered

include ethnographic, phenomenological, grounded theory, and narrative inquiry (Garcia & Gluesing, 2013). According to Bengtsson (2014), ethnography and phenomenology are suitable research design approaches where culture and lived experiences of participants are the focus of the research. Likewise, grounded theory design involves a collection of research data to generate new or improve existing theory (Johnson, 2015). Narrative research designs consist of the art of story-telling to gain an improved understanding of a research phenomenon (Vicars & Yelland, 2014). Although each of alternative designs has a unique research purpose, none was an optimal choice for my study. As case study design is appropriate for exploring strategies through data collection sources such as interviews and review of company documents (Yazan, 2014). Consequently, the case study design was the optimal approach for supporting the study.

Research Question

The central question that guided this study was: What strategies do service organization leaders use to develop DM programs to support competitive advantage and sustainable growth?

Interview Questions

The interview questions included the following:

1. What was the decision-making process in formulating your DM strategic action plans?

2. How did you develop or implement DM program strategies?

3. How did you assess the effectiveness of DM program strategies for supporting your organization's objectives? Specifically, competitive advantage and sustainable growth.

4. What were the key challenges you encountered in developing your DM program strategies?

5. How did you address the key challenges in implementing DM program strategies?

6. What additional feedback on developing DM program strategies to support competitive advantage and sustainable growth would you like to add?

Conceptual Framework

I used general system theory (GST) and diversity management framework for the conceptual framework of the study. In 1968, von Bertalanffy introduced GST, which hinges on the science of wholeness, relationship, and interdependence of various elements and functions within a system (Caws, 2015). The interconnectivity of organizational activities and its members make GST principles relevant in understanding how diversity works together in achieving corporate objectives (Montgomery & Oladapo, 2014). Researchers have supported the application of the interrelationship concept to organizational structure and strategic planning (Olsen, 2013). According to Wondrak and Segert (2015) a systematic business approach to diversity program developments is vital to foster sustainable competitive performance. Consequently, the value of DM has captured the attention of business leaders, scholars, and practitioners (Wasserman,

Gallegos, & Taylor, 2014). Leaders might be more effective if they understood the

systems approach of developing DM program strategies to support competitive advantage

and sustainable growth (Wondrak & Segert, 2015).

Thomas (1990) suggested DM framework as a system business strategy for

promoting business environments to catalyze growth and productivity among ethnically

diverse employees. Organizational leaders could develop a workplace that encourages

employees' diverse skills, perspectives, educational backgrounds, and experiences to

support competitiveness and sustainable growth (Sabharwal, 2014). According to

Sabharwal (2014) major constructs of DM framework include (a) inclusive and friendly

work environment, (b) recruitment and retention strategies, (c) leaders' behavior and

commitment, and (d) linking diversity and inclusion to business mission and strategy. As

related to this study, the focus was to explore the DM strategies as related to the systems

perspective. By exploring constructs from the perspectives of business leaders, I

identified in-depth and practical information on DM program strategies that could

support organizational competitive advantage and sustainable growth.

Operational Definitions

Competitive advantage: Engagement of resources including the workforce to

outperform competitors and improve business market performance and socioeconomic

reputation of an organization (Slack, Corlett, & Morris, 2015).

Diversity management (DM): The development and execution of strategic

managerial initiatives, plans, and policies to leverage differences such as skills, thoughts,

experience, and demographics among heterogeneous workforce to advanced organizational growth and productivity (Soldan & Nankervis, 2014).

Diversity enterprise system: The formalization of a system-wide policy strategy for integrating workplace diversity management practices and strategies into the major business functions (Sabharwal, 2014; Wondrak & Segert, 2015).

Leadership behavior: Management actions and attitudes that reflect the organization's commitment to the execution of strategic action plans and programs to promote and enhance corporate objectives (Ahn & Ettner, 2014; Awino, 2013).

Organizational commitment: The willingness of leaders to formulate policies and strategies to support business development and social responsibility (Cole & Salimath, 2013).

Strategic diversity initiative: A comprehensive plan which addresses business and social workplace diversity priorities toward the advancement of global business competitiveness and promotion of brand reputation (Rabl & Triana, 2013).

Sustainability: The measurement of the organization's objectives in the areas of economic, social, and environmental achievements to guide long-term competitive business pursuits (Longoni & Cagliano, 2015).

Sustainable growth: The process of achieving long-term business growth through effective performance and resource management to advance the social, environmental, and economic interest of an organization and its stakeholders (Galpin, Whitttington, & Bell, 2015).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are statements of facts a researcher holds to be true without verification (Kihn & Ihantola, 2015). The first assumption in this study was that all participants understood the interview questions and responded accurately to the interview questions. Another assumption was that the participants' responses to the interview questions were direct reflections of their views and experiences on DM practices and strategies. The final assumption was that the study findings and recommendations would be a helpful resource to business leaders and diversity practitioners in developing workplace diversity strategies to support sustainable business growth.

Limitations

Research limitations involve weakness and general applicability of research findings beyond the scope of the researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). One limitation was transferability of the findings to nonservice organizations and businesses. Service organizations are unique and different from other organizations and therefore by exploring DM program strategies from the perspectives of service organization leaders the study findings might not necessarily be transferable or applicable to other nonservice businesses. Another potential weakness was the risk for participants to misrepresent or present biased responses in order to influence the study findings to benefit personal interest. Similarly, dishonest or misleading responses could increase the opportunity for research errors, inconclusive results, and interpretations (Kihn & Ihantola, 2015).

Participant views as represented in the study findings might be perceived by others as politically incorrect.

Delimitations

Delimitations involve a self-imposed scope within which the researchers conduct their study (Foss & Hallberg 2014). The delimitations underlying this study included the selection of the targeted organizations, geographical location, and population sample. The delimitation of this study included setting the scope to meet the research purpose by exploring DM program strategies from the perspectives of five leaders from services organizations with business operations in the northwest region of the United States. Limiting the geographic boundary of the study to the northwestern region of the United States enabled me to narrow the targeted organizations and participants for the study. The use of a particular group of participants served as an appropriate contributing delimiter (Rule & John, 2015). The delimitations discussed above were helpful to narrow the boundary of the inquiry to align with the researcher's purpose.

<div align="center">

Significance of the Study

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Contribution to Business Practice

Leaders of services organizations could benefit from the findings of this study by gaining new insights regarding workplace diversity strategies. Further understanding of how business leaders develop diversity strategies to achieve a diverse workplace environment can catalyze competitive advantage and sustainability (Kulik, 2014; Labucay, 2015). Given the demographic changes and globalization advancement within the marketplace, effective management and development of DM strategies are relevant to

organizational long-term survival and growth (Michielsens, Bingham, & Clarke, 2013).

Organizational leaders could use the knowledge gained from this study to develop or

implement strategies that support diversity management programs in the workplace, thus

driving organizational competitiveness. Leaders could use the information to help plan or

establish a diversity strategic action policy to facilitate business long-term competitive

growth and sustainability in a changing demographic marketplace. Business leaders could

use the information in this study as a resource in managing workplace diversity

challenges and creating opportunities to support the growth of individual employees in

supporting their organizations' goals.

Implications for Social Change

In exploring strategies to understand DM programs, organizational leaders could

acquire practical skills to develop a workplace environment where respect for employee

differences and experiences regardless of their social status or ethnic background exist.

The enhancement of organizational diversity could result in economic prosperity and

community development (Mazur, 2014). Nkomo and Hoobler (2014) noted improving

strategies for engaging and incorporating nondominant racioethnic groups into the

workforce boosts socioeconomic productivity. Thus, the social implications of my study

include the potential contribution to a social culture of openness, mutual respect, and trust

among employees, businesses, and communities. Furthermore, the information from my

study could be helpful to organizational leaders to boost career advancements and

opportunities for historically marginalized individuals such as ethnic minorities within

the workforce to support socioeconomic growth.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

Many organizational leaders strive to enhance sustainable business competitive edge through strategic implementation of business goals. Competitive advantage and sustainable growth are the major pillars of many organizational strategies and programs (Wondrak & Segert, 2015). The challenge for leaders is to understand what strategic programs best fit their organizational needs and how programs can increase performance and competitiveness (Awino, 2013). Business leaders engage in competitive advantage and sustainability programs for several reasons, which include cost savings, employee's engagements, and workpace diversity (Bronn & Bronn, 2015; Galpin et al., 2015; McPhee, 2014). Human resource capacity is essential for organizational competitiveness and sustainability agenda as most aspects of the business enterprise involves human skills, experiences, and perspectives (McPhee, 2014; Slack et al., 2015). Organizational leaders would be prudent to pursue systematic strategic competitive and sustainability programs, which would support workforce engagements, build trust, and enhance collaboration in fostering organizational performance (Longoni, & Cagliano, 2015; McPhee, 2014). DM programs are a viable strategic initiative to achieve an enterprise-wide excellence and productivity (Hattke & Blaschke, 2015). Researchers associated market expansion, innovation, productivity, and quality of work to organizational workforce diversity strategies (Sabharwal, 2014; Verma, 2014). Employing people with diverse skills, experiences, educational backgrounds, and ethnicities are some of the contributing factors for propelling an organization toward competitiveness and sustainable growth (Janssens & Zanoni, 2014).

The literature review consists of contemporary peer-reviewed research publications regarding the studies on workplace diversity management, general systems concept, organizational performance, competitive advantage, and sustainability strategies. Sources include scholar-practitioner journals and professional trade magazines, government databases, websites, and statistical reports on the study phenomenon. Emerald Insight, Science Direct, Springer, Business Source Complete, and ProQuest were the primary research resources for this study. The search emphasis was primarily on business management peer-reviewed articles and publications. The primary search keywords and terms were: *diversity management framework, general system theory, workplace diversity practices as relating to strategies, programs, interventions, leadership, organizational performance, competitive advantage, and sustainable business growth.*

I focused the literature search on full-text peer reviewed publications not greater than 5 years old from anticipated chief academic officer/designee approval date. Business problems are constantly changing, therefore academic researchers and practitioners should emphasize investigating and sharing contemporary research information to understand business problems better. The timely application of relevant peer-reviewed literature to inform and understand business complexities is critical to existing and future business developments and practices (Panda & Gupta, 2014). The literature review contained 80 references with 68 of the references published within the past 5 years, representing 85.0%. In addition, the literature review contained 77 out of 80 references from scholarly peer-reviewed sources, representing 96.3%.

Application to the Applied Business Problem

The focus of this case study was to explore strategies that service sector leaders use to develop workplace diversity programs to support business competitive advantage and sustainable growth. I conducted a literature review analysis in the context of exploring DM strategies for supporting sustainable business goals. The literature review was comprised of four major segments regarding the exploration of DM program strategies to support competitive advantage and sustainability. The first two segments consisted of an overview of the GST and DM framework including its application to the research purpose. In the third section, the dynamics of DM program strategy was discussed. The fourth segment consisted of research overview on how to develop or incorporate DM strategy to influence competitive advantage and sustainability in an organization. The literature analysis began with an overview of GST, which was used as the lens for reviewing the research question in supporting the DM framework.

General System Theory

GST is the conceptual framework supporting this study. According to Caws (2015), the GST originated from the works of von Bertalanffy in the late 1960s. The premise of GST rests on the principle of systems, relationship, and interdependence of an enterprise activity, function, or program (Montgomery & Oladapo, 2014). The epistemology of GST is the relational vision between components and their interaction with each other for collective survival and achieving goals (Caws, 2015). Niederman and March (2014) explained GST in the context of human artifacts such as tools, products, or services that are interrelated to serve a common corporate mission or objective. Caws

(2015) argued that von Bertalanffy's opposition to utilitarianism along with the belief that

science and culture are inseparable facilitated in bringing about GST. The philosophical

and scientific principles of unity, wholeness, science, nature, and culture are major

underpinnings to the formation of GST (Caws, 2015; Midgley & Wilby, 2014). The

theory of GST was relevant to this study because developing a workplace diversity

strategy demands organizational unity and a systematic diverse thinking approach.

In an organization, the GST principle enforces the sense of interconnectivity and

collaboration with functions, departments, and people working at developing unified

business plans (Montgomery & Oladapo, 2014). The system view of GST involves an

understanding of the interrelationships existing between diverse enterprise activities and

management strategies, which may enhance organizational competition and sustainability

(Olsen, 2013). Researchers originally used GST to revolutionize medicine and hard

science discoveries (Midgley & Wilby, 2014). However, the theory's subsequent

applications in other fields of study (e.g., humanities, management, and behavioral

sciences) were equally significant (Adams, Hester, Bradley, Meyers, & Keating, 2014).

The multidisciplinary research application of the theory by researchers has contributed to

standard axioms in characterizing systems such as (a) centrality, (b) contextual, (c) goal,

(d) operational, (e) viability, (f) design, and (g) information (Adams et al., 2014). The

systems concept functions as a relation force for consolidating diverse perspectives and

strategies aimed toward unifying purposes (Midgley & Wilby, 2014).

Business units can benefit from diverse systems of resource allocation and

management strategies. Olsen (2013) argued economic resources and functions should be

viewed as heterogeneous and interdependent within an enterprise to drive its mission

towards a single competitive advantage module for efficiencies. Within an organization,

the integration of information, technology, and key other business processes are vital for

achieving effective strategic planning and decision-making (Niederman & March, 2014).

The interaction of resources and activities helps leaders to promote economic

development and foster learning of unit members, which could enhance productivity,

increase the value of the firm, and benefit society as a whole (Olsen, 2013). Benefits of

the general system approach for developing business decisions and goals would be a

more efficient use of scarce resources by using a diverse systematic implementation of

strategies and ideas.

      Organizational diversity by system interactions between functions and its people

are the hallmark of organizational unity and cohesion (Niederman & March, 2014). Most

aspects of the human interaction and work are interconnected such as organizational

activities, greater cooperation among employees, and learning among units, which are

essential elements of performance and economic growth (Dunnion & O'Donovan, 2014).

The workforce including organization strategy and impact can become the starting point

of influence (McPhee, 2014). The reliance on different skills and experiences within the

workforce increases diverse thinking and strategy, which could lead to innovative

strategic solutions (Bozionelos & Hoyland, 2014). A systematic approach to

organizational activities inspires transformation while ensuring progression of actions

and reactions that influence innovation, increase competitive performance, and augment

efficient decision-making (Niederman & March, 2014). With the advent of demographic

changes in business, advancement of organizational diversity to include people,

programs, and strategies are some of the competitive factors leaders use to drive

organizational growth and innovation in the marketplace (Tarus & Aime, 2014).

In order to adapt and thrive in the changing marketplace, business leaders could

benefit by systematically adopting strategic change. One change is system perspective,

which includes informational resource integration of insiders and outsiders of the firm

along with an environment to achieve a holistic understanding for addressing business

complexity (Olsen, 2013). Organizational leaders could strategize and focus on

addressing the needs of stakeholders through adaptation and implementing flexible

strategies (Olsen, 2013). The concepts of interdependence and a holistic approach to

diversity and creativity have transcended science, politics, and social responsibility; thus,

an organization must think and behave systematically (Dunnion & O'Donovan, 2014).

The hallmarks of system interdependence of organizational complexity are innovation,

diversification of products, and corporate social responsibility (Montgomery & Oladapo,

2014; Olsen, 2013). Systems behavior and culture can be desirable traits for success and

growth within and outside the organization.

Stakeholders' engagement may be a helpful strategy for connecting the

organization and its members toward a consensus objective. By engaging stakeholders,

leaders can identify and promote unified corporate goals for improving performance and

achieving sustainability objectives (McPhee, 2014; Slack et al., 2015). Reputation

building is another way to strengthen organizational competitive advantage by using a

systemic approach to engage and build a trusting relationship among stakeholders (Bronn

& Bronn, 2015; Jiang, 2015). Although stakeholders view activities of the organization as pieces of a system rather than individual units, the systems perspective is helpful for leaders in developing and supporting organizational behavior (Bronn & Bronn, 2015). Developing organizational strategy involves an understanding of how the various components, programs, or activities of the organization function with their relationships with each other (Valentyna & Oksana, 2016). The emergence of systems behavioral thinking to facilitate common understanding, coordinated actions, and interdependency among different units and elements requires innovative strategic efforts for catalyzing organizational development.

In applying the systems concept in a complex adaptive workplace, certain dynamics variables must be present and interact to promote system competitiveness and innovativeness. According to Akgün, Keskin, and Byrne (2014) these variables include opportunity to network, resolve conflicts, and provide feedback. Through the systems framework, leaders could leverage organizational diversity portfolios in terms of skills, experience, and backgrounds to increase knowledge sharing and collaboration. Improved interactions, communications, and decision-making are some of the byproducts of a well-coordinated organization system (Sonja & Igor, 2014). For example, in an interactive system, members are more willing to network, interact, and share information to support each other across different functional areas (Akgün et al., 2014). The belief in that the success for one is for the success of all drives the competitiveness and innovativeness spirits of such organizations. The goal for workplace diversity production is to leverage

people's differences to create an economic value that supports the organization's core objectives as a whole.

Workplace diversity established through connectivity of organizational members could lead to the organizational development and change initiatives to support sustainable growth. Through the systems model, participants could instigate change by being proactive and work to support the organization's mission on three-dimensional levels: chain reaction, educating others, and building a better environment (LePeau, Morgan, Zimmerman, Snipes, & Marcotte, 2016). Managing people in the workplace involves influencing behavior through a systematic and strategic process of coordinating resources, which in turn supports competitive organizational initiatives (Zizek, Treven, & Mulej, 2015). The model of GST is dependent on strategic holism as the basis to support corporate interdependence and global socioeconomic developments (Montgomery & Oladapo, 2014). People have a tendency toward interdependency for development and growth; therefore, exploring DM strategies underscores the importance of efficacious organizational interaction, participation, and collaboration. In the subsequent discussion, I reviewed alternative conceptual models considered for the study.

Contrasting Theories

Other theories I considered to support the study are social exchange theory and stakeholder theory. George Homans first introduced the social exchange theory (SET) in the 1960s (Slack et al., 2015). Researchers considered both theories relevant and useful in the exploration of research problems in business management literature (Compton & Meier, 2016, Paul, 2015, Slack et al., 2015). Yin (2014) argued that alignment of design

and concept to the research phenomenon is the first step in ensuring better understanding and rigor of the findings. For this study, (as discussed below) neither theory appeared supportive to align with the research appropriately.

Social exchange theory. Homans (1961) defined the SET as the exchange of interaction among parties to foster economic and social developments. The SET theory hinges on the principle of cost and reward as the main driving forces in supporting human decision-making regarding social interaction exchange (Homans, 1961). In an organizational context, the interaction and sharing of information among stakeholders could serve as leverage in the promotion of corporate social responsibility and economic development (Slack et al., 2015). For example, free flow of information and communication between organizational leaders and its members can foster a culture of engagement supporting participation and ownership (Slack et al., 2015).

Leaders concerned with organizational diversity program performance seek strategies to improve social and human resource capital exchange, which could promote sustainable economic advantage (Compton & Meier, 2016). Diversity management performance involves developing policies to facilitate networking, participation, and trust among organizational participants (Compton & Meier, 2016). Therefore, participants' involvement in diversity program performance strategies should address economic and social exchanges in a systemic-holistic manner to support institutional-wide diversity commitment (Cheong & Sinnakkannu, 2014). The necessity for diversity initiative program development in an organizational system is often indisputable for the management of different stakeholders and their expectations (Cole & Salimath, 2013).

Stakeholder theory. Stakeholder pressure and prioritization are another strategic concern for leaders regarding corporate diversity performance (Boesso, Favotto, & Michelon, 2015). As the shift in workforce dynamics continues, strategic diversity development is imperative to overall business economic prospects (Tarus & Aime, 2014). The stakeholder theory consists of the importance of morals, values, and member participation in the management of organization and development of its strategy (Harrison & Wicks, 2013). Researchers commonly credit R. Edward Freeman as the father and pioneer of the stakeholder theory in management literature (Boesso et al., 2015; Harrison & Wicks, 2013; Paul, 2015). The premise of stakeholder theory is that different stakeholders including customers, employees, competitors, and the community have different interests at risk, and thus cooperation and alignment of such interests are critical to business value creation (Paul, 2015). Creating a shared value through stakeholder cooperation is vital in supporting competitive advantage (Strand & Freeman, 2015).

