Diversity as an Influence on Talent Management and Competitive Advantage: The Absence of Female African American Executive Leadership in the Insurance Industry

By

Lateisha Rainey

____________________________

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Business Administration

___________________________

Liberty University, School of Business

June 2022
Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative research case study was to examine the extent of which the significance of diversity has on the representation of African American females in top-executive leadership positions. Furthermore, to comprehend why African American females are unfairly represented and disparaged in C-suite level positions. The purpose of this research was to study the influence that diversity may have on the insurance industry’s talent management and competitive advantage. To what degree do biases whether conscious or unconscious affect promotional opportunities, recruitment, selection, and hiring practices of African American females pursuing elevation to higher level positions within the insurance industry. Findings from this research provided an understanding into how top-executive leaders can identify and implement tactics to address the diversity gap in executive level positions. This researcher set out to address the general problem of the absence of diversity with respect to African American women in executive level positions resulting in the loss of talent and an organizational competitive advantage. The main results of this study show that African American females are unfairly represented in leadership positions, there is bias in the hiring practice, job opportunities are available, but this group of women are not being promoted to higher level positions, and when executive leaders are committed to promoting diversity within the organization and have diverse executive teams this can be of value and beneficial to companies within the insurance industry. Recommendations were developed to present to organizational leaders in an effort to help reduce the absence of diversity and increase the representation of African American females in executive level positions.

Keywords: C-suite, diversity, executive leadership, talent management
Diversity as an Influence on Talent Management and Competitive Advantage: The Absence of Female African American Executive Leadership in the Insurance Industry

by

Lateisha Rainey

Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Liberty University, School of Business

June 2022

Approvals

______________________________

Lateisha T. Rainey, Doctoral Candidate

Date

______________________________

Dr. Scott Quatro, Dissertation Chair

Date

______________________________

Dr. Robert Dewhurst, Committee Member

Date

______________________________

Dr. Edward M. Moore, Ph.D, Director of Doctoral Programs

Date
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandfather, Robert Rainey, Sr., and my cousin, Sharonda Rainey, who supported me during my initial quest to achieve this goal. Unfortunately, they gained their wings before I completed my dissertation. I will always remember your favorite scripture, Psalm 23, which has guided me along the way.
Acknowledgments

I am so grateful for those who supported me in my doctoral journey. Thank you, God, for guiding my paths and allowing me to complete this amazing journey. I would like to acknowledge my dissertation chair, Dr. Scott Quatro, who was supportive, motivating, and inspiring. I would like to express my gratitude to the participants of this study for your willingness to take part in my research because without you this would not have been possible to complete. Many thanks to my prayer warriors Reverend Gwen Carty and Reverend Lori Hudson who prayed with me and for me. Dr. Jihna Jenkins, thank you for staying up late with me on many nights to make sure my work was completed on time. We finished strong! Dr. Nishika Edwards thank you for your daily motivation and support. Thank you to all of my family and friends who were with me throughout this journey. Last, but not least, this would not have been possible without the love and support of my remarkable mother, Betty, my sons, Jalon and Christopher, my surrogate daughter Latoya Francis, my aunt and uncle, Delores and Eddie Martin, my godparents Irving and Lorene James, and my love, J. Tennyson Brown.
Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................................................. ii

Dedication ........................................................................................................................................... iv

Acknowledgments ............................................................................................................................. v

List of Tables ....................................................................................................................................... xii

List of Figures ..................................................................................................................................... xiii

Section 1: The Foundation of the Study ............................................................................................ 1

Background of the Problem ................................................................................................................ 2

Problem Statement .............................................................................................................................. 4

Purpose Statement ............................................................................................................................... 5

Nature of the Study ............................................................................................................................... 6

Discussion of Research Paradigms ...................................................................................................... 7

Discussion of Design ........................................................................................................................... 10

Discussion of Method .......................................................................................................................... 13

Discussion of Triangulation ................................................................................................................ 25

Summary of the Nature of the Study ................................................................................................... 27

Research Framework .......................................................................................................................... 27

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework .................................................................................................. 28

Concepts .............................................................................................................................................. 29

Theories ............................................................................................................................................... 31

Actors ................................................................................................................................................... 33

Constructs ............................................................................................................................................ 34

Discussion of Relationships Between Concepts ................................................................................. 37
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summary of the Conceptual Framework</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions, Limitations, Delimitations</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delimitations</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduction of Gaps in Literature</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Biblical Integration</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefit to Business Practice and Relationship to Cognate</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of the Significance of the Study</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Problem</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Practices</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related Studies</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anticipated Themes</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial and Gender Inequity</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Diversity</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment and Selection Practices</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discovered Themes</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Diverse Workforce</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pros and Cons of Diversity</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Diversity</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Commitment to Diversity (C-suite and Human Resources)</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American Females in Leadership</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Feminist Theory/Critical Race Theory</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Hindrances to the Climb</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginalization</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Glass Ceiling</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity Management</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity Training</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing the Presence of African American Females to Leadership</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment and Selection</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing the Talent Within</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Role of Human Resources, Talent Management, &amp; Competitive Advantage in Organizational Performance</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Professional and Academic Literature</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Section 1 and Transition</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 2: The Project</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose Statement</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of the Researcher</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Methodology and Discussion</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of Paradigms</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of Designs</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: Recruitment Letter........................................................................................................... 264
Appendix C: Interview Guide-African American Females ................................................................. 266
Appendix D: Interview Guide-Human Resources ............................................................................... 269
Appendix E: Interview Guide-Executive Leadership .......................................................................... 271
Appendix F: Questionnaire-African American Female ....................................................................... 273
Appendix G: Human Resources Questionnaire ................................................................................. 274
Appendix H: Executive leadership Questionnaire .............................................................................. 275
Appendix I: Field Notes Template...................................................................................................... 276
List of Tables

Table 1. Gender and Manager Status ................................................................. 163