Competing interests and differences among stakeholders could lead to conflicts and delays, which may cause impediments to the overall organizational development and growth (Paul, 2015). Cooperation between stakeholders is essential, yet requires extensive negotiations and resource management efforts on the part of leaders to achieve organizational success (Strand & Freeman, 2015). Stakeholder theory is more appropriate when the creation of value through joint efforts of all stakeholders is the primary focus of the investigation (Harrison & Wicks, 2013). The stakeholder theory was not an optimal lens for this study, as the primary focus was to explore diversity strategies only from

leader perspectives regarding support of organizational competitive advantage and sustainable growth. Through the system approach, leaders could effectively solicit diverse perspectives in building a sustainable workplace (Bronn & Bronn, 2015). The GST concept of viewing an organization as a system of wholeness, unity, and relation perspectives is relevant to organizational management and strategic planning (Montgomery & Oladapo, 2014). Leaders can ensure a common understanding, purpose, and collaboration within the organizational structure to achieve a coherent strategy that could support corporate goals (Sonja & Igor, 2014). From this analysis, the alternative theories I considered for the study have a unique perspective and impact on strategic development and within the management literature. The research problem is supported by GST, which serves as the foundational lens for utilizing the subsequent literature discussion.

Diversity Management Framework

According to Nkomo and Hoobler (2014) four distinct ideologies and historical eras delineate the topic and study of diversity in the United States. These include White Supremacy—the era of sanctioned/exclusion of minorities; Civil Rights—the era of equal employment opportunities and affirmative action; prevoluntary diversity management and multiculturalism of the 1980s; and postrace/inclusion era of DM in the 1990s (Nkomo & Hoobler, 2014). Each of these diversity ideologies and eras has a unique impact on the advancement, practice, and framework of diversity inside and outside organizations (Nkomo & Hoobler, 2014). Some consider the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as the significant milestone that shifted workplace inequality by prohibiting employment

discrimination because of race, religion, sex, and national origin (Nkomo & Hoobler, 2014; Patrick & Kumar, 2012). Through Executive Order 11246, President Johnson introduced an affirmative action policy requiring government contractors and agencies to attain specific employment quotas of ethnic minorities in the workplace to ensure equal employment (Kurtulus, 2016).

Other scholars argued that the works of Thomas (1990), and Johnston and Packer (1987) highlighted the importance of practicing and managing diversity beyond the standard compliance required by law (Nkomo & Hoobler, 2014; Sabharwal, 2014). In the postrace/inclusion era, firms using DM practices shifted toward strategic HRM and business-driven diversity strategies in order to capitalize on the differences employees bring to the workplace (Roh & Kim, 2016). Thus, DM strategic framework initiatives use a business-purpose reasoning rather than a legal compliance justification to enhance the firm's overall competitive advantage and sustainable growth (Cole & Salimath, 2013; Mazur, 2014).

The DM framework is based on voluntary organizational strategic action programs or initiatives that promote divergent thinking and inclusionary practices among employees in order to drive innovation and competition (Cheong & Sinnakkannu, 2014). Riccò and Guerci (2014) explained that the DM framework can serve as a catalyst to impact strategic importance regarding the firm's competitive advantage and sustainability growth. Janssens and Zanoni (2014) identified four common DM practice frameworks in literature: formalized HRM procedure, training, networking, and mentoring. When leaders of an enterprise decide to eliminate cognitive biases, discrimination, and isolation

in the workplace; the framework is used as a guide for DM strategies, initiatives, and programs (Janssens & Zanoni, 2014). The diversity framework strategy involves creating a work environment to foster a spirit of equality, social support, and respect among employees (Okcu, 2014). The diversity framework strategy can be used to develop and enhance individual and organizational performance and competitiveness (Okcu, 2014). Organizational diversity strategic action plan begins with informal interventions and initiatives which can influence the long-term formal policy and strategic action plan that advances diversity within the firm (Quintana-García & Benavides-Velasco, 2016). Researchers argued institutionalizing and operationalizing DM frameworks within the workplace could increase businesses competitive advantage and help achieve long-term sustainable growth (Cheong & Sinnakkannu, 2014; Marfelt, 2016).

Boesso, Favotto, and Michelon (2015) identified some DM strategic framework benefits: (a) workplace productivity, (b) competitive advantage such as cost savings, quality work, efficiencies, and return, (c) retention and reputation growth, (d) creativity, and (e) sustainability. Okcu (2014) maintained the differences among employees are the source of innovation, power, and wealth to greater productivity and growth. Managers learning and accepting diverse perspectives of others help create a culture of inclusiveness and establish better interactions among employees in the workplace (Marfelt, 2016). Other productive DM framework consequences include creative thinking, solving complex problems, offering new ideas, and processing improvements to enhance organizational competitiveness and sustainable growth (Verma, 2014). Nevertheless, translating the economic benefits of diversity can be a struggle for some

companies considering human unconsciousness, cognitive limitation, institutional bias, and limited cultural awareness towards others (Marfelt, 2016). Therefore, workplace diversity programs can backfire and yield unintended consequences including intrateam conflicts, stress, distrust, and miscommunications resulting into serious production losses, complex structural, and managerial problems (Marfelt, 2016; Okcu, 2014).

With substantial demographic workforce changes on the horizon, managing diversity has become an ever-pressing organizational and managerial issue needing careful attention and understanding in order to address DM in management practice and literature (Hur & Strickland, 2015). The real-world application of DM frameworks in organizations consists of specific strategic program initiatives including (a) recruitment policy, (b) multiethnic teams, (c) competency-based job classifications, and (d) multicultural practices to help influence marketability and performance growth (Boesso et al., 2015). External partnership, communication, development and training programs for leaders, employees, and customers are additional diversity framework strategies to improve business engagements, achievements, and competitiveness (Janssens & Zanoni, 2014). Other DM framework strategies that can enhance workplace diversity include minority internship programs, affirmative action plans, statistics comparison, diverse-targeted recruitment, and retention plans (Hur & Strickland, 2015). The dynamic constructs of systematic DM framework initiatives involve (a) focus on workplace environment, (b) recruitment and retention, (c) leadership behavior and commitment, and (d) linkage to business mission and corporate social responsibility (Sabharwal, 2014; Wondrak & Segert, 2015).

Dynamics of DM Program Strategies

Researchers have discovered diversity studies are relevant in various fields including the management of organizations (Janssens & Zanoni, 2014; Okcu, 2014). Business practitioners agree that efficient management of diverse employees is important for solving complex organizational and business problems (Marques, 2015). However, no universally agreed-upon framework of diversity practices exists for managing organizational diversity strategic pathways for competitive advantage and sustainability (Hur & Strickland, 2015). Differences in perspectives, expertise, and backgrounds add to the complexity of understanding and managing diversity in an organization (Marques, 2015). In organizational management, the objective of DM framework consists of managerial initiatives and practices to promote a workplace environment representing divergent perspectives, experience, expertise, and ethnicity (Okcu, 2014). Managing and building alliances based on employees' differences foster a culture of unity, openness, and trust which will enhance performance and sustainability goals (Jiang, 2015). Patrick and Kumar (2012) contended that embracing, practicing, and celebrating employees' individualism can act as catalysts to reduce conflicts and inspire innovative ideas and productivity.

Wondrak and Segert (2015) conceptualized an organization's DM strategy as an intellectual capital investment and a measure of decision-making and profitability. Therefore, to enhance decision-making and profitability levels in an organization, it is prudent to invest and incorporate diversity principles both inside and outside the organization. Organizations can improve their diversity strategy by formalizing and

incorporating policies into their business processes to gain stakeholders confidence in

organization's commitment for diversity (Cole & Salimath, 2013). The integration of

business-based diversity concepts and proactive management of diversity practices are

critical to the overall business success and competitiveness (Cole & Salimath, 2013). A

balanced strategic diversity initiative that addresses business and social responsibilities

will minimize undue perceptions of unfairness and help preserve the organization's brand

identity (Rabl & Triana, 2013). An organizational value perspective for diversity could

lead to improved innovation, market access, employee loyalty, and brand reputation,

which could help stimulate greater global market presence and competitive advantage

(Rabl & Triana, 2013).

DM strategy on an enterprise level requires a comprehensive approach to

implementing diversity initiatives and integration in business practices to gain a

competitive advantage (Wondrak & Segert, 2015). A holistic mindset, commitment, and

support of all stakeholders inside and outside the organization are necessary to develop

quality diversity outcomes supporting business goals (Rabl & Triana, 2013). In an

attempt to cultivate diversity principles into business practices some organizations have

adopted strategic tools to support their diversity initiatives (Wondrak & Segert, 2015).

Some of these tools include diversity scorecard, DM-institutionalization index, and

diversity impact navigator which benefit their core business functions (Wondrak &

Segert, 2015). Such strategic managerial tools could result in promoting and managing

diversity principles into the strategic business framework and decision-making processes.

The diversity scorecard and institutionalization index links managerial decisions to

diversity interventions in order to systematically influence business processes and objectives (Wondrak & Segert, 2015). In adopting diversity policies, leaders can strategize how to advance organizational value by developing a culture of unity and collaboration (Riccò & Guerci, 2014). Business leaders could benefit by understanding the dynamics of institutionalizing and integrating diversity program strategies (Wondrak & Segert, 2015). The efficient management of diversity helps improve the overall workplace environment and includes recruitment, leadership commitment, and maintaining competitive advantage and sustainability (Riccò & Guerci, 2014). Since the workplace environment can influence employees' attitude, behavior, and outlook towards diversity practices; additional literature on the dynamics of DM program strategies in the workplace is necessary (Rabl & Triana, 2013).

Workplace environment. Cole and Salimath (2013) elucidated that the debate to increase diversity in the workplace has gained additional attention because of social and demographical changes within the last 30 years. Increased globalization and market competition add to the demands for effective management and implementation of diversity programs to achieve desirable performance in the workplace (Ararat, Aksu, & Tansel-Cetin, 2015). As the stakeholders and workforce demographics change, leaders have to be well-informed and tactful in their decision-making to influence behavior and performance (McPhee, 2014; Oberfield, 2014). Thus, a strategic decision-making approach is essential to the overall organizational strategy plan including the decision framework for managing ever-evolving diversity needs in the marketplace (Martin, 2014; Oberfield, 2014).

The effectiveness of leaders' decisions depends on their skills and abilities to develop a work environment and culture of diversity, engagement, and creativity towards the corporate mission (Riccò & Guerci, 2014). Examples of decision strategies to influence workplace diversity and productivity are (a) an open flow of information, (b) soliciting ideas and opinions from diverse sources, and (c) training and targeted recruitment (Agrawal, 2012; Awino, 2013). The significance of diversity program strategies to improve workplace productivity and sustainability growth increases when leaders approach diversity implementation from a systems perspective; thus engaging the entire organization to diversity (Montgomery & Oladapo, 2014; McPhee, 2014). Engaging and directing an organization as a unified unit in the implementation of diversity program intervention strategies, fosters a culture of involvement, inclusiveness, and cross-functional collaboration to drive innovative sustainable performance (Adams et al., 2014; Galpin et al., 2015).

The idea of engaging the workforce to support diversity through exposure to diverse backgrounds, skills, culture, and experiences appears to be straightforward and simple yet is difficult to practice. For example, Wondrak and Segert (2015) suggested approximately 37% of Austrian Trade Index companies have introduced DM principles into their business strategies and workplace plans. Some business leaders have suggested organizational culture, structure, traditions and industrial practices are some of the contributing factors to consider in the decision whether to prioritize diversity program intervention strategies (Michielsens et al., 2013). For example, In the banking sector women are often the majority, whereas in sports and high-tech industries women and

ethnic minorities groups are underrepresented (Joshi Pant & Vijaya, 2015). Thus, some jobs demands can affect the diversity impact, direction, and implementation in the workplace (Joshi Pant & Vijaya, 2015).

Other practitioners have suggested legal compliance and justice as the major reasons organizational leaders approve or deny the adoption of workforce diversity strategy practices (Deo, 2014; Fujimoto, Y., Härtel, & Azmat, 2013; Kim & Park, 2016). For example, in most Indian organizations, diversity programs are only promoted to satisfy societal demands and not necessarily for business growth (Joshi Pant & Vijaya, 2015). However, injecting fairness and justice into organizational processes provide leaders a community-based approach for managing diversity issues within their workplace and community (Kim & Park, 2016). Thus, ethical justice reasoning can support DM framework when ethical concepts are applied to workforce diversification in order to ensure a fair and just workplace environment (Deo, 2014; Fujimoto et al., 2013; Kim & Park, 2016).

Most researchers ascribed productivity and creativity as a rationale for a diverse workforce; although some cautioned of potential negative consequences. Martin (2014) suggested dysfunctional behaviors and miscommunication are examples of negative outcomes in diversified workforce and teams. Cultural and interpersonal differences including differing opinions and skills among employees can lead to long debates, disagreements, and uncompromised decisions causing lost productivity (Martin, 2014). Consequently, some leaders regard workplace diversity plans as an unproductive strategy for organizational growth and development (Michielsens et al., 2013; Verma, 2014). For

example, (a) prejudice, (b) ethnocentrism, (c) stereotypes, (d) discrimination, (e) harassment, and (f) backlash are themes underscoring challenges to managing and implementing diversity program strategies within the workplace (Patrick & Kumar, 2012).

Nevertheless, through active management of diversity initiatives, organizational leaders can minimize negative consequences and promote positive opportunities (Walker, Machold, & Ahmed, 2015). For example, exposing employees to cross-cultural differences through training, knowledge sharing, and experiences through overseas assignments and departmental transfers helps to cultivate a healthy culture of engagements (Patrick & Kumar, 2012). Thus, engaging and building alliances with people of divergent perspectives can help foster and develop a hospitable culture to promote diversity practices (Martin, 2014).

Flexible working arrangements (FWA) is another emerging strategy for improving workplace diversity (Michielsens et al., 2013). FWA is a practice to support and promote work flexibility and allows for adjusting work schedules. For example, instead of the traditional eight to five Monday through Friday work schedules; some leaders have adopted policies that allow employees to choose alternative work hours or days. Organizations that have implimented FWA practices, may permit employees to work from their personal residence. Implementing FWA practics, may help leaders attract and retain talented employees and expand organizational commitment of diversity engagements (Michielsens et al., 2013). For example, through the FWA some employees can continue to work while balancing the responsibility of raising children and family. A

new level of flexibility and independence can yield positive organizational opportunities including brand equity and reputation for the workplace to boost performance (Michielsens et al., 2013; Verma, 2014).

Agrawal (2012) used the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis approach to assess diversity strategies to support diverse team performance. Agrawal argued that effective diverse teamwork could result in productivity when the team displays shared goals, values, and norms. Thus, a mutual appreciation of individualism can strengthen a team and enhance performance output (Awino, 2013). Agrawal further suggested that diverse teams could utilize their dissimilarities of skills, experiences, and perspectives to stimulate effective team functions and performance within the workplace. Jiang (2015) proposed that organizational culture could foster a spirit of community, belonging, and trust to support a healthy interpersonal relationship among employees. By conducting organizational engagement activities, leaders can seize the opportunity to motivate and bring their teams together towards a unified objective (McPhee, 2014). The use of social gatherings and events are some of the casual ways leaders can influence and motivate teams of diverse backgrounds to enhance the organization's overall competitiveness and sustainable performance (Slack et al., 2015).

Strategic decision-making regarding workplace recruitment and retention are other essential activities in the management of workforce diversity (Lu, Chen, Huang, & Chien, 2015). A decision to promote a diversified workplace cannot be done in isolation but rather needs to be linked and integrated with other managerial activities (Labucay,

2015). Therefore, organizational diversity program strategies must also address

recruitment and retention procedures and practices.

Recruitment and retention. Soldan and Nankervis (2014) discovered strategic

gaps between policy and management of diversity in most public service organizations.

For example, the diversity policies in a service organization may not be supportive with

program-specific initiatives or aligned with management practices to achieve

organizational objectives (Soldan & Nankervis, 2014). The disconnect of diversity

policies aligns with the research problem of this study, which is the lack of DM program

strategies developments in most service organizations. A practical approach to diversity

recruitment intervention strategies could assist leaders with better alignment of the

business's overall strategic pathway to productivity and creativity. A purposeful

recruitment and retention policy plan focusing on specific diversity objectives such as

gender or ethnicity, could help promote diversity practices and support from both

management and employees (Soldan & Nankervis, 2014).

Through an effective strategic personnel management cycle in the areas of

attraction, selection, inclusion, and retention; organizational leaders can reduce or

possibly eliminate the diversity gap and employment discrimination (Lindsey, King,

McCausland, Jones, & Dunleavy, 2013). Organizational strategic plans should involve

specific steps to attract people with different backgrounds and skills in order to have a

fair representation in the application pool (Lindsey et al., 2013). Organizational goals of

attracting a diverse applicant pool could consist of targeted recruitment and explicit

commitment to diversity recruitment efforts to facilitate the application process (Lindsey et al., 2013).

Attracting personnel through targeted hiring and retention initiatives is a popular strategy to promote diversity within an organization (Richard, Roh, & Pieper, 2013). Such recruitment strategies usually involve identifying an organization's diversity gap followed by recruiting diversity-promoting groups, organizations, or individuals within the community (Richard et al., 2013). Lu et al. (2015) described the effect of diversity recruitment plans as strategically important in the organization's human resource management and development.

Targeted recruitment strategies including the use of diversity recruiters from ethnic minority backgrounds helps to facilitate the diversity recruitment effort (Jiang, 2015; Lindsey et al. 2013). However, the use of ethnic minority recruiters is not an ideal diversity program strategy among many organizations (Richard et al., 2013). An ethnic minority recruiter can be unintentionally biased and might recruit people with similar backgrounds and experiences (Lindsey et al., 2013; Mujtaba, 2013). The influx of individuals from certain ethnic minority backgrounds into the organization can eventually lead to over-recruitment of a particular diversity objective (Richard et al., 2013). Purposeful recruitment of diversely experienced people for critical positions such as senior executives can be helpful in boosting the organization's reputation and image, sending a clear message to stakeholders about the organization's commitment to diversity (Li, 2014; Lu et al., 2015). Involving community groups and other key supporters in the

diversity recruitment strategy effort, helps to build trust and meaningful relationships between members and the organization (Bozionelos & Hoyland, 2014).

Soldan and Kankervis (2014) warned that formulating a strategy without stakeholder's support internally and externally could lead to limited diversity program implementation success. An organization's diversity recruitment and retention initiatives should involve enlisting senior executives and other stakeholders to leverage their ideas and support to build the best recruitment and human resource diversity plan (Soldan & Nankervis, 2014). The mere presentation of diversity policy statements on company's websites can be an indicator of poor management of diversity program initiatives or practices (Soldan & Nankervis, 2014). A shared understanding of the value of diversity to the overall organizational objectives is crucial to the successful implementation and management of diversity recruitment and retention plans (Lindsey et al., 2013; Soldan & Nankervis, 2014). Nguyen (2014) suggested that a leader's attitude and behavior regarding diversity issues could affect the commitment and accountability of diversity management within the organization (Nguyen, 2014). Since leaders affect the direction and mission of the organization, further literature highlights leader's role in the application and practice of diversity management program strategy is valuable (Kim, Lee, & Kim, 2015)

Leadership behavior and commitment. Researchers have studied various dimensions of leadership styles and behaviors to improve organizational diversity commitment for competitive advantage and sustainable performance (Ahn & Ettner, 2014; Okcu, 2014). Leaders have an important role in organizational success, and thus,

the study of DM framework requires literature regarding leadership and its effects on diversity program strategy. Leadership behavior can influence policies, strategies, and followers' actions in pursuing sustainable corporate objectives (Ahn & Ettner, 2014). Hence, business leaders could practice and encourage leadership behavior to promote long-term sustainable developments. Leaders might improve their performance through expansion of a commitment to collaborate and work well with others by advancing the organizational mission (Bardoel, 2016). Conflict resolution and relationship management are practical leadership behavior strategies for leading diverse working groups (Rispens & Demerouti, 2016). Through effective cognitive and affective conflict management behavior skills, leaders can drive performance of diverse teams both on individual and organizational levels (Torchia, Calabrò, & Morner, 2015; Walker et al., 2015).

Longoni and Cagliano (2015) stressed that leaders have a responsibility to improve organizational performance by pursuing sustainable strategic plans. One plan involves diversification of resources to include human capital, workforce diversity, products, and services (Kim et al., 2015). Diversifying the workforce, requires leaders' commitment to set the tone through leading by example to help promote organizational diversity and accountability (Villavicencio, 2016). Leaders' organizational commitment and responsibility help foster diversity strategies for long-term sustainable performance within an organization (Sabharwal, 2014). The commitment of a leader influences employee behavior and attitude about job satisfaction, turnover, and efficiency (Okcu, 2014). As the workforce demographics and population expands and diversifies, leaders should pursue strategies on managing diverse teams and personalities to improve

organizational climate and performance (Hajro, Gibson, & Pudelko, 2015; Jiang, 2015). Okcu (2014) argued that leaders could anticipate greater productivity and efficiency both at the individual and organizational level through effective management of diversity program initiatives. However, not all service organizational leaders are receptive to the idea of pursuing or capitalizing on DM framework as a valid business strategy to affect organization's competitive advantage (Joshi Pant & Vijaya, 2015). Unreceptive leaders have characterized diversity management practices as an unproductive strategy; others suggested environmental factors spawn challenges against creating and maintaining a strategic diversity agenda (Villavicencio, 2016).