Table 2. Participants Level of Management ..................................................... 164

Table 3. Outline of Participant Characteristics ............................................... 165
List of Figures

Figure 1. The Concept Diagram .......................................................................................................................... 28
Section 1: The Foundation of the Study

There is a lack of diversity with respect to women in executive leadership positions in organizations of all types both domestically and internationally. According to Baker and Cangemi (2016) research demonstrated that 37 women or 7.4% hold the title of Chief Executive Officer (CEO) in Fortune 500 companies which comprises of approximately 500 companies in the United States. Further data indicated that out of the 37 women, there were not any African Americans at the helm of these companies. They also noted that women in the United States occupied about 52% of low to mid-level management positions and about 47% made up the workforce. This disparity continues to impact women who are seeking advancement opportunities in executive top management positions (Baker & Cangemi, 2016). Baker and Cangemi (2016) also explained that the C-suite leadership, boards of directors, and human resources must recognize and acknowledge the issue of the diversity gap and identify and implement measures to eliminate this issue. If organizations fail to address this issue it may result in the attrition of African American women or a loss to talent, the loss of business relationships, and a competitive advantage.

The executive leadership and human resources personnel must work together to address the absence of diversity in the workplace not inclusive of women and employ a remedy for making them a member of the executive branch of the organization. According to Field et al. (2020), in order to get rid of the diversity gap, the number of diverse leaders would have to grow at a higher rate than general diversity. When an organization is led by women, the performance of the organization improves and increases with female workers (Flabbi et al., 2019). Employing diverse executive leadership can provide engaged discussions, better decision-making, and an improved financial outcome (Stewart, 2016). Although there are Equal Employment Opportunity
laws and policies, Affirmative Action policies, and diversity training to make people aware of diversity, the absence of diversity in executive level positions remains prevalent with respect to women holding titles in top management and high level positions (Stewart, 2016). In this research study, the investigator examined the absence of African American females in leadership roles within the insurance industry and the reasons that hinder their quest to ascend to those positions. In this study, the researcher was motivated to determine the industry’s rationale for the invisibility of African American women in top leadership positions, at the same time examining the participants’ dissimilarities and commonalities in their personal accounts for the development of recommendations for top-executives. The recommendations are made to help address the underrepresentation of African American females in executive level positions and close the diversity gap.

**Background of the Problem**

Historically, there has been an absence of women in particular African American women in executive leadership (Eagly & Chin, 2010; Thomas, 2003). Studies have shown that African American women with college degrees are more likely than white men and white women to get bypassed for executive leadership positions (Fernandes & Alsaeed, 2014). African American women are more apt to experience adversity in top management positions within companies in different industries. Inequality continues to impact African American women who pursue opportunities to progress their careers to the executive leadership level (Fernandes & Alsaeed, 2014). African American women may be deterred from seeking advancement opportunities because of the role that biases play in their being overlooked, rejected, or bypassed for executive leadership positions (Fernandes & Alsaeed, 2014).
African American women continue to pursue and obtain their degrees so it would afford them the opportunity for advancement in the high level positions, however, they are still underrepresented in executive leadership roles (Rivera, 2012). In 2012 just under 50% of women received their MBAs, masters, and Ph.Ds, but they do not hold top management positions nor are they promoted (Patterson et al., 2017). African American females with their graduate degree are hired for entry level jobs unlike white males and females with the same level of education. Xiang et al. (2017) discussed white men are still being promoted and hired for executive level positions at a rate higher than African American females. The absence of black women and the effects of biases are prevalent in executive leadership positions within the different industries in the private sector (Showunmi et al., 2016). The diversity gap is demonstrated in companies such as those listed in the Fortune 500 (Catalyst, 2013), higher education (Showunmi et al., 2016), the insurance industry, and other organizations.

African American women encounter barriers that hinder them from obtaining employment in the higher level positions. According to Schwanke (2013), the “good old boys club” is a standard that has been around for a long time. This standard prevents women from progressing to top management positions and eliminating the diversity gap between males and females in these positions. Xiang et al. (2017) discussed that the “glass ceiling” is another phenomenon that hinders the advancement of not just women, but African American women. They also stated that the glass ceiling also plays a role in African American females getting bypassed for executive leadership positions.

Gender diversity can influence an organization’s talent management and competitive advantage (Clarke, 2011; Heller & Stepp, 2011; Torchia et al., 2011; Welbourne et al., 2007). An organization’s ability to attract African American females who are educated, qualified,
experienced, have knowledge, and skill sets will be determined by the company’s position and policy on diversity, their diverse workforce, and the hiring, recruitment, and selection processes (Osoian & Zahrie, 2014). Studies have shown that organizations that employ gender diversity on corporate boards and in executive leadership positions affect its performance (Duppati et al., 2019). Luanglath et al. (2019) presented in their research that diversity at the executive leadership level can influence the outcome of an organization’s opportunities, finances, stakeholder and shareholder relationships, and their position in the industry’s market.

Ideally, the makeup of an organization’s leadership and workforce should reflect, resemble, and/or align with its geographical location and the demographics in which the company is housed (Boone et al., 2018). C-suite leadership must look into and identify if unconscious and/or conscious biases play a key role in the company’s diversity gap. They must also identify and implement measures to reduce or eliminate the absence of diversity, increase African American female representation in executive leadership positions while attracting and maintaining qualified top talent, and maintaining their competitive advantage.

**Problem Statement**

The general problem addressed was the absence of diversity with respect to African American women in executive level positions resulting in the loss of talent and an organizational competitive advantage. Women falling behind men in senior leadership positions has a negative impact on the women’s career path and the performance of the company (Graham et al., 2017). According to Kuschel and Salvaj (2018), organizations are taking measures to stop the loss of women with talent because it could affect the growth of the organization and competitive edge. Siemiatycki (2019) stated that researchers have particularly concentrated on pinpointing both a glass ceiling that is preventing women and minorities from advancing to upper leadership
positions which could impact an organization’s operational outcome. Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) discussed the challenges women in particular black women experience such as barriers, stereotypes, and certain factors that plague them as they attempt to climb the ladder to attain top management positions. The specific problem addressed was the potential absence of diversity with respect to African American women in organizational executive level positions in the insurance industry resulting in the potential loss of talent and an organizational competitive advantage impacting organizational performance.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative research case study design was to explore the degree to which the influence of diversity has on the representation of African American women in executive leadership positions. It was also to gain an understanding as to why African American women are underrepresented and marginalized in top leadership positions. The purpose of this research was to study the impact that diversity may have on the insurance industry’s talent management and competitive advantage. Managing talent which includes but is not limited to recruitment and retention is paramount for the industry to maintain its status, profits, relationships, and reputation (Cloutier et al., 2015).

To what extent do biases whether conscious or unconscious influence promotional opportunities, recruitment, selection, and hiring practices of African American women seeking advancement to executive leadership positions within the insurance industry (Rivera, 2012). Findings from the case study research provided insight into how executive leadership could identify and implement measures to address the diversity gap in executive leadership positions. It also provided ways that organizational leaders can reduce and/or eliminate the absence of diversity and increase the representation of African American women in leadership positions.
Research Questions

RQ1. How is there an absence of diversity with respect to African American women in executive level positions?
   RQ1a. What are the attributing factors that lead to a diversity gap at the executive level?
   RQ1b. What are the attributing factors that lead to reducing the diversity gap at the executive level?

RQ2. How do organizations close the diversity gap at the executive level?
   RQ2a. What measures can organizations implement to increase the representation of African American women at the executive level?

RQ3. What are the challenges that are manifested with the presence of a diversity gap at the executive level?
   RQ3a. How do organizations overcome the challenges to increase representation, retain talent, and maintain a competitive advantage while achieving organizational success?

RQ4. What is the importance and values of diversity in organizations and the benefits of having diverse representation at the executive level?

Nature of the Study

This research paper was guided by a research paradigm that is characterized as various ways of looking at the world many times from the foundation which the study is taken (Davies & Fisher, 2018). This methodology enabled this researcher to use qualitative methods. Post positivism was the research paradigm, and the methodology was flexible design using qualitative methods, specifically a single case study. Using the post-positivism approach allowed the
researcher to study the behaviors of individuals in organizations and the real-world issues (Kankam, 2019). The case study design allowed for flexibility in qualitative research and helped to answer what, why, and how research questions posed. Utilizing post positivism, flexible design, qualitative methods specifically, a single case study enabled the researcher to analyze and address the specific problem of why an absence of diversity with respect to African American women in executive level positions within insurance industry exists and how it may result in the loss of talent and a competitive advantage.

Discussion of Research Paradigms

Research paradigm is defined as a group of generally thought of ideologies and beliefs within the innards of a research community regarding epistemological, methodological, and ontological concerns (Iofrida et al., 2018). According to Kankam (2019), the research paradigm is a resemblance of worldview. For quantitative research, the paradigm should relate to life sciences and paradigms for qualitative research are applicable to social sciences. They also noted that the key aspect for researchers to remember is that the research paradigm is determined by the objective and necessity of the research. Research paradigms are not solely dedicated to quantitative and qualitative research, but mixed methods as well.

According to Kankam (2019), the variance in the implementation of research paradigms in research study do not solely depend upon the philosophical assumptions, but additionally on the practical consequences of the search and the assessment of the findings. They also discussed and described four major research paradigms. The paradigms are pragmatism, interpretivism or constructivism, positivism, and post-positivism. The first paradigm to be discussed is pragmatism. Shannon-Baker (2016) discussed that pragmatists are of the belief that a research question(s) is the utmost pertinent epistemological, methodological, and ontological components
that one takes on for research. Researchers that use pragmatism to guide their study rely upon the ideology that theories can be both contextual and widespread by analyzing their transferability to another matter. They set out to highlight the significance of undertaking various methods rather than examining them for success.

Ryan (2018) stated that interpretivism or constructivism is defined as an epistemological position that necessitates the social scientist to comprehend the intuitive meaning of social action. The interpretivists contend that there is neither intrinsic truth nor worldview. Valuing the vast number of human phenomena is the crucial function of interpretivism in research. Interpretivism depends greatly on the perspective of the participants of the subject being explored.

Kankam (2019) explained that positivism is interpreted as an autonomous, unconventional, and impartial presence of truthfulness. This particular paradigm was founded on the ontological philosophy and ideology that truth and reality is devoid of and self-governing of viewer and observer. Positivists have the belief that information is genuine if it originated using scientific methods. The conceptualization of positivism normally examines the process of collecting the data, noting regulations, and pulling out laws. This paradigm is applicable to social sciences.

Kankam (2019) presented post-positivism as having some similarities as positivism with respect to ontological and epistemological. The post-positivism paradigm offers a suggestion that knowledge is not unbiased, and that all knowledge is socially constructed. Post-positivism is most appropriate in social sciences using a flexible, fixed, or mixed methods design. The post-positivist believes that all observations are imperfect and error prone and all theory is amendable.
This paradigm enables, recognizes, and inspires researchers’ ambition and devotion to the research topic.

This research paradigm is post positivism. According to Kelly et al. (2018), post positivism is important when planning research and can form the study for comprehending. They indicate that this paradigm makes sense of the real world which encompasses morals, values, and attributes. It also impacts the way in which research questions are asked, examined, and methodologies that ought to be used. Post-positivism places importance on meaning and looks to clarify societal issues, convey that fixing meaning(s) is not unbiased, and express those questions posed dwell on specific interests (Kankam, 2019).