Leaders can choose to be either proactive or reactive in their response to diversity matters (Marques, 2015). A leader's behavior is a direct reflection of the organization's position and commitment to the practice and management of diversities (Awino, 2013). The proactive management of diversity initiatives within the business framework offers leaders an opportunity to actively manage and integrate diversity into the core strategy of the organization (Cole & Salimath, 2013). An organization's diversity initiatives and policies could include leveraging a leader's commitment to diversity in driving accountability and training to improve diversity performance (Soldan & Nankervis, 2014). Leaders can communicate their commitment to diversity initiatives – both inside and outside the organizational structure (Wallace, Hoover, & Pepper, 2014). By incorporating and routinely discussing diversity program activities and its impacts, leaders demonstrate their commitment and accountability to diversity strategic performance growth (Terjesen, Couto, & Francisco, 2015). Open communication and

endorsement of diversity initiatives can forge an organizational culture of accountability and productivity via strategic decision-making partnerships (Richard et al., 2013). A dynamic strategic leader focuses on the economic importance of diversity to drive strategic actions (Marques, 2015).

Recent economic trends make it prudent for organizational leaders to strategize their position on and commitment to issues of diversity. A business-driven diversity approach is essential for global competitiveness and market relevancy (Ararat et al., 2015; Wallace et al., 2014). Leaders should include a customer-centric diversity action plan to help diversify their workforce (Marques, 2015). A customer-centric diversity plan involves continuous training and education on diversity dimensions such as cultural, interpersonal, value differences, and commonalities for building interactive learning experiences to drive workplace and community developments (Mujtaba, 2013). In a customer-centric diversity practice organization, leaders strive to diversify the workforce to be more reflective of the geographic population (Marques, 2015). One type of diversity intervention plan usually involves placing heavy emphasis on diversifying the junior level leadership positions but with little to no effort at the senior management levels (Marques, 2015). According to Marques (2015) a one-sided diversity program intervention strategy for diversifying one particular management group and not the other can help satisfy some short-term business objectives but not long-term sustainability goals. Finding balance between short and long-term business goals demands strategic investment and development of relationships with stakeholders to influence innovation and performance growth (Kantabutra, 2014).

Regardless of the diversity intervention strategic plan and purpose, leadership involvement and commitment are critical to successful implementation (Okcu, 2014). Top leadership commitment, the ability to influence, and fairness are practical behavior skill sets needed to foster a culture of diversity within the workplace (Awino, 2013; Sabharwal, 2014). Effective leaders appreciate the value of diversity and will empower different personalities towards shared objectives (Okcu, 2014). Leaders' ability to transform and link diversity interventions with strategic plans for productive business objectives are essential for establishing a diversity-sensitive organization (Nguyen, 2014; Okcu, 2014).

Diversity business linkage. The linkage of diversity initiatives to business objectives and corporate social responsibility involves formal and informal system integration (Richard et al., 2013). Stakeholders can create informal norms and practices in order to pressure organizations into adopting and incorporating diversity priority to its business objectives. Mensi-Klarbach (2014) argued societal and organizational influences are indispensable and co-dependent in the linkage of diversity strategy to organizational performance and profit. Females in senior management positions, for example, tend to achieve high-performance excellence if well-supported via organizational and societal values system integration (Mensi-Klarbach, 2014). An increase in female executives as leaders within the organizational structure could help mitigate enterprise risk and reduce securities fraud and further enhance corporate business performance (Cumming, Leung, & Rui, 2015). Gender diversity is a strategic business imperative that organizations might consider investing in as part of human capital resource strategy (Roh & Kim, 2016).

Through formal legislation such as equal employment opportunity (EEO), affirmative action, and equal pay for equal work in the United States; organizational leaders have an obligation to provide equal employment opportunities to prevent ethnic minority and gender discrimination (Joshi Pant & Vijaya, 2015). Fujimoto et al. (2013) proposed justice, fairness, and diverse stakeholders as being interdependent factors in the promotion of effective DM objectives. An organization can maximize value potential through strategic linkage between diversity programs and business strategies (Richard et al., 2013). Organizational justice frameworks could describe effective means in which to manage and implement diversity practices for corporate sustainability objectives (Fujimoto et al., 2013).

Individual moral justice influences ethical contributions and recognitions regardless of the ethnic, cultural, and gender differences (Deo, 2014; Kim & Park, 2016). Therefore, service organizations promoting gender equality compensation and antidiscrimination policies could be recognized as a morally responsible organization and supportive of diversity growth (Wallace et al., 2014). The combination of diversity justice and management of business models, drive workplace diversity performance (Fujimoto & Härtel, 2017). Diverse teams boost performance and thus a strategic DM perspective can help position an organization to redefine its markets, products, and services for sustainable growth and performance (Mol, Khapova, Jong, & Elfring, 2015). Leveraging and linking workplace diversity initiatives to business practices is competitive strategy in the global marketplace requiring managerial involvement and understanding of DM program strategy development and implementation at strategic and

operational levels of the organization (Ararat et al., 2015; Riccò & Guerci, 2014; Verma, 2014).

DM Program Strategy Implementation: Research Overview

Managing diversity involves the acceptance and respect of individualism but also presents a challenge for business leaders due to the unique nature and differences of employees (Patrick & Kumar, 2012). Developing or implementing DM program strategies requires both tactical and operational knowledge of the organizational business processes (Riccò & Guerci, 2014). Supporting and integrating diversity policies and programs into corporate operations, reinforces commitment and sustainable strategy to inspire long-term growth (Tanikawa & Yung, 2016). A strategic approach to DM begins with a clear purpose, objective, and implementation plan expressed in the form of mission or vision statement (Kalargyrou & Costen, 2017). Establishing a clear diversity path could result in better alignment of policies and practices to enhance organizational diversity program implementation (Pauly & Buzzanell, 2016). At a tactical level, a DM strategy implementation can include the following questions: (a) who, (b) what, (c) when, and (d) where (Riccò & Guerci, 2014). The *who* is to identifying the major players; the *what* helps define DM program objectives; the *when* addresses the conditions for the initiatives; and the *where* involves assigning a leader to oversee the diversity initiatives (Riccò & Guerci, 2014). The operational level involves execution of diversity interventions as defined in the policy and is supported by resource commitment and monitoring (Riccò & Guerci, 2014).

The major challenge to DM implementation is translating diversity plans and policies to an actionable program strategy (Riccò & Guerci, 2014). Fifty percent of companies surveyed by European Commission in 2008 confirmed a lack of practical expertise in managing diversity (Riccò & Guerci, 2014). Favoritism and corruption are some of the undesirable consequences for DM strategy implementation failures (Mujtaba, 2013). Mismanagement of diversity could have a negative impact on economic and human resource development in the context of organizational and national growth (Pauly & Buzzanell, 2016). For example, in Afghanistan, stakeholders experienced a low standard of living, which was exacerbated by limited human capital development and low gross national product per capita because of distrust, discrimination, and stereotypical behaviors from ethnic diversity mismanagement (Mujtaba, 2013). Local differences, such as culture, politics, and ideologies are contributing factors that influence diversity matters both at organizational and national levels (Mujtaba, 2013). Human development programs that emphasize respecting each other's differences and contributions are essential to organizational and national innovativeness, unity, and economic prosperity (Ashikali & Groeneveld, 2014; Mujtaba, 2013).

Continuous training, awareness, and education on diversity dimensions such as cultural, interpersonal, shared values, and differences could help improve relationships and better management of diversity issues (Richard et al., 2013; Mujtaba, 2013). Nguyen (2014) proposed that organizational diversity training should be practically oriented and evidence-based to help influence desired behavior towards superior outcomes. Nguyen further suggested that only marginal outcomes are sometimes achieved from diversity

strategy implementation because some organizations approach diversity from a generic (one-size-fits-all) perspective. Organizations should approach diversity training from the systems viewpoint through the integration of strategy and operational efforts to develop a holistic roadmap towards diversity management (Nguyen, 2014).

Oberfield (2014) observed that service leaders could increase their organizational performance through effective handling of DM issues and programs. The practices and management of diversity help to permeate interorganizational collaborative advantage and governance (Vangen & Winchester, 2014). Diversity paradox is inherent in misunderstanding and conflicts, and thus active collaboration and resource management could help reduce diversity tension and achieve organizational reconciliation (Torchia et al., 2015; Vangen & Winchester, 2014). Researchers identified the workplace diversty best practices through organizational learning, training, and accountability (Fujimoto & Härtel, 2017).

The diversity system components are (a) paradigms, (b) policies, (c) programs, (d) practices, and (e) climate (Kulik, 2014). Each compenent influences diversity practices differently within the paradigms of the organization (Kulik, 2014). For example, an organization with a climate of employment discrimination may target diversity policies and practices to mitigate and reduce grievances and lawsuits (Kulik, 2014). However, an organization with an established access-and-legitimacy climate may be motivated to develop workforce diversity to reflect the population of its customers (Kulik, 2014). The uniqueness of individuals and teams can influence organizational knowledge because of diverse skills, abilities, and shared experiences (Zarzu & Scarlat, 2015). The benefits

of knowledge transfer are to foster information sharing, learning, and communicating culture for advanced growth and engagement among employees (Zarzu & Scarlat, 2015). Cultural diversity involves influencing the process or manner in which knowledge and information are shared or transmitted to improve organizational productivity (Hajro et al., 2015). Depending on the diversity of differences among individuals teams, the organizational diversity learning process can be challenging and face substantial resistance by employees who impact the cultural dimension of the organization (Zarzu & Scarlat, 2015). Diversity and knowledge management could influence learning and culture of organizational effectiveness (Hajro et al., 2015; Zarzu & Scarlat, 2015). Increased business competition is the top reason cited for managerial decisions regarding cross-border trade, market expansion, and globalization (Singal, 2014; Stahl, Miska, Lee, & De Luque, 2017). However, the decision to expand markets by trading overseas, requires a working knowledge of international marketing and cultural diversity decision-making for competitive advantage (Bardoel, 2016).

Diversity competitive advantage decision-making. A leader's role in an organization includes the promotion of cultural diversity to influence productivity and decision-making processes (Elele & Fields, 2010). In a multinational service organization, leaders will benefit from being mindful of the power of diversity incorporated into business decisions to achieve a desirable performance outcome (Labucay, 2015). The leader's authority and responsibilities can be executed in a manner that embraces and respects local culture, customs, and behavior influences (Stahl et al., 2017). Decision-makers in multinational enterprises need to be prepared to execute

business decisions within the context of the respective local settings and traditions to achieve desirable outcomes (Zarzu & Scarlat, 2015).

Cross-border differences and experiences are another important contexts for decision-making (Thomas & Peterson, 2015). For example, in the United States and China where the cultures of individualism versus collectivism are prevalent; business decisions might take on different approaches for execution in these countries (Elele & Fields, 2010). National and cultural differences are likely to influence business decisions and innovativeness of companies entering foreign markets (Ashikali & Groeneveld, 2014). In an individualistic culture like the United States, stakeholders are more likely to participate and execute business decisions in the context of preserving their immediate interest (Elele & Fields, 2010). In a collectivist culture, however, the emphasis is on mutual and social relationships, which guides business decisions towards community development and accountability (Elele & Fields, 2010). A service organization leader working in these two distinct cultures needs to be willing to apply the decision-making principles differently within a cultural diversity framework to be successful (Awino, 2013).

Regardless of the industry, cultural affiliations, and experiences; every country and business organization are unique; thus understanding the specific market needs and adopting a tailored solution is key to competitive advantage (Ledimo, 2015). An effective approach in the heterogeneous business environment is to apply continuous learning and flexible decision strategies in order to thrive in the complex and interconnected marketplace (Fujimoto & Härtel, 2017). As Elele and Fields (2010) discovered, a

participative decision-making style might not be the right fit in developing countries and emerging markets. The one-size-fits-all tactic might not be prudent in effecting diversity decision-making for competitive advantage in a multinational enterprise (Richard et al., 2013).

Diversity decision-making in organizations including multinational service companies must be business driven and diversity decisions need to support the overall business competitive differentiation strategy of the enterprise (Roh & Kim, 2016). The board of directors can review decision assignments to ensure leaders are truly influencing the organizational performance and growth in a manner that supports the overall enterprise risk management strategy (Florio & Leoni, 2017). Board diversity impact is the first step to mitigate risk profile and increase corporate performance (Fidanoski, Simeonovski, & Mateska, 2014). For example, a strategic decision to increase female directors could contribute to lower variability of stock market return (Lenard, Yu, York, & Wu, 2014). Active participation of boards and management in strategic diversity decision-making brings transparency and ownership for positive corporate governance and performance growth (Hassan et al., 2015). The business impact of workforce diversity decisions have surpassed traditional financial performance matrix, and now organizations are incorporating social and environmental diversity goals to drive corporate sustainability outcomes (Haywood et al., 2013).

Sustainability. Many scholars view sustainability as a strategic business process of using and preserving scarce resources whether natural, artificial, or economic to meet present and future generational demands of goods and services (Baumgartner, 2014;

Kahn, 2014). Longoni and Cagliano (2015) suggested sustainability consists of the preservation, use, and management of environmental, social, human, and financial capital in ways that benefit society. Baumgartner (2014) observed that sustainability involves effective management of human and business resources via strategic initiatives to help improve current and future market performance. A sustainability framework is inextricably linked to competitive performance, thus sustainable infrastructure and initiatives are vital tools for enhancing competitive advantage (Galpin et al., 2015). The inclusion of sustainability at every level or function of the organization could reinforce the mission of sustainability for long-term organizational performance (Emeseh & Songi, 2014). Expressed policies include hiring practices that ensure a culture of growth and sustainability that will safeguard the organization's future with stakeholders (Ferrero-Ferrero, Fernández-Izquierdo., & Muñoz-Torres, 2015).

The idea of sustainability is attractive to service business leaders who are seeking strategies to compete and operate more efficiently in a competitive global market (Haywood et al., 2013). In sustainability management, service business leaders could promote policies and practices including performance assessment to drive long-term perspectives to anticipate better and manage future risk and growth (Kantabutra, 2014). Furthermore, long-term strategic thinking regarding economic gains and short-term profits can be the driving force for all organizational decision-making. Service business leaders may strive to preserve resources through the value chain strategic analysis to support the overall economic, social, and environmental impacts on an organization (Ferrero-Ferrero et al., 2015).

Managing workforce and market diversity can be a sustainable strategic framework for preserving and enhancing long-term organizational value and market reputation. Changes in economic trends and demographic shifts are some important factors when evaluating and implementing sustainable initiatives to ensure market relevance and to protect stakeholder's interest (Bieling, Stock, & Dorozalla, 2015). A cornerstone to sustainability initiative success involves regular collaboration, engagements, and consultation with all stakeholders (McPhee, 2014). An organization's commitment to stakeholders is a major contributing factor for economic, social, and environmental growth (Haywood et al., 2013). Placing a high priority on managing diversity that focuses on growing and investing in the workforce has potential to increase organizational bottom line (Roh & Kim, 2015). Employee sustainable investment activities should emphasize educating and developing employees to equip them with technical and interpersonal skills in order to positively influence future financial and market competition (McPhee, 2014). The evaluation of relationships, ideas, systems, infrastructure, and its people are important strategic objectives in achieving competitive advantage and sustainability (McPhee, 2014).

The relationship between organizational objectives and sustainability strategies should be closely aligned and monitored to help create a greater impact and connection for all stakeholders (Emeseh & Songi, 2014). Service companies could align their core functions and purposes to benefit the greater society. Business leaders can enhance sustainable growth by pursuing strategic action goals by empowering employees through diversity, services quality, and workplace and community engagement (Emeseh & Songi,

2014; Ferrero-Ferrero et al., 2015, McPhee, 2014). Workplace sustainable strategy consists of addressing and balancing the social, environmental, and economic needs of the community and all stakeholders present and future (Ansted & Dent, 2015) Sustainable strategy is more than just a profit-seeking strategy. Rather, sustainability involves implementing strategic market-based approaches to maximize organizational value in three-tier areas: economically, socially, and environmentally (Ansted & Dent, 2015).

Transition

The economic and market pressures stemming from increased globalization and demographic shifts in the workforce support the business case for business leaders to undertake strategic initiatives to improve organizational competitive advantage and sustainability (Richter, 2014; Roh & Kim 2016). Such initiatives could consist of diversity program strategies to help develop and grow the workforce productivity through better management of employees' unique contributions from diverse experiences, skills, education, and ethnic backgrounds (Patrick & Kumar, 2012). Researchers argued developing and managing diversity has the potential to increase organizational competitiveness, innovation, market expansion, product and service quality, and productivity (Sabharwal, 2014; Verma, 2014). Developing and managing diversity could also support long-term sustainable growth (Sabharwal, 2014; Verma, 2014). The development and management of diversity program strategies requires interpersonal and organizational relationship building and commitment through a strategic partnership with stakeholders (Richard et al., 2013).

A systematic framework is necessary for organizational development and change interventions via stakeholder engagements, collaborations, and trust building (Joshi Pant & Vijaya, 2015). A diversity system strategy involves developing a holistic roadmap regarding DM programs in the areas of (a) workplace environment, (b) recruitment and retention, (c) leadership behavior and commitment, and (d) business mission linkage (Sabharwal, 2014; Wondrak & Segert, 2015). Effective management of different experiences, skills, backgrounds, and the interdependence of the workforce contributes to productivity and creativity which support the need for diversity program strategies (Li, 2014).

Sections 2 and 3 of the study contain the details of the research project and implications including the potential implication for social change. Section 2 was comprised of relevant subheadings that include the role of the researcher, participants, research method, design, sampling technique, and data collection instruments. Each of the subheadings contains content that was relevant and supportive to addressing the research question through a case study design. Section 2 included relevant discussions on ethical research, reliability, validity, and data analysis. Section 3 contained the study findings, application to professional practice, and potential social change implications of the study. Furthermore, Section 3 included recommendations for action and future research for practitioners and researchers. I closed the study with my reflections and conclusion.

Section 2: The Project

Section 2 contains relevant study information including research purpose, the role of the researcher, method and design of the research, participants, and population and sampling. I presented information relating to ways for assuring ethical research, objective data collection, organization, analysis, reliability, and validity of this research study's findings and conclusions. The content of Section 2 includes supportive information from peer-reviewed sources to help address and ensure research rigor for the study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies service organization leaders use to develop DM programs to support competitive advantage and sustainable growth. The targeted population included service organization leaders with experience in developing, implementing, or managing DM program strategies to catalyze organizational competitiveness and sustainable growth initiatives. Participants consisted of five leaders from service organizations with a formalized DM strategic action plan and business service operations in the northwestern region of the United States. The potential social change could help leaders to improve an organizational culture of inclusion, openness, and diversity; which could promote career advancement and employment opportunities for ethnic minorities within the workplace, and thereby support local communities' economic and social growth.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher is to focus on collecting data and maintaining objectivity with data and participants in an effort to minimize personal bias in order to

safeguard research quality and integrity (Nelson, London, & Strobel, 2015). The data

collection process in the qualitative study involves selecting and asking participants

relevant questions about the research phenomenon (Collins & Cooper, 2014). As the

researcher, my role included recruiting participants, interviewing, and interpreting their

responses to formulate study findings. Yin (2014) described a qualitative researcher as

the primary data collection instrument and interpreter of findings. My role in this study

included interpretation and analysis of the interview data. I verified and triangulated data

through transcript review validation and company documentation review. A qualitative

researcher can maintain data integrity by validating interview transcripts for accuracies

and verification of data from multiple sources (Moon, 2015).

Throughout this study, the goal was to exercise care by maintaining a professional

relationship with the participants in form and appearance. I had no personal or prior

working relationship with the study participants as well as with the study topic. The

researcher's role involves collaboration through professional relationships and

associations to influence appropriate research behavior and minimize potential conflicts

(O'Connor, 2015). Researchers can avoid personal bias in analyzing and disseminating

research information by refining and balancing participant-researcher relationships, and

through experience and closeness with the research topic (Collins & Cooper, 2014;

Elman, Gerring, & Mahoney, 2016). Researchers must exercise care to limit personal

dimensions of beliefs, and experiences to avoid undue influences and attachments to the

research processes (Wittmayer & Schäpke, 2014). My knowledge on the topic was purely

from academic literature research conducted for this study. I had no prior professional

working experience about the study topic. Applying external objectivity based on academic literature research and my independence to the topic was helpful in mitigating personal bias and further improved research data quality. Putting aside personal worldviews could contribute to improving data integrity; reduce research bias, prejudice, and ideologies researchers bring to their study (Garcia & Gluesing, 2013).

The Belmont Report identified three core principles (a) respect for persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice, which support ethical research framework and protection of human subjects in research (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014). I treated participants with utmost care and diligence in a manner consistent with the Belmont Report guidelines. In conducting the study interviews, my role as the researcher included protecting and safeguarding participants' personal interests by ensuring participants' responses remain confidential. Through the assurance of data confidentiality, researchers could demonstrate respect and justice towards participants by protecting their privacy (Bechmann 2014; Nelson et al., 2015). Another research ethical consideration for this study was to follow qualitative research protocols by informing participants of their rights in engaging in the study through informed consent process before interviewing. The informed consent includes advising participants that they are not under any obligation to participate or answer questions and that they can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty (Lie & Witteveen, 2017). I obtained informed consent from each participant before interviewing. Participants gave consent by signing the consent form or via email indicating their consent to participate in the study.

The rationale for researchers to use an interview protocol is to help prepare, organize, and conduct successful research interview meetings (Rowley, 2012). Researchers use research interview protocol forms to aid in asking a consistent set of questions, and as research procedural prompts to follow and to ensure ethical research compliance (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). The interview protocol consisted of a script to guide the researcher on what to say or do while interviewing to ensure seamless discussions and to reduce participant fatigue (Rowley, 2012). The interview protocol that supported this case study is in Appendix B. Some of the highlights of the information contained in the interview protocol for this study are an overview of the study purpose, interview questions, and ethical research procedures supporting the study.

Participants

The eligibility criteria was the basis for selecting potential participants to a study. In qualitative research, the eligibility criteria for selecting participants include knowledge, competency, experience, and worldview of the subject phenomenon (Wittmayer & Schäpke, 2014). Identifying participation eligibility requirements allows the researcher to narrow the population to targeted participants who can support the study (Elo et al., 2014). The participant eligibility criteria for the study included (a) leaders with experience in developing, implementing, or managing diversity strategies, (b) leaders from service organization with formalized diversity strategic plans, and (c) leaders whose business operations in the northwestern region of the United States.

The specificity and rationale for the eligibility criteria supporting the study was to align with the research question. Participants consisted of leaders from service

organizations with experience in developing, implementing, or managing diversity

program strategies to support competitive business advantage and sustainable growth.

Participants were selected from service organizations with a formalized diversity strategic

plans and who had business operations in the northwestern region of United States.

Hagaman and Wutich (2017) noted that the rationale for selecting specific targeted

participants for a study is grounded in the value of informational richness from the

knowledge and experience of participants. The use of purposive selection enables

researchers to self-identify the people and criteria for participating in the study and

determine what matters as data to the researcher (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). The selection

and use of qualifying participants enables researchers to collect relevant data from

participants to support the research question (Yin, 2014). The use of purposive and

snowball typology was helpful in recruiting participants to the study. In a qualitative

study, no optimal size is required for sampling participants (Hagaman & Wutich, 2017;

Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). Although qualitative researchers disagree

on the exact number of participants or sample size appropriate for a study, in making

sampling decisions a qualitative researcher will focus on the purpose, resources, and time

(Marshall et al., 2013). A qualitative researcher will consider participants that could

provide reliable information to support the study (Marshall et al., 2013).

     Access is another important factor researchers must consider when selecting

participants (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). Qualitative researchers can use the purposive and

snowball sampling techniques to help select qualified participants for their study (Elman,

Gerring, & Mahoney, 2016). Purposive sampling involves the selection of participants

based on specific criteria such as knowledge, skills, and experience associated with the study (Anney, 2014). A researcher using snowball sampling will use a referral system to gain access to participants for a research study (Ishak & Bakar, 2014). My purpose was to combine the strength of purposive and snowball sampling to select and gain access to potential participants for the study. The use of archival data and company records including online directory searches could help researchers gain access to potential participants for their study (Kalargyrou & Costen, 2017; Snyder, 2012). Roh and Kim (2016) selected and contacted potential participants for their study by utilizing company information from a publicly available database. Madera (2013) studied DM best practices by using Diversity Inc. website as a proxy for gathering diversity information about service-related companies. To access participants to the study, I conducted web searches via Diversity Inc (2017) and CEO Action for Diversity & Inclusion (2017) to identify potential participants for contact. Through the online contact information on these websites, I emailed participants to introduce myself, the study, and request their participation. I asked the initial contacts who agreed to participate in the study for referrals of other potential participants to contact and recruit for participation in the study. Kalargyrou and Costen (2017) discovered that diversity research practitioners have studied workplace diversity programs and strategies by soliciting participants from Fortune 500 companies. I contacted services organization's diversity practitioner-leaders and executives of Fortune 500 companies for their potential participation in the study. I provided consent forms to request participation via emails and followed up with phone calls to schedule semistructured interviews after receiving consent from participants.

Creating a working relationship and building trust with participants within the context of research ethics helps to prevent questionable research practices such as data fabrication, falsification, and misrepresentation (Farthing, 2014). I focused on encouraging participants to ask questions before, during, and after interviews to help answer and clarify any reservations or doubt that participants might have had about the study research process. I explained the consent form and asked each potential participant to consent by either replying the consent email or signing the consent form to indicate his or her agreement to participate in the study before scheduling the interview. All initial contacts with participants were conducted through emails. The consent form contained information about the purpose of the study, risks and benefits of participating, participant rights and steps to withdraw from the study. The consent form contained information about the study in plain English that allowed easy understanding and I also made the form available to participants ahead of the interview. Informed participants serve as the foundation to participant-researcher relationships, dialogues, and discoveries (Lie & Witteveen, 2017). Participants' recruitment was voluntary with no remuneration. The interview process involved conducting and presenting the interview questions in a friendly and nonthreatening manner. Providing privacy and assuring confidentiality could help reduce stress and anxieties on the part of participants (Enosh & Ben-Ari, 2016). When participants feel at ease with the researcher, the relationship deepens and can be a catalyst for further open dialogue and interactions in the production of research knowledge.

Research Method and Design

Research Method

Scientific inquiry is the foundation of scholarly investigation and scholarship (Wittmayer & Schäpke, 2014). The three broad research methods that support scientific inquiry are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Venkatesh, Brown, & Sullivan, 2016). For this research study, I used the qualitative method. Researchers use the qualitative research method to provide a deeper understanding, new insights, and approaches to emerging business practices and changes within the workplace to drive organizational change and sustainability (Garcia & Gluesing, 2013). Scholars use the qualitative research method to emphasize in-depth conversation with participants and data analysis through interviews, observations, and documentation reviews (Parker, 2014; Sarma, 2015). Other researchers have used the qualitative method by contextualizing the experiences and perceptions of participants to gain a holistic perspective on the study of diversity strategies for sustainable growth (Kakabadse et al., 2015). The focus of the study was to explore strategies service organization leaders use to develop DM programs to support competitive advantage and sustainable growth.

Researchers employing the quantitative research method use numbers and variables by testing specific underlying hypotheses through a statistical research evidence approach (Rowley, 2014). The mixed method research approach consists of using both the qualities of quantitative and qualitative methods in data collection, analysis, and interpretation to establish both statistical and contextual evidence (Ahn & Ettner, 2014). The advancement of diversity in research knowledge and technology poses a challenge to

quantitative research rigor (Moon, 2015). Qualitative researchers benefit from flexibility and diversity in data sources to establish credible and quality research (Humphrey, 2014; Sarma, 2015). The qualitative research method involves dynamic and nonlinear inquiry procedures for increasing knowledge and understanding complex research issues (Anney, 2014). Humphrey (2014) described the qualitative research process as a leap into the unknown because much of the research work including data collection and analysis follows the researcher's experiences and interpretations. The flexibility to adapt to the research processes and environment makes the qualitative method of inquiry appealing and rewarding.

The worldview of the researcher can guide the assumptions and beliefs applied to the research and can influence or direct the research approach used (Anney, 2014; Guercini, 2014). The interactive worldview underscores this qualitative study, as I explored the views of participants through shared interactions and direct contacts. With semistructured interviews, field notes, literature, and company documentation reviews, I identified six effective DM program strategies to support competitive advantage and sustainable growth. Sarma (2015) suggested that qualitative researchers thrive on the complexity of participants' views and interactions using an open-ended interview questionnaire. Exploration of the diversity of successful management strategies is a suitable choice within the paradigm of qualitative research methodology (Jaarsveldt & Joubert, 2015). The opportunity for direct interactions and exploration with participants can add insights and understanding of the topic (Guercini, 2014). Qualitative research methodology fits into the practice of diversity, flexibility, and creativity to advance

research knowledge for solving and understanding the real world business and

organization problems (Panda & Gupta, 2014).

Research Design

  I used case study as the research design to support this study. The case study

design involves research exploration from perspectives of participants with their

perceptions, experiences, and behaviors to help gain a comprehensive understanding of

the subject matter (Parker, 2014; Yin, 2014). Researchers use a case study design to

encourage in-depth dialogue with participants to discover new insights in bridging the

knowledge gap between theory and practice (Rule & John, 2015). The opportunity to

engage participants directly through interviews, observations, and review of archival

company documents in the exploration of a phenomenon is the essence of a qualitative

case study inquiry (Houghton, Murphy, Shaw & Casey, 2015).

  Using the case study design to support this research is a suitable choice versus

other qualitative design methodologies, such as ethnography, narrative, and

phenomenology. I explored participants' views and experiences in developing successful

DM program strategies for organizational competitiveness and sustainability.

Ethnographic design involves a deeper analysis of cultural experiences of respondents to

support research knowledge (Islam, 2015). In the ethnographic inquiry, culture is the

major focus for the researcher (Cumming-Potvin, 2013). The purpose of the study was

not to focus on understanding the cultural experiences of participants, thus an

ethnographic inquiry was not a suitable design choice for the study.

Phenomenology and narrative researchers emphasize exploring the lived experiences and personal stories of participants to describe research knowledge and understanding (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbon, 2015). In this study, the underlying problem focus involves identifying DM program strategies for supporting competitive business advantage and sustainability. Therefore, the explorations of participants through a lived experiences and story-telling approaches (i.e., phenomenology and narrative) were not suitable design choices for this study. Researchers relying on lived experiences and story accounts of participants could introduce more personal subjectivity in support research phenomenon (Trainor & Graue, 2014).

Researchers using a case study design can facilitate qualitative research credibility and quality efforts, in direct exploration of participants' experiences and insights to improve research knowledge production (Houghton, Casey, Shaw & Murphy, 2013). The case study approach involves place and time bounded research (Rule & John, 2015; Yin, 2014). Researchers using a case study design can benefit from verbal and non-verbal data sources (Johnson, 2015). Objective and subjective data points enhance the overall data completeness and research understanding (Johnson, 2015). Qualitative case study research design could involve the use of multiple cases to enhance research dialogue and understanding depending on the research objective (Rule & John, 2015). Researchers may benefit from in-depth discussions and interactions with participants in a case study when the research purpose is to formulate a specific understanding of a complex phenomenon (Yin, 2014).

Researchers may achieve data saturation when no fresh ideas or new perspective are evident from participants, which support the development of new themes in a study (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). Asking participants to clarify or further explain their responses during interviews is another way to engage and explore participants' views and to support in-depth exploration of research evidence (Marshall et al., 2013; Morse, 2015b). To ensured data saturation for this study, I asked participants clarification and additional follow-up questions during interviews. Clarifications and further explanations from participants were helpful in ensuring complete thoughts and insights about the study topic. By using case study design, I was able to ensure data saturation by exploring the phenomenon with diversity practitioners and reviewing company documents for verification. I obtained extensive information on the topic of diversity strategies within the organization, which aided data saturation. Information richness can be reached by using qualitative research through the exploration of the research topic with qualified, experienced, and knowledgeable participants (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013).

Population and Sampling

The primary population sampling techniques available to qualitative researchers include purposive and snowball methods (Ishak & Bakar, 2014). Researchers use purposive sampling to select participants based on certain predetermined qualities such as age, skills, or experience (Hagaman & Wutich, 2017). Researchers use the snowball sampling method as a referral system where the initial contact recommends or refers other potential participants to the researcher (Robinson, 2014). I used the purposive and

snowball sampling techniques to select study participants. Researchers using purposive

sampling to select participants can potentially contribute relevant information to support

the research question (Ishak & Bakar, 2014). Informational access is one of the reasons

for using the purposive sampling strategy in qualitative research (Ishak & Bakar, 2014).

Purposive sampling is an effective sampling procedure in qualitative research case study

where the researcher can select participants to satisfy specific research objectives

(O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). Snowballing could be a helpful strategy to purposive sample a

population group or recruit from a specific target cluster such as recruiting participants

from senior-level business executives (Robinson, 2014). The selection of participants

through snowball sampling involves purposive selecting a qualified applicant who can

recommend additional participants for recruitment (Rowley, 2014).

The target population for this case study consisted of leaders from service

organizations with business operations in the northwestern region of the United States.

The population sample included a selection of five leaders with experience in developing,

implementing, or managing DM program strategies to support business competitive

advantage and sustainable growth. The rationale for choosing participants was to guide

research alignment with the purpose statement of the study. Researchers argued that

informational richness through in-depth discussions with experienced and knowledgeable

participants are some of the reasons cited to support participant sampling appropriateness

in qualitative studies (Elo et al., 2014; Hagaman & Wutich, 2017). In a qualitative study,

no definite sample size rule exists; the researcher's sampling decision is largely

influenced by purpose, resources, and time (Hagaman & Wutich, 2017, Marshall et al.,

2013). Sampling enables the qualitative researcher to choose targeted participants and

sample size to help guide and narrow the scope of study (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). Data

dependability and sufficiency are other justifications for a qualitative study regardless of

the number of participants used (Boddy, 2016).

Data saturation usually is the result of the researcher being unable to develop

fresh or new themes from a targeted population sample to support a specific study

(Gentles et al., 2015). Rowley (2012) and O'Connor (2015) recommended data saturation

interview protocols to include (a) asking participants to clarify when necessary for

complete thoughts and insights, (b) following up with probing questions, and (c) avoiding

the use of lead or vague questions. In order to ensure data saturation for this study; I

followed the qualitative interviewing protocol. Interviewing knowledgeable participants

and reviewing company documents was helpful in yielding relevant and replica

information to ensure data saturation. Researchers could facilitate data saturation by

ensuring that participants selected for their study have relevant skills and knowledge on

the research topic (Gentles et al., 2015). The use of multiple data sources including

interviews and archival documents are helpful in ensuring research data saturation

(Rittichainuwat & Rattanaphinanchai, 2015; Sincar, 2013).

One strategy for in-depth exploration of a research phenomenon is through

semistructured interviews. Researchers have used face-to-face and telephonic approaches

to conduct semistructured interviews to support their studies (O'Connor, 2015; Yin,

2014). Drabble, Trocki, Salcedo, Walker, and Korcha (2016) suggested that conducting

semistructured interviews telephonically is convenient for participants and helps to

protect privacy. I conducted semistructured interviews using the telephone. Participants responded to six predetermined open-ended interview questions, which explored the overarching research question. Each interview lasted approximately 30-60 minutes. With the participants' consent, I used a handheld audio recorder and computer-aided software (Audacity®) to audio record the interviews. I took handwritten notes during the interview meetings as a backup plan for aiding with accurate transcription. Recording of interviews enables the researcher to transcribe data more precisely and to facilitate credible interpretation, analysis, and discovery (Rowley, 2012). All identifiable research information including the consent form, interview transcripts, and field notes were kept in a secure safe at my home office. After the study publication, I will keep all participant data for a minimum of five years at which time the information will be completely destroyed for protection of the participants' identity.

Ethical Research

Ethics is an important subject for most researchers and practitioners and serves as a moral compass for most human activities including actions, interactions, and behaviors (Roberts & Allen, 2015). Active awareness of common ethical issues in research is helpful in conducting an ethical study (Vanclay, Baines, & Taylor, 2013). Ethical issues typically arise in situations in which research actions could potentially lead to a conflict of interest or cause harm to the research participants (Wallace & Sheldon, 2015). Data collection, analysis, and interpretation are some decision points in the research process, in which important ethical consideration could occur (Barocas & Nissenbaum, 2014).

Researchers can minimize conflict of interest, using a personal lens, and bias by adhering to ethical research principles (Kendall & Halliday, 2014).

Informed Consent Process

In research, the informed consent process involves ensuring that participants have a clear understanding of benefits and risks associated with participating in a study (Lie & Witteveen, 2017). One ethical responsibility for researchers in the consent process consists of providing a clear explanation for mitigating harm and reducing distress for participants during and after interviews (Wallace & Sheldon, 2015). Researchers can obtain informed consent by asking participants to sign a consent form which includes disclosure information such as (a) study overview, (b) benefits and risks, (c) payment or funding source, (d) privacy protection, and (e) contacts for further questions (Bechmann, 2014; Lie & Witteveen, 2017; Vanclay et al., 2013). Through email; I disseminated the consent form document to potential participants disclosing relevant information about the study in simple terms. The consent form disclosures included (a) description and purpose of the study, (b) criteria for selecting participants, (c) sample interview questions, (d) procedure to participate and right to withdraw, (e) known and potential risks and benefits, (f) payment for participation, (g) privacy protection and data confidentiality, and (h) contact info for further questions and explanations about the study. I provided further explanations and answered questions about the consent process and the research project itself. The purpose of the informed consent process is to ensure participants are well-informed about possible risks and benefits of their participation and understand the steps taken for protecting participant privacy and data confidentiality. The first step in

developing strategies to protect participants is for researchers to identify risks involving

participation the study (Kendall & Halliday, 2014).

Procedures to Withdraw and Incentive for Participation

Voluntary participation is the implied principle of informed consent (Lie &

Witteveen, 2017). During the interview, I reminded participants that they could withdraw

from the interview at any time. All participants have the right to withdraw from the study

without any negative recourse and can demand removal of recorded data from the

analysis and publication (Vanclay et al., 2013). The right to withdraw procedure included

personal contact information so that participants could directly contact me via email and

phone if they decided to terminate their participation. Participants had a choice to

withdraw by declining scheduled interview appointments. Participation was voluntary

with no remuneration to participants. All participants received a "thank you" note for

their participation in the study. Delivery of such note was sent by email following

interview and reviewing of the summarized transcripts.

Measures for Ethical Protection

An important aspect of ethical research is the protection and minimization of risks

towards participants (Kendall & Halliday, 2014). Researchers have a legal and moral

obligation to protect and safeguard the interest of participants before, during, and after

interviewing and along with the entire research process (Wolf et al., 2015). The protocol

measures for protecting participants in the study included showing respect, beneficence,

and justice towards participants during the data collection and research process (Vanclay

et al., 2013). I listened attentively to participants' views on the subject and appropriately

responded to nonverbal communications from participants. I was careful with my choice of words and interactions with participants so not to pass judgment on or discredit their views and comments. Respect for participants includes showing no favoritism towards a particular group of participants but rather taking measures to protect participants' interests by gathering and recording all input as accurately as possible (Vanclay et al., 2013).

According to Griffiths (2014), a research-practitioner can offer ethical protection to participants is to maintain a professional relationship and confidentiality in all interactions with participants. Direct, private, and interpersonal relationships are discouraged between investigators and participants to increase independence and objectivity in the research process (Barocas & Nissenbaum, 2014; Wallace & Sheldon, 2015). I offered additional protection by ensuring I had no direct supervisory or working authority over any participants. Another critical dimension of the ethical protection for participants is for the researcher to be knowledgeable about the general understanding of research ethics, operations, and challenges for and in protecting human participants (Barocas & Nissenbaum, 2014). I received a certificate of completion for training (see Appendix D) to support my understanding of ethical procedural privacy and protections for human subjects in research.

Data Confidentiality & Protection

Given the sensitive and personal information research data might include, researchers have an ethical obligation to maintain confidentiality and restrict unauthorized access to research data (Wolf et al., 2015). Qualitative researchers can

protect participants' information by maintaining strict access and adhering to data security measures (Gentles et al., 2015; Roberts & Allen, 2015). I placed participants' information such as (a) signed consent forms, (b) interview transcripts, and (c) field notes, and personal logs under a secured cabinet. Researchers should protect participant privacy and ensure data confidentiality by securing research data (Wallace & Sheldon, 2015). I have stored research data on a flash drive which will be secured in a safe for a minimum of five years at which time I will use KillDisk$^{©}$ software to destroy research data and erase participants' personally identifiable information permanently. The final doctoral manuscript included an institutional review board (IRB) approval number 09-13-17-0527534.