Post positivism guided this research because it allowed this researcher to analyze the behaviors of individuals in organizations and the real world issues of the diversity gap in executive leadership roles. According to Davies and Fisher (2018), this research paradigm also uses triangulation of methods to conduct research, as it is founded on the belief that there is imperfection in determining the truth, and that using various methods enables the weaknesses of one method to be balanced out by the strength of another. They also indicated the use of triangulation can take place within methodologies, methods, and data analysis. Post-positivism can be used in both qualitative and quantitative research allowing flexibility. The post-positivism research paradigm allowed this researcher to investigate the behaviors that attributed to the absence of diversity with respect to African American women in executive level positions within the insurance industry resulting in the loss of talent and a competitive advantage. This researcher also set out to clarify this societal issue, express the posed questions that were of specific interest, and express that fixing meaning(s) were unbiased.
Discussion of Design

According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), the approaches to research are encompassed with strategies and processes for research that extends from widespread assumptions to specific methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. They also explained that the research approach is determined by the essence of the research problem or concern being addressed, the researchers’ first-hand experiences, and the target group for the study. There are three key approaches to research that have been identified by the authors. The approaches are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research.

Creswell and Creswell (2017) explained that from the late 19th century through the mid-20th century, quantitative research approaches were the prominent of the two approaches. During the course of the second half of the 20th century, researchers became increasingly more interested in qualitative research in addition, mixed methods were birthed. They stated that qualitative research is a design for assessing and comprehending the meaning of persons or groups attributed to a social or human phenomenon. The steps of research encompassed developing questions and approaches, data are usually acquired in the participants’ environment, data analysis preliminarily developing from details to general theories, and the researcher putting together the assessment of the data.

According to Anderson (2017), qualitative research is generated by an abundance of views and opinions of the participants in the study. They also discussed that the individuals using the qualitative approach share in the belief regarding the existence of numerous actualities acknowledged as intangible, contextually located, formed, sustained, or reshaped by the lived experiences of the participants. This form of research is delineated by the significance linked to interpretive, naturalistic, and holistic study. The majority of qualitative research offers varying
paradigmatic views including but are not limited to constructivism, interpretivism, critical realism and theory, and feminism. This form of research is also used in different research methods such as case study, ethnography, phenomenological, narrative, and ground theory.

Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that a researcher’s findings in the written form have a flexible framework. Researchers who participate in this form of study support a way of viewing research that favors an inductive approach, attention on distinctive meaning, and the significance of presenting the depth of the matter. Many researchers utilizing a qualitative approach end up having to substantiate the validity, reliability, importance, and authenticity of the study (Anderson, 2017).

Creswell and Poth (2018) presented that quantitative research is a design used for testing objective theories by analyzing the correlation between variables. The variables are usually measured on instruments in such a manner that numbered data can be examined using statistical procedures. According to Robson and McCartan (2016), the quantitative approach is also known as a fixed design. They noted that quantitative research is theory driven that depends on the collection of data in statistical and numerical form. This approach is used to conduct scientific research. An individual utilizing quantitative research must have considerable theoretical knowledge regarding the phenomenon prior to devoting time and resources. Robson and McCartan also explained that individuals conducting quantitative research will generally stay at a broader physical and emotional separation from the study.

Baskarada and Koronios (2018) defined mixed methods approach as the style of research that comprises of both quantitative and qualitative approaches. According to Denscombe (2008), mixed methods came into sight as a “third paradigm” for social research. This approach provides
a level of diversity in research. The researcher must have a solid understanding of both quantitative and qualitative approaches when embarking on the mixed method approach.

McKim (2017) discussed in their study that the researcher will need additional time for research because they will have to collect and examine information from both approaches. In the field of business the mixed method design is found to have significance because it improves the validity in the findings, edifying the collection of the second source of data, and aiding in creating knowledge. The mixed methods approach provides readers with more assuredness in the findings and conclusions they ascertain from the study. This mixed method also promotes cultivation for research being conducted in the future.

Robson and McCartan (2016) presented that quantitative or fixed design is based on experimental research, focuses on the collection of numbers and statistical data, determines relationships between variables, the research questions are not open-ended, they are objective, descriptive, comparative, and relationship based. They also stated that quantitative approaches are not flexible, driven by theories, and more scientific than social research. Robson and McCartan explained that the mixed methods approach is a culmination of both quantitative and qualitative approaches which will require the researcher to become knowledgeable in both designs. The quantitative research approach was not appropriate for this study because it was based on statistical data, not flexible, theory focused, and more scientific. Because mixed methods have a component of quantitative research this method was not appropriate for this study. Neither method aligned with the path of this research, the research problem nor research questions.
Discussion of Method

Creswell and Poth (2018) noted there are five methods to qualitative research: case study, ethnography, ground theory, narrative, and phenomenological. The method selected was determined by the one that was best aligned with the posed research question(s) and problem.

Ponelis (2015) presented in their study that case study is the appropriate method to use when the researcher is seeking to study a person experiencing and dealing with particular issues, problems, or situations. Harrison et al. (2017) stated that this research method is broadly used in realms such as business, education, law, medical, political and social sciences, psychology, and social work. Creswell and Poth (2018) indicated researchers utilize case study to focus on genuine-life and current issues occurring in certain areas. They also noted that individuals conducting the research should have an in-depth knowledge of the identified case, dilemma, or subject of interest or concern.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), there are identified aspects of case study which individuals conducting research should consider:

1. Identifying the particular case(s) to be examined;
2. Significance to identifying the case is affirming it is well-defined within specific parameters;
3. Intentions for conducting the research;
4. Have an in-depth knowledge of the case;
5. The selection of how to approach the data information will be different;
6. The key to constructing the description of the case will require pinpointing case themes (differences, similarities, organized chronologically, or shown as a theoretical method); and
7. Studies most times commence with the researcher coming to a conclusion about the general meaning of the case(s).

Yin (2018) mentioned that the data collection for case study research is done by way of audio visual, data analysis, interviews, observations, and reports. This style of research asks and discusses the “how” and “why” questions posed. Harrison et al. (2017) explained that a researcher selects case study because greater detail is given and available for trying to ascertain knowledge of the dilemma, matter, issue, or situation in real-life circumstances.