Protecting Participants' Identities

According to Barocas and Nissenbaum (2014), the use of anonymous identifiers can help protect the identity of individual participants or organizations involved in research. Vanclay et al. (2013) recommended replacing names, towns, and regions of participants to help achieve data anonymization and identity protection. I employed coding (P1, P2, P3…, etc.) to identify each participant so not to risk disclosing any personally identifiable information that could link to the actual identity of participants. I did not include real names or place of work of participants in the research publication. I used a coding identifier for direct quotes from participants. Participants' recruitment and data collection commenced after receiving IRB approval.

Data Collection Instruments

As the researcher for this qualitative study, I was the data collection instrument. The role included gathering data from participants via semistructured interviews and analysis of company documents. I used the telephonic means to conduct the semistructured interviews. Drabble et al. (2016) presented interview questions to participants telephonically to further ensure suitability, convenience, and protect privacy of participants. Snyder (2012) recommended analyzing company documents and archival reports to supplement semistructured interview transcripts. I used public company documents such as (a) annual reports, (b) diversity management reports, or (c) strategic policy documents available through company's websites or filings on the security exchange commission (SEC) website to triangulate and supplement the research interview data. A case study researcher can rely on multiple data types and sources to enhance the validity of their work (Snyder, 2012). Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, and Neville (2014) noted that combining interviews with documentation could help the researcher to triangulate data sources to improve the research rigor, quality, and understanding. Therefore, the data collection sources for this qualitative study consisted of semistructured interviews and analysis of company documents.

Data Collection Process/Protocols

The semistructured interview provides an opportunity for qualitative researchers to ask participants open-ended and follow-up questions when appropriate to facilitate in-depth exploration and obtain a deeper understanding of the study phenomenon (Elo et al., 2014). For this study, the data collection techniques involved the use of semistructured

interviews and analysis of company documents to explore DM program strategies to support organizational business goals. Snyder (2012) recommended combining data from company archival documents and semistructured interview to help increase contextual and practical understanding on the subject of diversity management. The data collection process involves obtaining permission to access appropriate information, which will improve reliability and quality of the research (Hurst et al., 2015). The protocol for gathering data began with obtaining consent from participants to participate in semistructured interviews. The protocol for collecting company documents to support the interview data included reviews of company websites and annual filings for relevant publicly available documents. I reviewed company documents to find support for the interview themes in answering the research question. Snyder (2012) suggested archival records such as company memos and journals are appropriate sources of information to support emerging research themes.

Rowley (2012) identified interview protocols for researchers to ensure (a) participant privacy, (b) convenience, (c) timely interviews, and (d) appropriate recording or note-taking. In conducting interviews using an interview protocol and encouraged participants to express their views freely. The interview protocol form (see Appendix B) includes open-ended interview questions and other research procedural prompts to guide the data collection processes. Sincar (2013) suggested considering expert opinions and reviewing the formulation of interview questions could improve clarity and comprehensibility of questions. I consulted faculty members to review the appropriateness and alignment of the interview questions to the research problem. I made

the interview questions (see Appendix C) available to participants via the consent form before interviewing participants. Hurst et al. (2015) observed that prior access to the interview questions increases participants' confidence and decision-making on participation. To reduce interview fatigue on the part of participants, researchers should be considerate and minimize the length of the interview to not exceed 90 minutes per participant (Hurst et al., 2015; Sincar, 2013). The interview of each participant lasted approximately 30-60 minutes. I adhered to interview protocols and ethical research principles for reducing harm to participants when conducting and recording interviews. Furthermore, I reviewed the websites of businesses and the SEC to obtain publicly available diversity management information from annual reports, diversity management reports, or strategic policy documents to supplement and triangulate the research interview data.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are criteria for supportive quality research outcomes (Hurst et al., 2015). Validating the transcript accuracy is one way a researcher can improve research quality (Cypress, 2017). Research validation involves direct assessment of participants' feedback on gathered research data and confirmation of actual research evidence (Sincar, 2013). Researchers can enhance the quality of their research based on the reliability of data sources used in their research (Hurst et al., 2015). The use of peer reviewed sources to support literature can enhance validity and improve quality findings (Sincar, 2013). Hence, the research literature cited in this study mostly came from peer-reviewed research journals to help improve the overall research quality. In this research, I

utilized interviewee transcript reviewing and peer-reviewed literature to support research reliability and validity. The transcript reviewing process consists of verification, correction, and confirmation of research data. Each participant had an opportunity to review a summary of their responses and confirm its accuracy. Participants made changes and corrections as appropriate to accurately represent their views and opinions. Like data verification through interviewee transcript reviewing, researchers can enhance research data integrity by applying a structured instrumentation process to collect and analyze data (Morse, 2015b; Yin, 2014).

Data Collection Technique

Qualitative researchers gather data from participants using an interview approach guided by semistructured and follow-up questions regarding the research phenomenon (Sincar, 2013). Another data collection technique available to qualitative researchers is documentation analysis (Walby & Luscombe, 2016). In this study, I collected data by conducting semistructured interviews and analyzing company documents to answer the research question. The use of different data types is a helpful strategy for researchers to demonstrate rigor and support validity of data (Morse, 2015a). All data collection for this study commenced after receiving IRB approval. Upon receipt of IRB approval, I conducted internet searches through the websites of DiversityInc (2017) and CEO Action for Diversity & Inclusion (2017) to invite potential participants and request their participation in the study. Furthermore, I contacted diversity leaders of Fortune 500 companies with businesses in the northwest region of the United States to invite and request their participation in the study. The purposive and snowball sampling strategy

was the overall guide strategy for requesting and recruiting participants to support data collection for the study.

In conducting semistructured interviews for this study, I began by explaining the purpose of the study, elaborating on the consent form process, and reminding respondents of their rights to withdraw participation at any time during the interview. Vanclay et al. (2013) suggested a brief introduction explaining the participants' rights along with the purpose and protocols of the interview can help researchers to minimize stress on the part of participants. A researcher's goal should be to reduce stress during the interview process and make the experience as comfortable as possible for the participants (Rowley, 2012). The use of interview protocol helps researchers to be more organized and consistent in their interview proceedings (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Following the interview protocol (see Appendix B), I asked each participant permission to audio record the interview conversation. If the participant refused to be audio recorded, I took handwritten notes. The interview questions (see Appendix C) consisted of six semistructured questions. I probed deeper whenever necessary for participants to clarify their answers. Part of the interview procedure included explaining to participants about the transcript review. I also scheduled post interview follow-ups. Besides interviewing participants, I explored the company websites and annual filings of public companies. I scoured SEC's website to obtain additional relevant diversity information to support and triangulate the research interview. I reviewed the following company documents (a) annual reports, (b) diversity management reports, or (c) strategic policy documents to help supplement and triangulate the research interview data.

Advantages & Disadvantages of Data Collection Techniques

There are advantages and disadvantages in using interviews as a data collection process. A benefit in using a semistructured interview as a data collection technique is researchers can engage respondents in a deeper conversation guided by open-ended and follow-up questions about the research phenomenon (Sincar, 2013). Elo et al. (2014) argued that research participants could share in-depth personalized views and experiences to broaden the research knowledge base of a topic through semistructured interviews. Flexibility is another benefit of semistructured interviews for gathering data, as researchers can easily change the wording and ordering of questions depending on the direction of the interview (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Interviewing research participants can involve a unique and different experience among interviewees (Parker, 2014). The freedom for investigators to adapt and ask relevant probing questions even in challenging interview situations makes the semistructured interview a favorable data collection technique among qualitative researchers (Dikko, 2016). However, a drawback of flexibility is that the interview process can be time-consuming and exhausting for the researcher (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Hurst et al. (2015) argued that lengthy interview proceedings could add unnecessary fatigue and pressure on participants. Another potential shortcoming of using semistructured interview technique is that an inexperienced researcher may fail to ask appropriate follow-up questions and valuable information might be lost in the data gathering process (Doody & Noonan, 2013).

Researchers analyzing company documents can supplement interview evidence thereby triangulating data sources to increase research knowledge and study validity

(Snyder, 2012). Researchers collecting data via company documents and reports could ascertain insights about a phenomenon and how practice aligns with theory (Snyder, 2012). The disadvantage of data collection through reviewing archival documentation could be inadequate, inaccurate, and / or incomplete data (Soltes, 2014). Researchers who overrely on archival data sources could misinterpret, misinform, or be misguided by the information (Snyder, 2012). As the development of archival documents can have a predefined purpose, use of archival data sources in research might not provide relevant information to answer the research question (Soltes, 2014).

Transcript Review

Interviewee transcript reviewing and validation is a strategy a qualitative research interviewer will use to verify and confirm the accuracy and completeness of interview data from participants (Elo et al., 2014). Researchers transcribing audio recordings immediately upon completion of the interview can ensure timely and accurate recollection of the data (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Sincar (2013) explained researchers use transcript-reviewing strategies to check the accuracy of participants' views and validity of transcribed data. After transcribing the interviews verbatim, I summarized the responses of each participant and emailed a copy to participants for review and verification. The email included a request for participants to review and confirm whether the summarized responses were transcribed accurately, represented their answers to the interview questions, and to provide any corrections. Furthermore, I offered participants an opportunity for a post-interview meeting to allow sufficient explanation if the need arose. Researchers who provide respondents with the opportunity to review interview

transcripts can help validate research independence, transparency, and rigor (Houghton et al., 2013).

Data Organization Technique

I used a database filing system to keep track, process, and organize the research data. I organized and categorized data sets into two main folders consisting of data from interviews and company documentations. The information in the interview folder included (a) signed consent forms and emails, (b) audio recording of interviews, (c) transcripts, (d) participants' response summary, and (e) interview field notes and personal logs. The company documentation folder contained relevant company information from articles, interviews, and business websites, which included (a) annual reports, (b) diversity management reports, or (c) strategy policy documents.

Restricting access and assuring confidentiality for research data are fundamental principles in protecting human subjects during research (Vanclay et al., 2013). Researchers can safeguard the sensitive and personal information of participants by using locking cabinets or safes to protect research documents from unauthorized access and to further ensure confidentiality (Wolf et al., 2015). Privacy and security are the two primary requirements for preventing vulnerability and unauthorized access of data (Martin et al., 2017). Researchers can secure backup data to prevent research information loss (Cao, Fu, & Sun, 2016). During this research study, I used my laptop to maintain the data. I stored the data on a password protected flash drive which is secured in a locked cabinet at my home office. Other research artifacts, data, and documents relating to this study were stored in the locked cabinet. Only I have access to the locked cabinet.

Researchers can help protect participants' privacy and ensure data confidentiality by securing research data (Wallace & Sheldon, 2015). After publication of this study, I will secure data evidence and artifacts under a locking safe at my home for a minimum of five years. I will maintain exclusive access to this safe. After five years, I will use software technology (KillDisk[©]) to permanently erase all the electronic research information and I will shred all hard copies of personally identifiable information and all other research evidence.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is the process of reviewing, analyzing, and identifying research evidence such as interview transcripts and field notes to explain the research phenomenon (Elo et al., 2014). Qualitative researchers use data analysis processes to help identify relevant ideas and develop research themes to explore the research topic (Miles, Hubermna, & Saldana, 2014). A case study researcher can categorize, tabulate, test, or recombine evidence to help with the analysis (Baškarada, 2014). A qualitative case study research-practitioner could develop more in-depth findings from research evidence through methodological triangulation analysis process (Rule & John, 2015). Fusch and Ness (2015) explained methodological triangulation involves the use of multiple data sources to confirm research findings. I utilized the methodological triangulation approach for analyzing data to support this study. By reviewing and comparing interview transcripts, I identified key common themes. I triangulated the common themes identified from the transcripts by reviewing company documents supporting the themes. One popular strategy for qualitative data analysis involves theme identification from repeated

words, phrases, signs, or symbols (Percy, Kostere, & Kostere, 2015). Researchers can use

pattern matching to compare and contrast data to identify similar and repeatable patterns,

variances, or gaps across multiple data sets (Baškarada, 2014). Discovering themes

through common concepts and identifications of phrases and keywords was the main

strategy I used to support the data content analysis for this study.

Logical Analysis Process

To identify themes in qualitative studies, the researcher uses a thematic analysis

by finding repeated patterns and common meaning of a data sets (Percy et al., 2015).

Qualitative data analytic framework consists of comprehending, synthesizing, theorizing,

and recontextualizing research evidence to support research understanding of the topic

(Houghton et al., 2015; Miles et al., 2014). The thematic analysis approach for

identifying and triangulating data served as the overarching strategy for guiding my case

study data analysis. Percy, Kostere, and Kostere (2015) and Saldana (2009) suggested

steps for data analysis and theme identification summarized as follows (a) carefully read

and examine each transcript, (b) highlight to identify the relevant sections to research

question, (c) synthesize relevant phrases and words (codes) to form the common concepts

from each transcript, (d) review the codes and common concepts across transcripts, (e)

create a matrix of the major common concepts, (f) compare and contrast the concepts

from each transcript, (g) analyze and interpret the major common concepts to form

themes and subthemes, and (h) categorize the concepts themes to support the research

question. I followed the summarized steps in analyzing and identifying the major

concepts or themes to support the study findings.

Plan for Data Coding

Although qualitative data analysis software can aid with coding data sets, much of the software functionality is not automated but rather analyst-driven and does not negate the researcher's role in analyzing and interpreting data (Baškarada, 2014). Morse, Lowery, and Steury (2014) and Ose (2016) recommended researchers use MS Word and MS Excel spreadsheets to record, organize, track codes, and to identify research themes. I utilized the MS Excel and MS Word to help store, organize, and analyze data for exploration and identification of the study themes.

Data analysis in qualitative studies involves coding and labeling data to identify major concepts to form themes to support understanding of a phenomenon (Ose, 2016). Data coding in qualitative studies is the basis for deciphering, developing, and synthesizing data to identify and categorize themes and subthemes (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Data coding involves a systematic and interactive process of identifying and interpreting data for qualitative research (Rowley, 2012). Percy et al. (2015) provided qualitative data analysis steps for labeling, comparing, and categorizing evidence to identify data patterns and themes. Likewise, Saldana (2009) described a data analysis coding process whereby qualitative researchers could establish meaning from data transcripts by reviewing, highlighting, color-coding, and summarizing data to support the research question. Therefore, the data coding process I used to identify meaning and link ideas from the data to formulate themes and subthemes had four steps. First, I began the coding process by reading and reflecting on the data transcripts. Second, I highlighted and color-coded the relevant phrases and words that supported answering the research question. Third, I

embedded textboxes and typing codes to summarize the highlighted text or concepts to describe data. Fourth, I reread the transcripts and repeated the coding processes for a second and third time to discover additional codes in order to synthesize the data further. Researchers could read and insert codes in the margins or inside transcript documents to stimulate their understanding and highlight relevant facts from the evidence supporting the research question (Percy et al., 2015; Saldana, 2009). The repetition of reading and combing through transcript data affords the researcher an opportunity to glean further insight from the evidence, which is useful for reaching data saturation (Miles et al., 2014; Saldana, 2009).

After completing the second and third iterations of coding, I constructed a word table to compile, summarize, and organize the main concepts from participants and look for relationships among participant responses. I synthesized the information further to find common themes and recorded them into a Microsoft (MS) Excel spreadsheet for further analysis. I summarized and grouped the common themes which supported the research question. After the final analysis and categorization, I developed a master theme list from which the major and subthemes emerged supporting the study phenomenon. Percy et al. (2015) recommended comparative analysis whereby the researcher reviews data to discover patterns and relationships across participants' views and datasets. Reviewing data through the comparative technique, allows the researcher to synthesize and group data that reveals a common understanding and enables categorization of the evidence to support the research question (Saldana, 2009). Coding data into tables in MS Word or MS Excel spreadsheets is a strategy that a qualitative researcher could use to

organize, track, and analyze evidence from multiple sources (Morse, Lowery, & Steury, 2014; Ose, 2016). Data categorizations involve the researcher classifying and summarizing the key common evidence into themes and subthemes in order to support the understanding of the research question (Miles et al., 2014; Saldana, 2009).

Correlation of Themes

Identifying key themes from research data for correlation to the conceptual framework is vital to qualitative research (Morse et al., 2014). The objective of the constant comparative method in qualitative data analysis involves distinguishing the relationship of the main themes to the research theory and research question (Baškarada, 2014). The triangulation of data from interviews, company documents, archived reports, and literature can help researchers understand the research problem (Carter et al., 2014; Sincar, 2013). In a qualitative study, researchers seek alignment between evidence and conceptual framework tenets used in their research (Trainor & Graue, 2014). In conducting a literature review, researchers can establish a conceptual basis for supporting research evidence. I correlated the research evidence, literature, and the major underpinnings of GST and DM framework to support the study.

The GST and DM framework were the lens in supporting the study findings. The GST principle was helpful to assess the coordination and collaboration between diversity system perspectives and strategies to support enterprise-wide organizational growth and sustainable development. The in-depth literature analysis increased my understanding of GST and its applications to DM framework of business diversity system strategy development and helped me to identify diversity strategic themes from the data to support

the research problem. Upon identification of the major themes from the interview

transcripts, field notes, and company documents. I integrated themes with the framework

by comparing and contrasting with literature findings. Analyzing and correlating data

from diverse sources can enhance research dependability and credibility (Fusch & Ness,

2015). I focused on understanding how service organization leaders develop DM program

strategies from systems perspective to catalyze enterprise-wide business competitiveness

and sustainable growth. Correlation of research findings to the literature helps to bridge

the knowledge gap between theory and practice (Trainor & Graue, 2014).

Reliability and Validity

Qualitative researchers assess rigor, trustworthiness, and quality of a study

through reliability and validity criteria (Noble & Smith, 2015). Judgment on research

quality in the qualitative research framework involves the subjective opinion of the

researcher because of the researcher's role in gathering data (Walby & Luscombe, 2016).

However, qualitative researchers should use strategies to limit personal opinion and bias

in order to ensure reliability and validity and increase research quality. Marshall and

Rossman (2016) recommended triangulation, transcript review, member checking, and

documentation of the research procedures as an acceptable strategy to ensure research

credibility and trustworthiness. Triangulation involves the process of gathering,

interpreting, and analyzing data using alternative sources, methods, investigators, and

theories (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Morse (2015b) described transcript review as a

process of verifying and confirming data accuracy with participants to ensure credible

representation of research findings. Rittichainuwat and Rattanaphinanchai (2015) argued

that researchers could improve research reliability by triangulating the research data with peer-reviewed literature sources.

Reliability

Research rigor, trustworthiness, and quality are aspects research-practitioners consider when evaluating the reliability and dependability of a qualitative study (Cypress, 2017; Prion & Adamson, 2014). Reliability in qualitative studies involves dependability of the research procedure, which includes method, design, and concept that researcher used to facilitate the study (Dikko, 2016). The appropriate use of research method, concept, and design could help researchers with data trustworthiness (Yin, 2014). The hallmark of data trustworthiness in a qualitative study is consistency of researcher findings and conclusions with a similar context over time and across different populations (Noble & Smith, 2015). A qualitative researcher can assure trustworthiness by triangulating the data source used in the research (Fusch & Ness, 2015). To ensure trustworthiness, I applied the triangulation strategy to this study, by utilizing interviews and company documents as data sources. The use of multiple data sources afforded me the opportunity to verify the data and check for consistency with company documents to identify effective diversity program strategies to support business growth. I supported the research themes presented with academic literature sources to further indicate reliability of the study.

Dependability. In a qualitative study, dependability is a way to establish rigor and trustworthiness of research findings (Henry, 2015). The dependability of a qualitative study stems from the consistency of research results studied under comparable

investigations, procedure, and conditions (Anney, 2014). Researchers can assure

dependability by maintaining accurate records to address changes during their study

(Prion & Adamson, 2014). In qualitative studies, researchers can achieve dependability

by developing audit trails of the assumptions, procedures, and designs for conducting the

study (Anney, 2014; Morse, 2015a). To ensure dependability, I provided an audit trail by

discussing the underlying assumptions, limitations, method, and design applied to the

study. Researchers may address dependability by including a detailed description of the

research process and methods, which helps ensure consistency (Morse, 2015a). I

established data dependability for this study by reconfirming the accuracy of the data

transcripts through interviewee transcript review. Each participant had the opportunity to

review and make corrections to the transcripts before data analysis for the study began.

The transcript reviewing strategy involved authentication of the transcribed data from the

perspective of the research participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Allowing

interviewees to review the transcript improves the accurate representation of data to

ensure data dependability (Sincar, 2013). I ensured the study dependability by

triangulating the interview data via company documentation review and academic

literature about diversity strategies for supporting sustainable business practices.

Validity

The concept of validity in qualitative studies involves accurate reflection and

representation of the research data by the researcher (Kihn & Ihantola, 2015). Although

validity originated from quantitative research, the concept is equally relevant in

qualitative research to evaluate research data rigor and soundness (Cypress, 2017).

Judging the quality and soundness of qualitative research findings requires the appropriate use of method, design, and alignment of the research problem (Yin, 2014). In qualitative research, validity can involve the researcher legitimizing and confirming data accuracy (Morse, 2015a). Interviewee transcript reviewing and verifying data from multiple sources are some practical validation strategies among qualitative researchers (Elo et al., 2014; Fusch & Ness, 2015). Additionally, qualitative researchers rely on triangulation strategies to establish rigor and trustworthiness of their studies (Noble & Smith, 2015). Applying objectivity towards research data is another way for qualitative researchers to validate study findings (Stewart, Gapp, & Harwood, 2017). Reaching data saturation is a legitimate avenue for achieving data validity in qualitative studies. Data saturation occurs in a qualitative study when the researcher is no longer able to obtain new themes about the study phenomenon (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Repetition of themes and ideas is the measure of data saturation in validating qualitative research data (Morse, 2015b). Generally, qualitative researchers validate rigor and trustworthiness of the study findings through four criteria (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability (Morse, 2015a; Yin, 2014).

Credibility. Credibility consists of establishing quality research primarily based on the research evidence (Stewart et al., 2017). The goal of a researcher is to describe the phenomenon from the perspective of the research participants, and the findings must accurately represent the views of the respondents. Hence, credibility is linked to data trustworthiness and truthfulness (Henry, 2015). Researchers ensure credibility through various strategies including note taking, memorandums, member checks, peer debriefing,

prolonged engagement, and persistent observation (Henry, 2015; Stewart et al., 2017).

Another strategy researchers use to achieve data credibility in qualitative studies is

through data triangulation. Triangulation involves the use of alternative data sources,

theories, investigators, and methods to support research credibility (Carter et al., 2014).

Researchers use triangulation strategy to enhance diverse perspectives and sources of

evidence to support quality research and enhance understanding (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I

employed the data triangulation technique by gathering research information through

interviews and company documents analyses to support the study findings. Participants'

responses in semistructured interviews and reviews of company documentation were the

supportive basis for the study findings. In this study, I furthered the credibility of my

study by asking participants to verify the accuracy of the summarized transcripts to

ensure participants' views were well-represented. Researchers recommended verifying

and validating data accuracy to ensure viewpoints of participants are reflected in the

research findings (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Sincar, 2013).

Transferability. When researchers have a limited number of cases to represent

the general population, researchers have difficulty in generalizing findings of the

qualitative research methodology, specifically case study design (Yin, 2014). In

qualitative studies, transferability involves applicability rather than generalization of the

study findings to the general population (Prion & Adamson, 2014). The study findings

are not meant to be general representation on workplace diversity strategies. However,

the study findings include recommendations for developing strategies that might be

relevant to leaders from service organizations in achieving workforce diversity. Another

strategy to gauge research transferability involves enabling other researchers to judge the applicability of the research procedure and method to their own studies (Noble & Smith, 2015). To assess transferability of the study, I provided exhaustive literature on research ethics, data collection, and sampling techniques in qualitative studies, which might be relevant to qualitative researchers. An in-depth description of the context under which research phenomena occurred and the framework used to account contextual understanding is helpful to support research transferability (Anney, 2014). Researchers can enhance transferability criteria of their study by providing rich descriptions of the research procedure used under the discussed phenomenon (Morse, 2015a). Other researchers may benefit from my discussion about the literature on workplace diversity strategies. An analytic review of the literature on the concept and theory underlying a study can be valid for research applicability (Yin, 2014). In a qualitative study, transferability is achieved through the applicability of the study to other contexts. I provided researchers information to determine the study applicability and practitioners recommendations for developing workplace diversity strategies.

Confirmability. Confirmability refers to the degree in which a researcher could confirm or corroborate the study results through other researchers (Houghton et al., 2013). Assuring confirmability enables researchers to demonstrate objectivity in interpreting data to limit research bias (Anney, 2014). Accurate record keeping and interpretation of data are some ways to limit data bias and improve research data confirmability (Houghton et al., 2013). Objectivity to data interpretation is the preferred criterion for assessing data confirmability (Morse, 2015a). Therefore, I ensured

confirmability for the study through accurate recording and interpretation of the data to support the research themes. I kept a detailed account of the interviews through audio recordings and handwritten notes, which was helpful in facilitating objective representation of the participants' views. A review of the interview transcripts can reduce the subjectivity of research findings (Prion & Adamson, 2014). I reduced the personal lens to improve data confirmability by emailing the transcripts to participants to confirm whether the views presented in the transcripts objectively and accurately represented their views on workplace diversity strategies. I also used data through company documentation to confirm and validate strategies revealed by participants regarding workplace diversity. Archived data sources such as company documents are viable sources to authenticate organizational strategies on a particular subject (Rule & John, 2015).

Data Saturation. Qualitative researchers can also gain credibility and dependability of their study findings by reaching data saturation (Morse, 2015b). Data saturation involves the lack of new ideas, evidence, or information to support different research themes (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Morse et al., 2014). For this study, I achieved data saturation by asking participants to clarify their responses during interviews, and also reviewing the transcripts at a later date to ensure the complete representation of their views. Further probing from research participants could yield additional explanations and answers to better understand the research problem (Doody & Noonan, 2013). In qualitative studies, supplementary inquisition from participants are relevant in achieving data saturation to support research quality (Houghton et al., 2013). The reliance on diverse data types could be helpful in achieving research data saturation (Rittichainuwat

& Rattanaphinanchai, 2015; Sincar, 2013). O'Reilly and Parker (2013) described the use

of multiple data sources to account for a well-represented research sample. Researchers

using interview strategies to gather data have an opportunity to ask further questions,

which could yield additional information to accurately understand the problem

(O'Connor, 2015). To further ensure data saturation and support research credibility and

dependability for this study, I asked participants additional and follow-up questions to

obtain any new perspectives or supplementary information to fully understand the

research topic.

Transition and Summary

In this section, I discussed the purpose of the case study, which was to explore

successful strategies that leaders use to develop DM programs to support competitive

advantage and sustainable growth. I discussed my role as the researcher. I identified the

population and characteristics of targeted participants for the study. Other descriptive

contents in this section include information on research method and design including

qualitative case study, ethics, data collection techniques, and analysis. Information in this

section contains in-depth discussions and justifications to support research decisions and

actions to assure validity and protect participants while ensuring research quality. Using

transcript review and triangulation of data strategies was helpful in achieving data

saturation and improving credibility and dependability of the study.

Section 3 contained relevant information regarding the final project. The

information in Section 3 included the research findings and conclusions, application to

professional practice, and the potential for effecting social change. Recommendations for

future research and a call to action both in the academia and practice of diversity in

business and management studies were also provided. Section 3 concluded with

discussions of the lessons learned from conducting the study, and my overall conclusions.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Section 3 begins with a brief introduction of the study, purpose, and summary of the findings. The contents of this section include a presentation of the findings, application to professional practice, and potential social change implications of the study. Finally, I present recommendations for action and further research, reflections on my research journey, and a conclusion of the study's results.

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies that service organization leaders use to develop DM programs to support a competitive advantage and sustainable growth. Five leaders from service organizations with strategic experience in developing, implementing, or managing DM program strategies participated in the study. Participant responses to open-ended interview questions formed the basis of the research findings. The data collection process included validating and triangulating information gathered via transcript reviews, the use of archival business documents, and peer-reviewed journals. The research findings have the potential for both business and social implications because DM strategic practices can contribute to an innovative and competitive advantage of business while also improving the socioeconomic development of stakeholders. Therefore, the findings indicated that service organization leaders could develop DM program strategies to support competitive advantage and sustainable growth through formulation diversity business goals and corporate diversity education campaign awareness and accountability.

Presentation of the Findings

The central research question for this study was: What strategies do service organization leaders use to develop DM programs to support competitive advantage and sustainable growth? From the central question, I presented six predetermined open-ended interview questions (see Appendix C) to participants on DM program strategies involving (a) decision-making, (b) implementation, (c) assessment, (d) challenges, and (e) ways to use DM strategies to support organizational business goals. Participants consisted of five leaders from service organizations who had experience developing, implementing, or managing DM program strategies. Each participant was identified with a code, such as P1, P2, P3…, etc. to protect their identity, and also for presenting evidence from participants responses in support of the themes. From data collection and thematic analysis, six major themes and two subthemes emerged. These themes are:

- Linking diversity programs to business goals.

- Educating and creating diversity awareness.

- Recruiting and retaining diverse talents.

- Building diverse and inclusive work culture.

- Engaging and leveraging diverse stakeholders.

  o Employee resource groups (ERGs).

  o Diversity and inclusion (D&I) councils.

- Implementing diversity reporting and accountability.

Theme 1: Linking Diversity Programs to Business Goals

The linkage of diversity programs to business system objectives was a common theme among participants' responses. Four out of five participants commented that developing diversity-focused business strategies in the areas of workplace development, marketplace growth, employee and career advancement and for example, leaders could facilitate increased business growth. Participants further suggested that in formulating diversity strategic intervention plans (DM framework), diversity practitioners or leaders could assess and direct such initiatives towards supporting the company's business goals and objectives. For example, participant 1 (P1), stated "… commerce is the main focus of our diversity strategic action plans." Participant 2 (P2) also noted that formulating diversity strategies begins by connecting the DM framework initiatives with the business goals. Participant 4 (P4) suggested localizing DM program strategies to support business needs, priorities, and regulations is key to success. Likewise, researchers have suggested a relationship between DM framework and organizational performance (Labucay, 2015; Marques, 2015). The orientation of diversity program strategies towards business objectives is of strategic importance to diverse systems of perspective for enhancing organizational competitive performance (Roh & Kim, 2015; Verma, 2014).

The theme is related to GST and DM framework. From the GST lens of systems of interdependence, a relationship that should exist between enterprise activities, strategies, programs for the advancement systems survival and growth (Caws, 2015). In order to engage in GST thinking, business leaders must view and execute company's strategies from a holistic perspective (Montgomery & Oladapo, 2014). Strategic decision-

making in an organization involves a diversity of functions and activities, thus interconnectivity is an essential element for achieving an organizational system of wholeness and competitiveness (Niederman & March 2014; Olsen, 2013). Connecting the DM framework to business goals is a way for leaders to promote and integrate holistic thinking into the business processes that drive diverse systems perspective and growth (Sabharwal, 2014; Verma, 2014). Participants indentified strategic intervention programs for facilitating diverse business development which included ethnicity, skills, and age. Under the DM framework, a strategic diversity business linkage reinforces a leader's ability to purposefully tailor corporate diversity business needs to support sustainable business objectives (Sabharwal, 2014; Roh & Kim, 2016).

However, not every single workplace diversity program strategy can focus on business outcomes. Holck, Muhr, and Villesèche (2016) made similar remarks when discussioning social identity theory and implications of diversity management practices. P1 mentioned that their diversity strategies revolve around Rodriguez's (2015) 4Cs of (a) commerce, (b) career, (c) community, and (d) culture. The participant also said "… regarding community and culture, we develop diversity strategy to focus on supplier diversity, how to use philanthropic dollars, and education programs to support people and the communities that we serve." Madera (2013) discovered approximately 20% of service companies' workplace diversity inititaives involve supplier diversity programs and spending. P2 and P5 suggested that strategies for developing diversity programs could not be all about business as usual, because of the negativities, assumptions, and inherent inequality associated with the phenomenon. According to P1, described business

as usual in terms of keeping certain people from advancing in their career fields or working in an unequal playing field.

Valuing diversity beyond economic profitability is a good indicator of leaders working toward sustainable business objectives. Researchers described sustainability as a measure of success for an organization in three main areas – economic, social, and environment (Ansted & Dent, 2015; Baumgartner, 2014; Haywood et al., 2013; Kahn, 2014). Pursuing sustainability goals involve finding balance and prioritizing organizational system needs to meet business objectives (Boesso et al., 2015). Economic, social, and environmental objectives of a firm can sometimes conflict or seem counterproductive. However, through strategic systems thinking which could involve market needs assessment, and prioritization of business activities; business leaders can implement policies and strategies to achieve organization's sustainability goals (Montgomery & Oladapo, 2014; Olsen, 2013). P4 mentioned that having a DM corporate policy statement underscores the organization's commitment towards sustainable business practices. A further review of participating company management reports revealed DM policy statements and actions, which support the business case for connecting diversity practices into business operations to achieve systems competitive advantage and sustainable growth.

Three participants indicated that DM framework assessment, stakeholder prioritization, and involvement are important considerations for connecting diversity strategies to business system goals. The strategies align with GST view of diverse perspectives and interrelations that exist in supporting effective business development.

As business demographics change, a diverse business goal strategic orientation is
imperative to organizational success (Hassan et al., 2015). Leaders are in a position to
incorporate and prioritize diversity agendas into corporate missions. Researchers
discussed the importance of leader participation and commitment when integrating
diversity into business goals to achieve a strategic business alignment (Ocku, 2014;
Villavicencio, 2016). P1 and P4 explained diversity systems strategy involvement
includes working with senior leaders to define the diversity intent, priorities, and
directions to support business objectives. Prioritization of diversity practices is important
in an organization, but can be challenging for managers given limited resources and skills
(Boesso et al., 2015). P2 and P5 commented that middle-level managers often lack skills,
drive, and enthusiasm to connect leader participation and commitment regarding how
diversity affects performance. Connecting diversity to business system goals to create
meaningful impact for employees can be difficult considering personal biases such as
racism, bigotry, sexism, and homophobic behaviors (Richard et al., 2013).

All five participants emphasized unconscious bias as one of the major challenges
for advancing diversity practices in an organization system. In a diverse workplace,
people are expected to have heterogeneous opinions and behave differently. Having
different biases is expected, but leaders cannot undermine respecting and treating people
unequally (Richard et al., 2013). Organizational policies that involve values, respect, and
equal treatment of people in the workplace can foster team effectiveness and
collaboration toward unified corporate system goals (Baumgartner, 2014; Hajro et al.,
2015). The linkage of diversity management practices reinforces the business ideals of

value creation through a diverse system of thinking (Valentyna & Oksana, 2016). Having a high sense of diversity awareness and implementing education programs can catalyze diversity business strategic alignment to support business goals.

Theme 2: Educating and Creating Diversity Awareness

Education, awareness, and communication were among the top strategic diversity priority goal areas that the five participants identified. Participants continued to stress the importance of diversity education and suggested diversity training programs help to overcome some negative organizational behavior challenges such as unconscious bias while managing a diverse workforce. Diversity education involves a set of training programs aimed at changing or reducing prejudice attitudes and behaviors to improve intergroup relationships and collaborations (Ehrke, Berthold, & Steffens, 2014). According to P3, examples of diversity educational training programs include diversity workshop, diversity 101, unconscious bias training, and structured dialogue sessions. Fujimoto and Härtel (2017) described diversity educational awareness as a continual learning process considering people's morals, values, and social identity differs from person to person. Diversity training programs should be dynamic and not a generic one-size-fits-all (Nguyen, 2014). Since every person is unique and organizations are distinct, business leaders could ensure that organizational diversity training focuses on the diversity practical needs of the firm and employees (Fujimoto & Härtel, 2017; Nguyen, 2014).

Diversity training facilitators need to produce results showing a mitigation of unconscious bias, discrimination, and unfair practices within the organizational structure

in order to positively impact business outcomes (Alhejji, Garavan, Carbery, O'Brien, & McGuire, 2016). Diversity trainers have the potential to improve employee knowledge, skills, and attitudes (KSA) thereby increasing organizational value (Alhejji et al., 2016). P2 indicated that by educating employees on contemporary diversity issues, business leaders can provide employees the skills and knowledge in understanding people and learning about employees' experiences. The KSA acquired from diversity educational programs could inform employees and leverage differences to support each other and drive the business goals forward (Alhejji et al., 2016). Diversity educators could teach employees the business case for supporting D&I strategy. Leaders could forge organizational unity and better communicate priorities through diversity training programs (Fujimoto & Härtel, 2017).

In most organizations, diversity management practices start as an educational training program (Ehrke et al., 2014). The GST lens relates to this theme because diversity education could be characterized as a system strategy. Leaders could promote diverse perspectives by educating and empowering employees on the need for different approaches or perspectives to business objectives. The GST model hinges on systems diversity whereby training is essential for successful developmentation and implementation of diversity program strategies or practices in the workplace. In an organizational system, diversity training program strategies could relate to awareness and communicate to employees the importance of diverse perspectives and relations in driving the organizational mission forward (Alhejji et al., 2016). Like many facets of workforce diversity management, diversity training is not an isolated managerial

function. In order for leaders to successfully develop and implement diversity educational

training programs, a system effort of perspectives is required (Fujimoto & Härtel, 2017).

P3 suggested that diversity education is not only the responsibility of the D&I team in an

organization, but rather it is every manager's duty to create an experience that supports

diverse system thinking and to lead inclusively. In the context of GST and DM

framework, initiatives such as training, networking, and mentoring; leaders could reduce

system discrimination and isolation in the workplace. Diversity education can serve the

purposes of engaging, communicating, and changing the behavior of employees to build

diverse and inclusive work culture and experience (Reynolds, Rahman, & Bradetich,

2014).

In workplace development, the DM framework could include educational training

and awareness on cultural, interpersonal, shared values, and differences for employees to

understand each other better and to improve working relationships (Richard et al., 2013;

Mujtaba, 2013). The proponents of diversity training explained that employees who

participate in diversity training programs are better informed and engaged with

colleagues (Reynolds et al., 2014). P4 indicated that diversity training brings about

greater transparency and visibility on the organization's stance regarding D&I matters. P3

suggested leaders use diversity training meetings to engage employees, improve

communication, and reinforce the corporate agenda regarding D&I matters. The

participants' viewpoints were consistent with DM framework for supporting diversity

workplace culture through leaders' practices and engagement of heterogeneous

perspectives in building effective organizational system relationships. The DM

framework through a diversity training strategy can foster improved organizational team spirit, collaboration, and effectiveness (Ehrke et al., 2014).). P1, P2, and P3 opined that diversity education is a vital tool for developing DM program strategies because everyone does not understand the importance or the impacts D&I has on corporate business goals. According to P4 and P5, the more leaders can educate, engage, and communicate to their internal team on the purpose and importance of D&I, the better they can develop and position DM strategy to support business goals.

P2 identified the use of diversity representatives was helpful in creating diversity system awareness, involvement, participations, and engagements at each of their business units. Through diversity training programs, diverse teams increase decision-making to boost an organization's entrepreneurial effectiveness (Hajro et al., 2015, Mol et al., 2015). However, diversity training can be hurtful because conversations regarding race and ethnic relations can be difficult and uncomfortable for nonminorities (Subotnik, 2016). Most DM researchers agreed that diversity education training has the potential to increase understanding and collaboration of employees among a diverse team, and thereby improve organizational learning and performance (Fujimoto & Härtel, 2017; Reynolds et al., 2014).

Theme 3: Recruiting and Retaining Diverse Talents

Diversity recruitment via talent acquisitions was on all five participants' mind and was cited as strategically important to workforce development in achieving competitive organizational performance. Each participant emphasized the DM framework should include strategies for attracting, recruiting, and retaining diverse talents. The participants'

viewpoints aligned with the GST perspective for supporting a diverse system enterprise activities and objectives. P4 described specific diversity recruitment initiative areas for the firm, which included a strategic effort on recruiting more women and ethnic minorities into the senior leadership ranks by adding a diversity recruiter and developing internal candidates for senior leadership roles. P5 argued the purpose of these strategies is "… to help improve the demographic data and close the diversity gap among the senior leadership ranks." The DM framework involving targeted diversity recruitment practices helps leaders to recruit talent to satisfy specific organizational objectives (Lindsey et al., 2013). P2 mentioned that diversity recruitment could have a positive impact on workplace experience and flexibility which "… ties to our corporate objective of being employer of choice" in attracting and retaining talents." P2's view is tied to the DM framework because creating flexible working arrangements, organizations can attract and retain experienced and seasonal employees. For example, Michielsens, Bingham, and Clarke (2013) explained most working mothers are more attracted to organizations that offer flexible or alternative working arrangements including working from home. Providing employees flexible working experiences has the potential to improve organizational culture and employee performance through high employee engagements, low turnover, and less work-related physiological stress (Timms et al., 2015).