According to Hyett et al. (2014), this research method has three kinds of studies determined by the purpose of the research for the cases, which may include evaluating an individual, multiple individuals, a project, or an association of some sort. The three kinds of studies are single case study or instrumental, multiple case study or collective, and intrinsic case study. A single case study’s focal point is a singular issue or concern. Once the person conducting the research has determined the particular issue, they will choose a single bound case to detail the situation. A multiple case study pinpoints the concern(s) by using multiple studies to detail the matter. The researcher that utilizes multiple case studies can elect to examine a number of entities from many programs or places within the area. Lastly, intrinsic case study has a focal point on its own case (e.g., evaluating a program or assessing a struggling business) due to the fact that the case’s situation is unusual (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

Creswell and Poth (2018) presented five key steps for the researcher to take when conducting a case study:

1. Determine the appropriateness of this method for the research problem and question(s);
2. Decide the purpose and choose the case(s);
3. Implement methods for obtaining the data (audio-visual, interviews, reports, etc.);
4. Define the specific analysis approach: if it is holistic (whole case) or embedded (certain aspects of the case); and

5. Detail in a written report what was obtained by utilizing case assertions (final thoughts regarding the general meaning fashioned by the researcher).

Wall (2015) noted that ethnography is one of the earliest methods of qualitative research that began in anthropology. Creswell and Poth (2018) presented ethnographic research as a method intended to study culture sharing also known as intricate patterns of the lives of individuals who share similar behaviors, values, beliefs, cultures, and languages in the real world. They also noted that as early as the 1920s and 1930s ethnography was broadened to encompass sociology and other social sciences.

According to Madden (2017), ethnographic researchers study a minimum of 20 participants in their own environment. At times, the number of participants may not reach the minimum number. In order to successfully conduct the research and collect the data, the ethnographer must have in-depth understanding of the culture within the locality that he/she has garnered interest in. Draper (2015) stated that the researcher must meld themselves into the community as they were a part of the population. The ethnographer may participate in the daily activities inside of the community and the experiences of the people within the community. Ethnography is relevant to the fields of sociology, social sciences, and other social realms.

Vesa and Vaara (2014) identified several forms of ethnography such as autoethnography, confessional, electronic media, ethnographic novels, feminist, ethnography, life history, videos, and visual found in photography. They also stated that realist and critical ethnography are the most favored forms. In realist ethnography the researcher provides an impartial report about the situation. The ethnographer articulates the research in the third-person based on the information
acquired from the participants. With this method, the researcher communicates just the facts. The collected data are also communicated objectively and not marred by their own biases, views, opinions, and judgments. The individual conducting a realist ethnographic study has the final word on how it is interpreted and presented.

According to Palmer and Caldas (2015), the individual utilizing the critical ethnographic research is provided it in their own perspective. Critical ethnography is in response to current issues impacting society whereupon persons who are in power, have authority, status, and sense of entitlement embark on minimizing individuals who are not the same as them. The ethnographer takes a stance against the biases, inequity, and disparate treatment that individuals may encounter because they come from a different cloth and backgrounds including but not limited to gender, race, socioeconomic, and education.

Creswell and Poth (2018) discussed some suggested measures for conducting realist and critical ethnographic research:

1. Determine the appropriateness based on the research problem and question(s);
2. Establish and find cultural groups;
3. Choose cultural themes, situations, or theories;
4. Decide on the form of ethnography being used;
5. Assemble the information;
6. Create an entire interpretation of the participants from the collected data analysis; and
7. Detail the themed patterns of the participants in a written report which includes the perspective of the participants and researcher.

Robson and McCartan (2016) discussed that grounded theory was affiliated with sociology which later encompassed the fields of business, education, health sciences, and others.
The intent of this research method is to build or find a theory encompassing an occurrence or circumstances which is ‘grounded’ in the information gathered and assessed during the participants’ study. According to Corbin (2017), ground theory research generally occurs in a distinct location with the attention placed on a particular phenomenon in the real world and challenges of the environment. This theory is used to determine, augment, and meld ideas. The participants of the study are not the subject of the analysis. Charmz (2017) stated that the ground theory researcher evaluates the data given by the participants via data collection. This approach enables synchronous data collection and keeps the researcher continuously engaged with the collection of information and developing analysis.

Creswell and Poth (2018) discussed the key features of ground theory research:

1. Attention is on the method or action;
2. The researcher looks to create a theory of the method or action;
3. The method of memoing becomes a part of creating the theory;
4. Methods for collecting data and analysis are considered to be undertaken concurrently and repetitively; and
5. The inductive processes involved in data collection are described based on the approach—choosing one category to be the focal point of the theory and then describing the sub-categories to form a theoretical model.

According to Chong and Yeo (2015), systematic procedures and Charmz constructivist are the two favored approaches in ground theory research. Systematic procedures are continuously juxtaposing data from the field of research with developing groups having to do with categories, codes, and coding. With the systematic procedures approach, the researcher may conduct anywhere between 20 and 30 interviews with the participants and potentially follow up
interviews if more information is required. This approach entails several visits of going back and forth (zig zag) from the field to the office to gather data and evaluate it at the same time while gathering information. The data are collected and evaluated from sources such as events, instances, and occurrences. Information and data were constantly added to the research or saturated until all information was depleted or could no longer be accessed.

Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that the focal point of Charmz constructivist approach is on theory development from collaboration among the participants and the researcher. With this approach emphasis is placed on real-world issues and challenges such as diversity, certain life situations, views and actions. This approach also places attention on the groups and participants behaviors, beliefs, cultures, languages, and views rather than the methods of the study. Charmz is an advocate of the perspective of a social constructivist.

Chong and Yeo (2015) discussed the steps necessary to conduct a ground theory research combining systematic procedures and the Charmz constructivist approaches:

1. Decide the appropriateness of ground theory for the research problem and question(s);
2. Interview questions should focus on comprehending how individuals experience the process and determine steps in the process;
3. Theory developed occurs via concurrent data collection, analysis, and memoing processes;
4. Format analysis procedures as open (grouping of formed information), axial (data put together after coding), and selective coding (researcher crafts storyline that links groupings);
5. Axial coder provides a coding paradigm or diagram in which the primary phenomena is identified;
6. Selective coding hypothesis or proposition may be explained pinpointing predicted connections;

7. Develop a concrete theory crafted by the researcher; and

8. Present the theory as a framework or discussion.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018) the definition of narrative research is having numerous forms that use a variation of scientific practices and is embedded in various social and humanities disciplines. Narrative research design is derived from the fields of literature history, anthropology, sociology, sociolinguistics, education, and other disciplines taking on their own approaches. This approach is used in research in instances such as the process of assisting stories being told. The narrative approach starts with the experiences as conveyed in lived and shared stories of participants of the study. The basis of a narrative study is not to just solely validate persons’ experiences, but it is also a probe of the social, cultural, familial, linguistics, and institutional narratives amid which persons’ experiences were, and are constructed, formed, articulated, and pursued. This particular research design is implied as a verbal or written record providing a narration of an event/action or series of events/actions chronologically linked.

Creswell and Poth (2018) outlined some key characteristics of the narrative approach:

1. The researcher collects stories from participants (and documents and group discussions) about the lived and told experiences;

2. Stories describe the experiences, and may crystalize the participants’ characteristics and how they view themselves;

3. The stories happen within certain places or situations;
4. Stories are amassed through several various forms of data such as via interviews that may be the main form of collection but also via observations, documents, pictures, and other sources related to qualitative data;

5. Stories are assessed using different strategies such as thematically, structurally, dialogic/performance, or through visual analysis;

6. Most times the stories are heard and formed by the researcher into a chronological order; and

7. Many times the stories have turning points or certain tensions, transitions, or interruptions featured by the research in the recitation of the story.

Robson and McCartan (2016) stated that there are three types of narratives: autoethnography/autobiography, biography, oral and life history. Creswell and Poth (2018) noted that autoethnography/autobiography is choreographed by the persons who are the subject of the research. They defined this form of narrative as the conception of several layers of consciousness, the exposed self, the lucid self, examining the self in social point of view, the subversion of dominant discourse, and reminiscent possibility. The biographical study is when the person conducting the research writes and records the experiences of another individual’s life. Oral history includes collecting self-reflections of events and their interconnectedness from one person or many persons. Life history illustrates a person’s total life, while a first-hand experience story is a narrative approach of an individual’s first-hand experience brought about in a single or multiple incidences, confidential matters, or shared traditions.

As demonstrated with other research methods there are steps to follow when conducting a study. Creswell and Poth (2018) outlined some steps:

1. Determine the appropriateness of the research problem and questions for this design;
2. Select the number of persons who have stories or life experiences to share and spend a significant amount of time collecting their stories;

3. Think about how the data collection and their recordings can take different forms;

4. Set information regarding the circumstances of these stories into data collection, data analysis, and writing;

5. Evaluate the participants’ stories and restructure the stories into some form of framework also known as restorying;

6. Establish a collective approach in the gathering and recitation of the stories; and

7. Give the narrative in a written format.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), phenomenological research details the conventional explanation for many persons of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon. The phenomenologist directs their attention to detailing the commonality of the participants as they experience a phenomenon. They stated that the intent of phenomenology is to decrease single experiences with a phenomenon to a depiction of the universal essence. The phenomenology method is greatly favored in the fields of social and health sciences particularly in sociology, psychology, nursing and the health sciences, and education.

Creswell and Poth (2018) outlined many characteristics included in phenomenological research:

1. Attention is placed on the phenomenon to be studied, phrased in terms of a single thought or notion;

2. The study of this phenomenon together with a group of persons who all have endured the phenomenon;
3. A philosophical conversation regarding the fundamental concepts related to conducting this form of study;

4. The researcher brackets themselves out of the research by talking about personal experiences with the phenomenon;

5. The process for gathering the data usually involves interviewing persons who have experienced the phenomenon;

6. A data analysis that follows systematic procedures that transition from the narrow units to broader units, then details that summarizes the “what” and “how;” and

7. Conclude the research with a descriptive report that talks about the nature of the study for persons including “what” they have experienced and “how” they experienced it.

Creswell and Poth (2018) discussed that phenomenology has two approaches which are hermeneutical and transcendental. Hermeneutical phenomenology is research explained as concerned with lived experiences and interpreting the “texts” of life. Transcendental phenomenology or Moustakas’s (1994) phenomenology has less concern about the interpretations of the individual conducting the research and more concern on the details of the experiences of the participants. Additionally, Moustakas’s approach targets one of Husserl’s concepts epoch or bracketing, whereupon the researcher withholding their experiences as much as is feasible to gain a newer perspective for the phenomenon being studied. Utilizing the Moustakas’s approach, Creswell and Poth provided critical steps to conducting the phenomenological research:

1. Decide the appropriateness of the research problem and questions;

2. Determine a phenomenon of interest and detail it;

3. Identify and define the broad philosophical assumptions of the phenomenon;
4. Using in-depth and many interviews to ascertain data from the participants who have experienced the phenomenon;

5. Develop themes from the analysis that are noteworthy statements;

6. Create textural and structural descriptions;

7. Detail the nature of the phenomenon by using composite descriptions; and

8. Articulate the understanding of the nature of the experience in a written report.

The ethnography approach was not appropriate for this study because it focused on the researcher becoming engrossed into the natural surroundings of the individuals to better understand their culture, community, and societal issues (Robson & McCartan, 2016). This approach required the researcher to thoroughly assess the culture of African American females, while on the contrary their views and patterns of behavior were not the subject of the study to align with the logic as to why African American females experience roadblocks to attaining executive level positions in organizations. In ground theory design the purpose is to build or find a theory that incorporates the phenomenon in the real-world (Corbin, 2017). The research problem and questions posed for this project were not anticipated to develop any new theories. However, it was to validate the commonalities amongst African American females’ experiences to establish an illustration of the diversity gaps that are present and how these women handle the adversities. With the narrative approach, the researcher focuses their attention on a sole individual with the intent to depend on the verbal and written stories of that person as they remember the life challenges and issues they have experienced (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This will become a narration delivered by the researcher. The narrative approach examines the intimate experiences and stories of persons as they occur throughout and is written down chronologically to restructure the stories into some form of framework. This approach was not
applicable for this project because the focal point was not storytelling the lives of African American women, but the purpose was to assess the diversity gaps and absences of the women in executive leadership roles.