P2 and P4 suggested that in formulating DM framework (diversity strategic action plans), talent acquisition should be the number one priority because without diverse talents to think creatively and *outside the box* it will be difficult for organizations to achieve its objectives. Participants further argued that diversity strategy development

include reviewing diversity data on employee representation and leadership profiles to ensure a diverse representation of talents and ideas to execute business operations. Soldan and Nankervis (2014) described strategic diversity alignment as necessary to enhance employee development in the areas of diversity of talents, backgrounds, and perspectives in order to foster organizational competitive advantage. According to P1 and P5, creativity and innovation outcomes regarding products and services development is another reason to acquire diverse talents to enhance organizational competitiveness in the marketplace. Leveraging diverse talents to business developments provides a competitive advantage as a diverse workforce brings different perspectives to the production of products and services to meet customer needs (Bieling et al., 2015; Bozionelos & Hoyland, 2014). Although researchers argued that diversity of thinking can lead to effective decision-making, diverse teams have the potential for conflicts, disagreements, and misunderstanding (Torchia et al., 2015).

Researchers have found a direct connection between diverse teams and productivity (Hattke & Blaschke, 2015; Mol et al., 2015). P3 and P5 argued that diverse talents within an organization need to be reflective of the people and communities they serve. Supplier diversity is a popular strategy that organizations use to guide diversity practices, which includes hiring candidates who reflect the customer base, purchasing from diversified vendors, and supporting charities (Madera, 2013; Richard, Su, Peng, & Miller, 2015). Richard et al. (2015) emphasized the supplier diversity framework emphasizes diversity objectives through a supply chain management, which supports diverse and ethnic minority businesses. Participants opined that societies are

demographically diverse by either ethnicity or gender, and therefore the inclusion of workforce diversity into business priorities makes strategic business sense. Bieling, Stock, and Dorozalla (2015) indicated demographic changes and diverse organizations attract highly talented individuals. For organizations to remain competitive, they need to leverage diversity as a strategic recruitment tool for talent acquisitions (Kulik, 2014).

P4 mentioned that workforce diversity recruitment strategies could involve targeting organizations and universities to attract diverse candidates into the hiring pool. Three out of five participants suggested diversity recruitment strategy should focus on strategic partnership and offering of internship programs to help attract diverse talents. Diversity recruitment strategies were mentioned in the participating company documents. Management reports and company websites revealed similar targeted diversity recruitment practices and the significance management places on workforce diversity and inclusion in affecting decision-making. Highlights from company documents included building a positive work environment through employee engagements and targeted diverse recruitment plans. The theme aligned with GST and DM framework. The impact of DM framework through targeted recruitment practices could be of importance to an organization's human resource development and sustainability (Lu et al., 2015). The application of GST lens to organization strategy development helps to associating diverse talents and perspectives to enhance effective resource allocations and management of strategic decision-making processes (Olsen, 2013).

Theme 4: Building Diverse and Inclusive Work Culture

All participants emphasized that workforce diversity without inclusiveness is nonentity. P5 described the concept of diversity and inclusion as intertwined; therefore organizations cannot only focus on diversity but inclusion as well. Ledimo (2015) suggested an organizational culture of inclusiveness is an attribute of organizational success. P2 described inclusion as the by-product of diversity. P3 said that inclusion leads to diversity. Furthermore, P1 indicated, "… you cannot truly have diversity without inclusiveness." P4 also noted "… leaders must build inclusive workplace environment for all employees to thrive." Participants explained that diversity was important, but stressed inclusion was also of strategic importance for sustainable organizational success, which was consistent with DM framework of inclusive and friendly workplace environment as a catalyst for growth.

Scholars have made similar observations and suggested that DM framework involving strategic diversity inclusion policies and practices are instrumental in building a purposeful organizational culture to support sustainable business objectives (Lee & Kramer, 2016; Ledimo, 2015). The GST perspective affords leaders opportunities to build a unified organizational purpose and collaborate around systems of diverse thinking (Adams et al., 2014). Sabharwal (2014) suggested leaders building an organizational system of diversity goes beyond diversity practices and an effective DM framework encompasses a culture of inclusion. Inclusion is an organizational culture issue of how employees are treated. One way to assess the culture of inclusiveness in an organization is if employee insights and opinions are considered in decision-making processes. Muir

and Hoyland (2015) described inclusion practice as people fitting into the organizational culture and their level of engagement in the business processes. The culture of inclusion is pivotal for DM framework and in building a diverse and inclusive workforce to support organizational business goals.

In the GST perspective, building an inclusive work culture requires proactive system involvement, participation, and commitment from leaders. Frost (2014) described inclusion is an imperative leadership trait for attaining strategic organizational success. P4 explained inclusive leadership means bringing leaders on the journey by giving them direct exposure by attending, supporting, and promoting diversity and inclusion initiatives internally and externally of the firm. P4 further suggested that through leader participation and exposure to DM framework via various diversity initiatives and talents; leaders become stronger in championing and advocating for change while helping the organization achieve its goals. Frost argued that the underpinning of inclusive leadership is to drive organizational system changes and sustainable growth. Jin, Lee, and Lee (2017) suggested that inclusive leadership has a positive correlation between organizational change and performance.

In addition, P5 commented that leaders need to understand that developing and implementing a strategic diversity and inclusion agenda takes time and should approach the endeavor as a "marathon and not a sprint." P5 explained that diversity and inclusion culture change is difficult to mandate, as inclusive leadership is more about organizational culture, and thus takes longer to change. As diversity and inclusion policies and practices in most organizations are construed from a compliance perspective

and not organizational system change, real culture change outcomes become difficult (Nkomo & Hoobler, 2014; Sabharwal, 2014). Scholars defined culture as unique characteristics of people or organizations including behaviors, principles, and assumptions (Kim et al., 2015; Stahl et al., 2017). Therefore, cultural change involves changing peoples' behavior, attitudes and beliefs. Similarly, changing organizational culture involves changing those unwritten assumptions, values, and beliefs that are inherent in the operation and practices of an organization. Ledimo (2015) argued that organizational culture is the yardstick for measuring employee behavior and performance. A leader's inability to manage organizational culture effectively in a multicultural business environment can lead to the organization failing its mission (Ledimo, 2015). P4 noted leaders should leverage people's engagement in an organization in order to facilitate open dialogue regarding diversity and inclusion efforts to affect a greater culture change. P1 suggested ongoing communication and marketing around workplace diversity and inclusion culture are important and that leaders need to let people see their personal connections and success stories. Ledimo explained that DM framework through inclusion could yield greater organizational change and productivity results.

All participants concurred that an inclusive culture is associated with increased creativity. According to P5, in some organizations, the term diversity and inclusion has been changed to inclusion and diversity because leaders could focus first on building an inclusive work culture, which has a superior impact on the organization's bottom line. P4 noted by fostering stronger inclusive leadership by including others, validating their

experiences, and caring for them, leaders can develop a more diverse workforce.

Inclusive leaders will naturally build a diverse team. Hence, inclusive work culture could

lead to a diverse workforce, productivity, and sustainable growth. Strategic diversity

inclusion practices fosters an opportunity to adopt policies and practices to increase

leader's impact through inclusive leadership (Jin, Lee, & Lee, 2017). Building a diverse

and inclusive work culture involves an organization-wide systems approach to soliciting

leaders' support and engaging diverse employees in contributing their best efforts

towards the maximization of organizational value.

Theme 5: Engaging and Leveraging Diverse Stakeholders

All participants identified strategic partnerships and engagement with diverse

stakeholders as best practices in the developementation of DM framework strategy. The

development and implementation of DM framework or strategic action plans would be

incomplete without the support and engagement of diverse stakeholders including

employees, customers, and investors. The application of GST and DM framework is

relevant to this theme and subsequent subthemes because diversity in people and

perspectives supports systems relations and functions, which is also relevant to business

development and expansion. Muir and Hoyland (2015) discovered that the engagement of

employees and leveraging employee differences is the strength in building workforce

diversity. Effective engagement of stakeholders leads to improved understanding,

organizational behavioral change, and maximization of an organization's value (Slack et

al., 2015). McPhee (2014) argued that the engagement of stakeholders is the essence of

systems sustainability. P2 and P3 noted developing DM framework involves working

with diverse teams and employees to deploy effective business strategies. P4 emphasized

the engagement of stakeholders is the essence of developing DM framework to support

diverse business objectives. P5 also explained external strategic partnerships include

working with organizations such as the leadership council, national diversity council, and

national business and disability council, supports greater diversity in corporate America

through sponsorships, participation, and promotions.

The five participants described using D&I councils, committees, working groups,

governance, and ERGs as a best practice in the development of a DM framework

program strategy. Participants acknowledged when working with other internal

departments, D&I councils and ERGs have been invaluable in supporting DM framework

and strategic initiatives in building a more diverse workforce. In addition, people need to

understand diversity has several components and is not solely about cultural difference,

but is also about diversity of thoughts and perspectives.

Subtheme 1: Employee resource groups. ERGs consist of volunteer employees

organized groups created for different causes such as social, environmental, and

economic within an organization. According to Welbourne, Rolf, and Schlachter (2017),

ERGs started in the 1960s as a result of racial tensions and were known as affinity

groups. Even though ERGs existence in organizations is over half-century old, lack of

sufficient empirical research is available showing the contributions made to the

organization's bottom line (Welbourne, Rolf, & Schlachter, 2017). Nonetheless,

Schlachter (2015) and Welbourne et al. (2017) noted some economic and social benefits

from leveraging ERGs to support organizational development. In recent times, ERGs in

many organizations focused on developing and implementing diversity and inclusion

goals. Each participant's description of ERGs in their organization supported my research

data. A plethora of ERG participants were identified and collaborated from company

documents (see Appendix E) for examples and uses. According to participants and

reviews of management reports, ERGs function by helping (a) leverage employees'

experiences and differences, (b) organize, attend, and participate in various diversity

programs, (c) improve diversity awareness and employee engagement, (d) increase

understanding of customers' diverse needs in order to provide solutions, and (e) increase

collaboration across teams to create a culture of inclusion. Madera (2013) discovered the

use of ERGs as DM is a best practice among service organizations for facilitating

employee networking and menitoring. ERGs are strategic partners in achieving

sustainable diversity and inclusion business goals.

The dynamics and diversity of ERGs are an innovative and valuable asset for an

organizational products and services development in order to meet diverse customers'

needs (Schlachter, Rolf, & Welbourne, 2016). ERGs are also beneficial to businesses

through employee engagements with workforce diversity and inclusion to support

sustainable business practices (Welbourne et al., 2017). Other uses of ERGs in

organizations include attracting diverse talents and building an inclusive leadership

culture to reflect the demographics of organization's customer base. Schlachter (2015)

mentioned that in the future ERGs could be known as a business resource group.

Consequently, in developing strategies for DM programs to support organizational

competitive advantage and sustainable growth, leaders should partner with and rely on the support from ERGs to drive the corporate mission forward.

The subtheme tied to GST and DM framework of diversity and perspectives indicates diverse perspectives through engagements and interactions of employees are the bedrock of ERGs. Although ERGs have multifaceted purposes in an organization, leaders will rely on ERGs to facilitate participation and engagement from diverse employees towards enhancing corporate unifying business objectives (Welbourne et al., 2017). The enhancement of business objectives in GST is consistent with relational vision and interactions between different employees and functions within the workplace (Montgomery & Oladapo, 2014). Understanding customer needs through the lens of heterogeneous employee groups and approaches, is a strategic necessity for business survival and growth (Madera, 2013; Marques, 2015). Bieling et al. (2015) noted business demographic changes serve as a competitive market force in driving diversity to improve performance in the workplace. Under the DM framework, workplace diversity consists of engaging and leveraging employee differences to support competitive business development and growth (Sabharwal, 2014). A strategic alliance with ERGs in the workplace is one of the hallmarks of DM framework in the advancement and support of corporate business objectives. Leaders engaging and managing workforce and market diversity could positively impact firm performance because diversity drives innovative and creative thinking (Bozionelos & Hoyland, 2014).

Subtheme 2: Diversity and inclusion councils. Participants agreed that senior-level leadership involvement in formulating DM strategies is essential, as it sends a clear

message to employees about leaders' commitments and priorities. All five participants had some form of diversity and inclusion working group, committee, or council in their companies. Although diversity councils have different names among service orgnizations, their function is to focus on diversity and inclusion objectives (Madera, 2013). P5 indicated that the diversity council in many service organizations includes senior executives responsible for decision-making, planning, developing DM framework, and creating diversity strategic programs and goals of the firm. For example, P4 said that "the senior diversity council developed diversity goals around recruiting, representation, and how to create an inclusive working environment." P2 and P1 suggested senior leadership could buy-in support and that feedback makes the difference in implementing DM agenda for a firm. Scholars argued that leaders' behavior and commitment are of strategic importance to DM practices in an organization (Li, 2014; Tanikawa & Jung, 2016). Leadership behavior that focuses on inclusively will result in workforce diversity (Jin et al., 2017; Sabharwal, 2014).

The subtheme relates to GST and DM framework of supporting diversity through leadership involvement and participation. The use of leadership groups and committees such as the D&I council in the developmentation and implementation of workplace diversity strategies are relevant to GST and DM framework. Ahn and Ettner (2014) noted that leaders influence policies and strategies within the workplace. Leader behavior and commitment could influence greater diversity and perspectives within an organizational system. Leaders presuppose the GST lens as as a system of ideas and interrelationships of different functions and people, which could serve as a strategic link in promoting a

diverse system of perspectives (Bronn & Bronn, 2015; Olsen, 2013). Leaders supporting diversity via leadership behavior and commitment coincides with DM framework. Leader participation in developing and implementing a diversity program system strategy is critical in enhancing organizational performance (Awino, 2013). Effective commitment towards matters of diversity from senior executives could affect organizational behavior and the culture of diversity (Li, 2014; Sabharwal, 2014). Okuc (2014) noted that effective leaders foster creativity through team diversity.

The use of D&I councils to plan, review, and evaluate DM framework priority areas regularly helps to guide corporate sustainable business orientations (Madera, 2013). The strategic alliance with the senior leadership helps to build organizational synergies rounding diversity and inclusion in order to support overall business goals (Lee & Kramer, 2016; Ledimo, 2015). Working with senior leadership on strategies on DM framework helps to establish a unified understanding of why diversity matters to the business and brings greater transparency and accountability.

Theme 6: Implementing Diversity Reporting and Accountability

Four out of five participants' comments revealed two perspectives for assessing diversity accountability with the DM framework using quantitative and / or qualitative reporting metrics. Researchers using the quantitative reporting approach measures diversity program success by using statistical data, and could be appropriate working representations and demographic trends. P3 noted a firm may report DM framework or program strategy success using a metric of increased hires in diverse talents, ethnic minorities, and women, who are eventually promoted into senior leadership positions in a

firm. Effective DM framework and practices are a reflection on employee engagements, customer satisfaction, feedback, and retention. Management provided with an effective reporting strategy provides management with opportunities to bring greater transparency and accountability to organizational activities (Emeseh & Songi, 2014). The assessment of DM framework may improve stakeholders' relationships and restore public trust regarding organization's business practices (Jiang, 2015). As a result, DM framework on reporting strategy can help drive sustainable business practices towards satisfying stakeholders' needs and demands.

Pérez-López, Moreno-Romero, & Barkemeyer (2015) explored the relationship between sustainability reporting and sustainable management practices and suggested that internal and external pressures from business demographic changes act as a compelling force in the corporate sustainability reporting. Most mid-tier to large organizations issue a voluntary corporate social sustainability report (CSR) which includes reports on diversity and inclusion practices. Each of the five companies of the participants issued a CSR, which revealed information about the companies activities including diversity and inclusion strategic actions and achievements. In one company, for example, the CSR indicated workforce diversity was at 68% and that 16% of the suppliers budget spent on diverse business enterprises. The company had a workforce diversity target of 43% in upper management and 15% of the ownership of their suppliers. The board of directors received a periodical reporting on diversity and inclusion efforts. The GST perspective was relevant because having a unified system

reporting and accountability plan is critical to an effective DM framework monitoring strategy.

A review of management reports and participant comments suggested that firms use different reporting metrics to assess DM framework strategic progress via diversity scorecard, dashboard, and annual culture surveys. DM framework measurement strategies help ensure workplace diversity strategies are not just written into the policies, but are actually implemented and integrated into the daily business practices (Lafever-Ayer, 2013). DM framework reporting strategies, such as the diversity scorecard, balanced scorecard, and diversity index provides managers a quantifiable basis to make business decisions and orient DM framework or the program strategy toward business operations (Awino, 2013; Wondrak & Segert, 2015). A diversity scorecard, for example, can provide management a 360 degree view to reinforce diversity decisions into business processes to create a systemic economic advantage for the business (Lafever-Ayer, 2013; Wondrak & Segert, 2015).

P1 suggest that diversity scorecard was helpful in measuring and tracking diversity progress on a biannual basis regarding the corporate strategic priority areas on commerce, career, community, and culture. P1 added that diversity scorecard helps with "… (a) measurability, (b) setting of goals, and (c) communication and awareness" to ensure a unified strategic alignment towards corporate business goals. P2 and P3 indicated that measurability of demographics data trends on promotion, retention, turnover, and development rates provide leaders an effective tangible assessment on DM framework and program strategies. Wondrak and Segert (2015) noted that strategic

linkage of DM intervention programs to support strategic corporate focus areas provides businesses competitive economic advantage. The measurability of DM framework is a helpful strategy to navigate the market in order to achieve continued business relevancy in the marketplace.

Each of the five participants suggested another means to report on DM framework progress is through internally qualitative measures as well externally recognitions. On internal qualitative reporting metrics, participants described the use of direct feedback from leaders about organizational changes on culture, employee engagements, and customers' satisfaction could be indicators of diversity strategic actions success. Gathering qualitative information can help broaden organizational learning and improve diverse culture (Fujimoto & Härtel, 2017). For example, conducting employee satisfaction and culture surveys can be helpful in assessing workplace culture regarding employee satisfaction and engagements (Soldan & Nankervis, 2014). According to P5, connecting DM framework initiatives to employee engagements activities enhances employees' participation and satisfaction which improves organizational culture. Lastly, the reliance on external awards can provide a realistic measure of the diversity inclusion success stories of a company. External recognition brings improved objectivity to the measurement of DM framework and program strategic implementation plans. Participants identified awards and listed company websites with diversity management reports such as *The Working Mother 100 Best Companies*, the human rights campaign's corporate equality index, and the diversity supply awards. Participants emphasized that receiving

diversity awards provides external recognition to the organization's overall DM

framework practices in the business community and among competitors.

In summary, establishing a diversity reporting measurement is useful for

informing leaders how to prioritize and redirect diversity program strategies in supporting

organizational business goals. The use of reporting strategies can foster dialog and hold

leaders accountable in promoting and improving efforts for creating a more diverse and

inclusive workforce. Jin et al. (2017) suggested diversity accountability involves

executing inclusive leadership strategies to build a diverse team and to offer services to

meet the increasingly diverse customer needs. P2 noted that diversity accountability also

includes ensuring that senior executives and middle-level managers have a common

understanding of the business case for diversity and how to lead inclusively. Regarding

DM leadership accountability, P4 and P5 mentioned that inclusion is one of the most

admirable leadership core competency skills. Improving leadership skills concerning

inclusiveness is vital in achieving accountability for DM framework in an organization.

Themes tied to the conceptual framework. The themes were related to literature

and tied to GST and DM framework. Under each theme presentation, evidence was

presented from data which was supported by the literature review and also related to the

GST and DM framework as the lens guiding the study. In an organization, the GST relate

to DM framework as a reinforcement of the sense of interdependency, interconnectivity,

and collaboration among diverse stakeholders in the development of unified and diverse

business strategies (Montgomery & Oladapo, 2014).

Overall, the GST principles of system perspectives, wholeness, and relations were relevant in supporting the DM framework and identifying six DM program strategies. As discussed in the literature review section, a relationship exists with the DM framework involving workplace environment, diverse and inclusive culture, recruitment and retention, leadership behavior and commitment, and business linkage and accountability. I integrated and discussed the themes in the context of GST while viewing DM framework as an organization-wide effort in supporting business development and performance growth. DM framework and practices in an organization involve diverse elements, functions, and teams working in sync and harmony toward building organizational competitive advantage and sustainable growth (Hajro et al., 2015; Zarzu & Scarlat, 2015). As confirmed by the findings, workforce diversity strategies include creating strategic and holistic partnerships in leveraging diverse teams to support organizational system objectives. Like many aspects of an organization's functions, workplace DM strategy requires organizational effort and systems perspective for leaders to develop effective strategies to achieve its objectives (Fujimoto & Härtel, 2017). The GST and DM framework served as appropriate underpinnings for supporting the study.

Applications to Professional Practice

The findings from this study could benefit organizational leaders and aid them in their professional practices, by improving leaders' understanding and offer practical strategies for developing DM program plans to support business goals. First, I found leaders may acquire new perspectives and improved understanding into the dynamic complexities between business goals and workplace diversity strategies. Second, leaders

could identify strategies for developing strategic DM programs to support workforce

competitiveness and organizational growth. As researchers have suggested, effective

linkage of diversity management practices to business goals can lead to business growth

and competitive advantage (Hur & Strickland, 2015; Janssens & Zanoni, 2014; Labucay,

2015; Marques, 2015). The strategic linkage of diversity practices is vital to promote

growth in the areas of diverse talents, backgrounds, and perspectives among the

workforce to foster organizational competitive advantage (Soldan & Nankervis, 2014).

Furthermore, business globalization and demographic changes make it imperative

for organizational leaders to boost their understanding on how to effectively manage,

develop, and incorporate diversity strategies to impact the business bottom line (Bieling

et al., 2015). The research findings might be helpful to organizational leaders as they

develop policies to support and improve inclusion culture in the workplace. As

researchers argued, inclusive culture can lead to a diverse workforce and increased

productivity (Jin et al., 2017; Sabharwal, 2014). Leaders could use the information from

my study to help establish organizational strategic diversity management and inclusion

action plans to emphasize workforce diversity through inclusive culture to facilitate a

sustainable business future. The results of this study could be a resource to assist business

leaders to effectively manage workplace diversity challenges and find opportunities to

support the growth of individual employees in supporting their organizations' goals in a

changing demographic marketplace. Kulik (2014) argued that further research is

necessary to improve DM research practice gap. The six strategies revealed from the

study could be helpful in bridging the practice gap and to influence leaders'

understanding on effective DM strategic practices. Other researchers could gain new insights from the study literature and potentially conduct further research to improve research-practice gap on diversity management, both in academics and in business practice.

Implications for Social Change

The implications for social change in this study findings includes improving the organizational culture of openness, respect, and trust among a diverse workforce. The study information could help organizational leaders affect social change by building a welcoming and inclusive workplace environment so that every employee could be successful in reaching their full potential and contribute their utmost toward the organizational bottom line without undue social or ethnic influences. By developing diversity management strategic actions, leaders could influence social change by changing people's behavior and thinking. As cultural diversity improves in a workplace, individual employee engagement and productivity increases along with their socioeconomic contributions (Slack et al., 2015).

Accounting for organizational social change when planning and developing diversity management practices is a well-debated topic among researchers (Fujimoto & Härtel, 2017; Mazur, 2014). Compton and Meier (2016) suggested that organizational business goals include meeting the social capital needs of its stakeholders to ensure long-term sustainable business value implications. Moreover, the social dynamics and demographic changes reveal that organizational leaders should seek strategies to help address social diversity needs (Holck et al., 2016).

The linking of diversity management practices to business goals is not just a business necessity, but includes corporate social responsibility (Mazur, 2014; Verma, 2014). Ethnic minorities represent approximately 34% of the total labor force in the United States (U.S. Department of Labor, 2015). In developing diversity program strategies, organizational leaders should not ignore the statistical demographic regarding disadvantages of ethnic minorities existing in the U.S. labor market. Other researchers have suggested moral and social change as reason for seeking strategic diversity management initiatives to support future sustainable business practices (Compton & Meier, 2016; Fujimoto & Härtel, 2017).

The study findings include diversity recruitment practices information that organizational leaders could find useful in advancing employment opportunities and career development for historically marginalized individuals in the workforce, and thereby improving socioeconomic growth. Another potential social implication for this study is that leaders could use the findings to develop effective diversity management interventions to enhance community development through business growth. Finally, through the implementation of diversity management strategies, leaders could affect social change by advocating for workforce diversity and leading inclusively to support organizational change and improved business practices.

Recommendations for Action

Thomas (1990) and Johnston and Packer (1987) as the pioneers of DM framework described DM strategies to involve developing business practice to facilitate a productivity workplace environment to support a diverse workforce. Developing a

welcoming and inclusive organizational culture is the essence of workplace diversity

(Lee & Kramer, 2016; Ledimo, 2015). The responsibility of leaders include ensuring the

workplace environment fosters diverse growth and thinking in the application of business

practices (Sabharwal, 2014). In the spirit of educating and creating diversity awareness,

organizational leaders can incorporate diversity education into the organizational culture

to attract and retain diverse talents. From this study, I discovered strategies for

developing workplace diversity to support organizational growth. Based on the study

findings, I recommend the following strategies to organizational leaders and diversity

practitioners in their efforts to improve organization's diversity management practices by:

- Implementing diversity-focused programs to promote a culture of inclusion, respect, and equal treatment of people in the workplace to foster effective intergroup collaboration and productivity.

- Emphasizing diversity awareness through the use formal and informal communication channels such as social media and blogs to broaden the strategic importance of workforce and inclusion practices to the organization's objectives and awareness among stakeholders.

- Advertising a clear diversity management policy statement on the company's website underscoring the commitment of workforce diversity to foster long-term sustainable business practices and development.

- Offering diversity training such as unconscious bias, workshops, and panel discussions to address contemporary diversity issues and to promote organizational learning and experiences among all employees.

- Establishing diversity recruitment targets to increase diverse representation in terms of gender, ethnicity, skills among the workforce as diversity of thinking leads to improved product and services developments to meet increasingly diverse customer needs.

- Developing supplier diversity goals to ensure workplace diversity practices reflect organization's customer base and support the activities of the communities they serve.

- Encouraging and engaging leaders and managers at all levels of the organization to practice diversity and to lead as inclusive leaders could lead to improved organizational change and performance growth.

- Building a strategic partnership with diverse stakeholders internally and externally to advance workforce diversity through the use of ERGs and diversity councils as well governance groups.

- Incorporating diversity management reporting tools such as diversity scorecard, dashboard, and culture surveys to help showcase greater accountability and transparency to the business practices and strategy.

The study information could be a useful resource to organizational leaders and diversity practitioners in the development and management of workforce diversity practices to support business demographic changes. The timely distribution of research findings could be relevant in informing business leaders on how to effect organizational changes and growth (Panda & Gupta, 2014). I will share a summary of the findings with the study participants. I will strive to make presentations at diversity management

conferences, workshops, and training seminars in order to share my findings with other

diversity practitioners and business leaders. Through the study publication by ProQuest

and diversity management academic journals, this doctoral study will be available to

other scholar-practitioners and researchers which could be useful in their practice and

advancement of diversity management research.

Recommendations for Further Research

Kulik (2014) argued a research-practice gap is developing as a result of emphasis

among researchers to conduct more *below-the-line* research than *above-the-line* research

regarding DM practices and strategies. Kulik described above-the-line DM research as a

type of research whereby the focus of the investigation is on formal organizational

diversity programs and activities and its impacts on corporate performance. Alternatively,

below-the-line DM research involves attempts by researchers to explore diversity

practices and implications from the perspectives of employees and leaders' behavior

(Kulik, 2014). Kulik suggested that future researchers could bridge the research-practice

gap by focusing more on above-the-line research to emphasize cross-organizational

comparisons and to recommend practical DM strategies. From my experience in

conducting this study, I recommend further research to improve diversity management

research-practices by:

- Using different research methodologies to investigate effective diversity

  management strategies across different organizations and industries. Cross-

  sectional and longitudinal research designs could be helpful to ensure a sizeable

sample to achieve a holistic comparison and improve the application of research findings.

- Exploring how workforce diversity management implemented in policies and practices at different stages of the organizational structure (i.e., strategic, tactical and operational levels) affect workplace performance growth and inclusive culture change.

- Investigating the socioeconomic implications of using ERGs and diversity councils in organizational development and workforce diversity sustainable growth.

The findings of this doctoral study could be improved by other researchers addressing the research limitations by widening the research scope. Increasing the population and participants sample size could help with in-depth explorations regarding useful and practical diversity management program strategies across different business sectors. Other researchers may consider using the quantitative method or mixed method to investigate the specific research problem, which could increase the generalization and applicability of the results to future business practices.

Reflections

In pursuing this Doctor of Business Administration (DBA), I acquired several skills and experiences on the academic and personal level. In this pursuit, I improved prioritizing and balancing multiple responsibilities including family, school, and work. Time management was key. Furthermore, I built an attitude of perseverance and dedication to complete this doctoral study. The DBA learning process provided me skills

such as critical reading, synthesizing, and scholarly writing. On a personal level, the DBA journey gave me a new perspective on how to be patient and never give up on my goal of completing this degree. Therefore, I will conclude that the continued pursuit of one's goals is a key to achieving academic success. On this journey, I have learned to become a better listener, a more acute observer, and critical thinker.

Another major skill that I learned was the appreciation of objectivity over personal bias such as reviewing data and coming to conclusions purely based on facts and evidence. In conducting this doctoral research study, I was fascinated by research discoveries on the economic benefits of a business case for supporting diversity management practices in organizations. I realized developing diversity management practices would be simple for supporting organizational success. With my siloed perspective, I reviewed literature and learned that incorporating diversity management practices can be extremely challenging and the value impact goes beyond mere economic benefits. Corporate responsibility for organizational leaders includes affecting social change through workplace empowerment and growth. I set aside my initial thoughts and beliefs that could limit alternative perspectives about the exploration of DM program strategies for supporting organizational competitive advantage and sustainable growth.

On collecting data to support this research, I initially took for granted how time-consuming and difficult securing qualifying participants to participate in the study could be and underestimated the time and challenge of securing participants for the study. I sent over 100 research participation invitation requests and emails, and most potential participants did not respond to my initial request. Those who responded to my research

participation request, cited busy schedules or company policy for their refusal to

participate in the study. After continuous effort, I managed to secure five qualifying and

knowledgeable participants who were willing to discuss the strategies for developing DM

programs to support organizational business objectives. In spite of the sample size,

participants shared sufficient information on the topic to allow data saturation and

complete the data collection process.

Finally, the doctoral journey was not an easy one (if it were easy everyone would

have a doctorate) and demands rigorous academic work, commitment, and a first-rate

supportive system. My professors, cohorts at Walden, and my family were my support

system and were instrumental in completing this degree. Without my committee's

outstanding feedback and encouragement from family and cohorts, I am not sure I could

have completed my DBA. Thanks again for all their support. My expectation for the

findings of this study is to contribute to increased understanding of diversity management

practices in organizations. My experiences on this doctoral journey were enlightening,

exciting, and thought-provoking.

Conclusion

The economic and social implications of workforce diversity management are a

well-discussed concept among researchers (Compton & Meier, 2016; Oberfield, 2014;

Singal, 2014). Researchers associate an increase in workforce diversity such as gender,

experience, and thinking to organizational growth in terms of creativity, productivity, and

profitability (Roh & Kim, 2016; Torchia et al., 2015). Other researchers focused on the

socioeconomic importance of improving strategies for engaging and incorporating more

ethnic minorities and women into the workforce (Kakabadse et al., 2015; Nkomo & Hoobler, 2014). As the ethnic minority population increases and the business demographic changes, business leaders must incorporate diversity management practices to enhance sustainable competitive business growth. Therefore, an increasing understanding about leaders' role and strategies for developing diversity management programs are essential to achieving business objectives.

However, unified strategies for developing diversity management practices to support workforce diversity to advance organizational growth are scarce in management journals (Kulik, 2014). The focus of the study was to explore strategies service organization leaders use to develop DM programs to support competitive advantage and sustainable growth. The study findings revealed that service organization leaders develop DM program strategies to support competitive advantage and sustainable growth by (a) linking diversity programs to business goals, (b) educating and creating diversity awareness, (c) recruiting and retaining diverse talents, (d) building diverse and inclusive work culture, (e) engaging and leveraging diverse stakeholders, and (f) implementing diversity reporting and accountability. Finally, the research findings have potential for economic and social change as diversity management strategies can impact organizational inclusiveness which, in turn, promote individual and team competitive advantage and sustainable growth.

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Appendix A: Invitation Letter to Participants

Email Invitation to Participate in Diversity Management Research

Dear XXXXXXXX,

My name is Alex Amegashie, and I am a doctoral student at Walden University and working on my doctoral dissertation research to complete Doctor of Business Administration degree. I am conducting this doctoral research study to explore and gain an improved understanding of how leaders of service organization develop diversity management (DM) program strategies to support organizational objectives and business goals to achieve competitive advantage and sustainable growth.

I would like to invite you to participate in the study. I respect your time and ask you to please read this email and attached consent form to decide whether you will participate in the study. I am fascinated by your company's commitment regarding diversity management initiatives and your involvement. I believe your participation and knowledge on diversity management initiatives and strategies will be a valuable contribution to the research and resource for the other business leaders and practitioners. Further, your participation in the study will help to gain new insights into the dynamics of managing effective diversity program strategies in the workplace to support sustainable business goals to achieve greater competitive advantage.

Your participation in the study will consist of 30-60 minutes interview, and 20-30 minutes time commitment following an interview to verify data accuracy. After an interview, I will email a summary of your interview responses to you for verification and accuracy. The research is purely for academic purpose and all information discussed or shared with me will be treated confidential and protected. If you agree to participate, please sign the attached consent form and return to me or reply this email and state you consent to participate in the study.

I am looking forward to answering any questions or concerns that you may have and discuss further details of my research. You can contact me at XXX-XXX-XXXX or via email alex.amegashie@mail.waldenu.com.

Thank you for your time,

Alex Amegashie
Doctor of Business Administration Candidate
Walden University

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

What to do	**What to say**
Begin of the interview protocol	–
A brief introduction of myself and the purpose of the research topic under study.	My name is Alex Amegashie, and I am a Doctorate student at Walden University. I would like to thank you for your time and for granting me this interview. The purpose of this research interview is to gain an improved understanding of strategies that leaders of service organization use to develop DM programs to support competitive advantage and sustainability growth. By so doing, I will be asking and discussing the interview questions that I provided to you earlier. Before we get into that, could you:
Set the stage to get the interviewee at ease by asking about their background. Use the subsequent questions (2–4) to probe further for a more targeted response from the participant.	1. Please, briefly tell me about your background? 2. How long have you been working for this company? 3. What is your current position? 4. What is interesting outside work?
Explain the informed consent form process and address any concerns the participant may have.	On [insert date] your received a consent form via email or hand delivery by myself. The consent form contains information about the study, to include your rights to withdraw or stop participation at any time with no punitive action against you. Also, participation is voluntarily in nature with no monetary incentive. On [insert date] you signed the consent form by granting me the consent for this interview. Do you have any questions or concerns before we proceed? My contact information is also included in the consent form; if you have any further questions or concerns about the study after this interview, please feel free to contact me.

Receive consent to begin the interview and remind participants that the interview will be recorded to ensure data accuracy. Remind and assure participants of anonymity and confidentiality.	Our interview conversation today will be voice recorded and taking notes to help ensure data transcription accuracy on my part. I want remind and assure anonymity and that your identity and information shared and discussed are protected under confidentiality and will be used solely for research purpose without disclosing your identity. We will proceed this interview shortly if I have your consent to begin recording.
Start the audio recording and/or be prepared to take notes.	–
Introduce participant with code, the date, time, and location.	Interview with Participant [P1, P2, P3…10], [date], [time], and [location].
Begin asking the predefined open–ended interview questions, and probe further with targeted questions when necessary to ensure in–depth exploration.	1. Tell me about your decision-making process in formulating DM strategic action plans. 2. Tell me about how you develop or implement DM program strategies. 3. Explain to me how you assessed the effectiveness of your DM program strategies for supporting your organization's objectives.
*Follow-up probing question	*Specifically, to what extent or how regarding competitive advantage and sustainable growth?
*Follow-up probing question	4. What were the key challenges you encountered in developing your DM program strategies? *Specifically, whether or to what extent regionalism hindered or helped to develop a DM strategy and why? 5. Tell me how did your address the key challenges in implementing DM program strategies? 6. What additional feedback on developing DM program strategies to support competitive advantage and sustainable growth would you like to?

This concludes our interview, thank you for your time and participation.

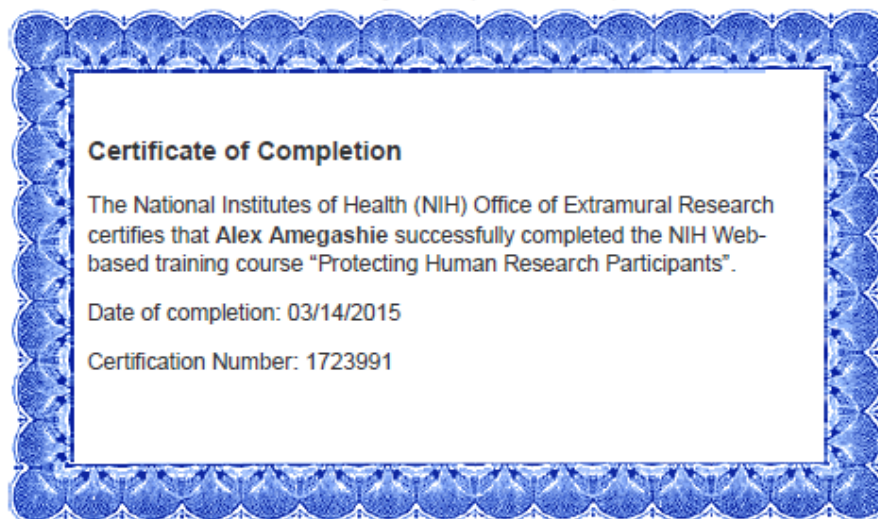|	
Stop audio recording	–
End of the interview, let the participant know the next step. Explain the transcript review process following interview.	As indicated in the consent form, participant will be asked to member check summarized post–interview transcript. I will verbatim transcribe this interview and synthesize your responses to each question. I will subsequently email it to you for confirmation of accuracy; you can make corrections to ensure accurate representation of your views.
Schedule follow–up meeting or alternative avenue to confirm data accuracy.	I will email you the summarized transcript on [insert date] and would like to schedule a follow–up meeting on [insert date] or you may provide your feedback/corrections (if any) by replying to the email. Thank you, once again for your time.
End of the interview protocol	–

Appendix C: Interview Questions

The interview questions include the following:

1. What was the decision-making process in formulating your DM strategic action plans?

2. How did you develop or implement DM program strategies?

3. How did you assess the effectiveness of DM program strategies for supporting your organization's objectives? Specifically, competitive advantage and sustainable growth.

4. What were the key challenges you encountered in developing your DM program strategies?

5. How did you address the key challenges in implementing DM program strategies?

6. What additional feedback on developing DM program strategies to support competitive advantage and sustainable growth would you like to add?

Appendix D: NIH Protecting Human Subject Training Certificate

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that **Alex Amegashie** successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants".

Date of completion: 03/14/2015

Certification Number: 1723991

Appendix E: Some Common ERGs Examples and Purposes

Some Common ERGs Examples and Purposes

ERGs	Purpose
Adapt Ability	To leverage the diverse skills and 'Abilities' of employees who have a disability, or who are caregivers of those with disabilities, to ensure that their individual gifts and talents are utilized to influence customers, shareholders, suppliers and communities, and making the workplace the best, while also creating shareholder value.
African American Network	Foster and provide diversity awareness through personal development and networking opportunities, and create cultural awareness in an inclusive environment. Offer innovative forums of professional development and growth, and drive the development of future opportunities.
Generational ERG	Seeks to leverage the insights and experiences of our multi-generational workforce in order to cultivate an inclusive work environment that fosters greater connectedness, supports the development of all generational groups and delivers business value to the firm.
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Allies (LGBTA)	Advocates a work environment that respects, welcomes and supports lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender professionals and enables them to perform to their fullest potential and contribute to the greater goals of the firm.
Military/Veteran Network/Valor	Seeks to recognize and support veterans, active duty military personnel and military families both at work and in our communities. Members primarily focus on outreach efforts, including workforce integration and raising awareness around issues that impact veterans.
Network of Empowered Women	Seeks to enhance the recruitment, retention, promotion and professional development of

female professionals by implementing programs that foster greater interaction among peers as well as the broader community, while acting as a collective voice for raising women's issues to senior management and enhancing the employment brand

Note. ERGs and purposes listed above were tabulated from company documents and websites – identities of companies removed to protect privacy.

Appendix F: Sources by Year of Publication

Table F1 contains the summary of the type of literature sources, year of
publication, and frequencies supporting the study. The 207 references that comprise this
study include 189 scholarly peer-reviewed articles representing 91.3% of the total, seven
non-peer reviewed articles representing 3.4%, three government websites representing
1.4%, and eight books representing 3.9%. The total references published within the past 5
years are 176, which is 85.0% of the total number. The literature review contains 80
references, with 68 references published within the past 5 years, representing 85.0%, and
77 from scholarly peer-reviewed sources, representing 96.3%.

Table F1

Sources by Year of Publication

Type of Sources	2013 & Older	2014	2015	2016	2017	Total No.
Peer-reviewed	29	61	61	28	10	189
Non-peer reviewed	0	4	1	0	2	7
Government websites	0	1	1	1	0	3
Books	2	4	1	1	0	8
Total	31	70	64	30	12	207