Creswell and Poth (2018) explained the intent of phenomenology research is to study a single thought or notion of multiple persons who have experienced the same phenomenon. It is to study the lived experiences of persons. This approach was not applicable to the research project because it was looking to examine the lived experiences of African American females who have experienced the same phenomenon. However, the intent of the case study was to explore the absence of African American females in leadership and if diversity has an influence on talent management, competitive advantage, and overall organizational performance. The designs of ethnography, ground theory, narrative, and phenomenology did not fit into the realm of this case study, nor did it align with the research problem and questions.

This study was conducted with a flexible design using qualitative methods specifically, a single case study design. A single case study focuses on an issue or concern. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), this approach is used to focus on real-world perspectives and present-day situations occurring in certain locations. The case study design is generally used in fields such as business, social sciences, psychology, and other fields (Harrison et al., 2017). Creswell and Poth (2018) noted that case study research is divided into two categories concrete and less concrete. They described concrete cases as being smaller in nature and are labeled as individuals’, small groups, partnerships, or organizations. A less concrete case focuses on a greater scale and labeled as community, relationships, certain projects, and decision-making process.
The case study research data are acquired by means of reports, data analysis, interviews, audio-visual, and observations (Yin, 2018). He also stated that this specific research design asks and addresses the why, what, and how questions and is one of the three qualitative methods that is flexible and is used depending on the posed research question(s). The case study design was ideal for this research because greater detail was provided and acquired analyzing and making sense of why there is an absence of diversity with respect to African American women in executive level positions within the insurance industry and how it may impact an organization’s talent and competitive advantage (Harrison et al., 2017).

The flexible design enabled this researcher to be flexible in the case study. This researcher was able to use various methods such as interviews, observations, data analysis, audio-visual, and documents to conduct the research. The case studies allowed this researcher to focus on the reason(s) why African American women are absent from executive level positions in the insurance industry. This research method provided greater detail and accessibility for analyzing and understanding the gap in diversity with respect to African American women in executive level positions within the insurance industry and the impact it may have on organizations.

**Discussion of Triangulation**

According to Yin (2018), triangulation is the reason for using more than one source of evidence for conducting qualitative research (case study research). It is also explained that the necessity for using numerous sources of evidence outweighs that in other research experiences such as experiments, surveys, or histories. A vital reason for using a lot of sources of evidence in case study research pertains to the main objective for conducting a case study: to do a thorough
research of a phenomenon in its real-world context. This enables the researcher to collect an array of pertinent data and therefore depending on numerous sources.

According to Robson and McCartan (2016), there are four types of triangulations:

1. Data triangulation which uses more than one method of collecting data (e.g., interviews, documents, observations, etc.);
2. Observer triangulation uses more than one observer in the research;
3. Methodological triangulation merges qualitative and quantitative methods; and
4. Theory triangulation uses many theories and perspectives.

They also noted, although the various triangulations can aid in the validity of the study, there is always the potential to encounter inconsistencies and variances between the different sources. These issues may be more apparent using a mixed methods approach. Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that the use of a triangulation can help build plausibility.

The qualitative methods that were used for triangulation to conduct this case study are interviews, questionnaires, and documents. The aforementioned tools enabled this researcher to view the organization's current processes for cultivating employees and other pertinent documents related to the study, interview the identified actors, and conduct surveys. Reviewing the various documents enabled this researcher to look at the hiring and promotional practices, diversity training programs, trainee programs, succession planning, and other documents, using different interview approaches (e.g., fully structured, semi-structured, and unstructured) allowed this researcher to be flexible with the interview, and conducting surveys provided the latitude to ask additional questions not included in the interview process and it was more anonymous (Robson & McCartan, 2016).
Summary of the Nature of the Study

Case study was determined to be the most appropriate research method to explore how and why diversity may have an influence on talent management and competitive advantage which may create an absence of African American females in executive leadership in the insurance industry. This qualitative research design was preferred over the other four research designs because of its key purpose to be investigatory, because of emotions, viewpoints, and first-hand experiences of African American females generated the diversity gaps that exist in the places of work. There were other practicable qualitative approaches under consideration; but the case study approach was decided upon to be the most applicable for analyzing the experiences of diversity gaps and adversity that African American women encounter, conceivably resultant of biases which may include but are not limited to race and gender impacting their potential for advancement. This case study focused on delineating diversity and the absence of African American women in executive leadership within the insurance industry where they may encounter obstacles with progressing in their careers.

Research Framework

Marginalization continues to impact African American women who aspire to advance their careers to executive leadership. The disparity in employing African American women with college degrees in upper management level positions is still a problem that continues to plague this particular group (Patterson et al., 2017). The issue of diversity gaps in executive level positions with respect to African American women must be addressed by executive leadership and human resources personnel. There is a diversity gap present in executive level positions in the insurance industries in the United States. Ideally, an organization’s workforce and leadership should mirror the world and especially the community in which they are located. This research
framework set out to address the issue through the use of the following theories: Black Feminist Theory, Glass Ceiling Theory, and Theory of Diversity Management.

Figure 1

*The Concept Diagram*

The concept diagram illustrates the relationship among African American women aspiring leadership roles, the human resources and c-suite leadership, the causes of the diversity gap, and how it may impact talent management, competitive advantage, and organizational performance.

*Conceptual/Theoretical Framework*

The intent of this study was to explore if diversity has an impact on talent management and a competitive advantage and to understand why African American women are not visible in executive leadership positions within the insurance industry. This researcher established this qualitative research case study on the conceptual/theoretical framework of the theories that clearly speaks to the obstacles of African American females seeking to acquire top leadership positions through promotional opportunities. The theories are (a) the Black feminist theory, (b)
the glass ceiling theory, and (c) the theory of diversity management. The theories laid the groundwork for the exploration of this phenomenon encountered by African American females who aim to climb the corporate ladder to top leadership positions in the insurance industry. The participants of this study noted that some of the challenges these women encounter is due in part to biases, a lack of professional programs specific to progressing through the different tiers of management, it is a white man’s industry, bias in the hiring processes, and not being afforded promotional opportunities.

**Discussion on Diversity and Diversity Gap and Its Impact on Organizational Performance.** According to Boone et al. (2018), an organization’s executive leadership team should reflect its workforce. When organizations exercise gender diversity in top leadership positions, they experience more revenue, an increase in their customer base and profits, and improved market positions (Moreno-Gomez et al., 2018). Sharma et al. (2020) presented in their study that ethnic diversity is thought-about to be essential to organizations globally. Additionally, they note that more importantly the paucity of labor and skill sets have made organizations more reliant upon a racial minority workforce. When companies have a diverse workforce, it can potentially produce innovation and enhance employee knowledge within the company and lure customers from other companies to their establishment (Sharma et al., 2020). The participants of this study believe that having a diverse workforce is beneficial to the company because it can help in decision making, innovation, and increase profits.

**Concepts**

**Discussion on Contributing Factors to Creating a Diversity Gap in Leadership.** According to Glass and Cook (2020), one of the barriers or factors impacting women, especially African American women, from attaining top management positions is what is called the “glass
ceiling.” Xiang et al. (2017) explained that glass ceiling is a term that was coined to refer to women particularly African American women who aspire to work in top management positions but are continuously overlooked for these type positions. Baker and Cangemi (2016) identified in their study some roadblocks that may prevent women from occupying executive level positions. Some of the potential roadblocks are this is a chauvinistic and male-controlled culture and women are perceived as too nurturing, family orientated, and may be willing to pass on a career to care for their families.

The findings of the study identified some of the attributing factors to creating diversity gaps within the ranks of leadership. These are some of the attributing factors, bias in the hiring processes, this is a white man’s industry, it is the good old boys club, and there are not any professional career development programs offered. Women are also perceived as being incapable of sitting at the helm of an organization because they may appear too preoccupied or not as dedicated to the job due to family life. Another reason presented by them is that women may not have the required skills, readiness, aptitude, and training to hold higher level leadership positions.

**Discussion on Measures to Eliminate the Gap and Increase Representation of Black Women in Leadership.** Executive leadership must work with human resources and diversity management to create and implement plans to work at reducing the diversity gap and enhance cultural competence practices to retain talent, maintain a competitive advantage, and improve operational performance. According to Nelson (2016), in an effort to begin the process of eliminating diversity gaps within executive leadership positions, organizations should develop a strategic plan that would include the following: a succession plan, an affirmative action plan and hiring goals, a hiring plan with processes, and a strategic plan for human resources. The data
from this research project concluded that employers should develop and implement professional career development leadership trainee programs, supervisory, and management training to cultivate women for better opportunities (Baker & Cangemi, 2016). They also noted in their research that target recruitment and other programs should be established and implemented to initiate attracting, hiring, promoting, and retaining a more diverse workforce particularly African American women for top management positions (Nelson, 2016).

**Theories**

**Discussion on the Black Feminist Theory.** According to Rankin-Wright et al. (2020), inequality and underrepresentation of women of color is prevalent in many industries. In their study they used critical race theory (CRT) and black feminism as a mechanism for gaining an understanding of the racial and gender equity. Their research has also determined that CRT is an effective means for grasping and grappling with the subjects of ethnic discrimination, racial unfairness, and pallidity. To comprehend how race and gender are managed within the equitability of positions, it is managed by adopting a CRT philosophy and exploit black feminism.

Rankin-Wright et al. (2020) explained that employing a historical viewpoint that connects present-day biases to earlier race discrimination, critical race theory establishes unbiased well-grounded tools that inherently opposes those inequitable ethnicized power processes, which disparage persons and groups at the same time favoring others. According to Eke et al. (2021), there must be changes to the way that have been duplicitous in the selection of African American females and diminishing their worth to a racial quota check box. They also indicated in their study that through the lens of history it has demonstrated when African American females are provided the opportunities regardless of inadequate resources and widespread impediments, they
bring great worth. The Black feminist theory was paramount in this research study as it aided in bringing about a precise representation of African American female’s experiences with marginalization through the examination of their viewpoints and encounters. This conceptualization speaks to the unfair treatment and prejudicial treatment of African American females, while the posed questions are in alignment with the rudiments of the theory and reasons for the absence of this demographic were examined through the point of view of the African American female managers, human resources managers, and executive leaders for interpretation of the developed themes.

**Discussion on the Glass Ceiling Theory.** According to Bloch et al. (2020), the glass ceiling effect creates marginalization of black women impacting their ability to promote to multi-level leadership positions. Their research found that African American women are particularly absent from middle, senior, and top management positions. Lewellyn and Muller-Kahle (2020) presented in their study that the make-up of numerous organizational boards and leadership positions do not resemble the United States because they continue to be mostly occupied by white men. This theory was integral in helping the investigator with the purpose of addressing the posed research questions, while it defined the approach for comprehending the absence of women particularly African American women in top leadership positions. Lewellyn and Muller-Kahle (2020) also explained in their study that the absence of women in these positions has attracted the attention of numerous persons and has given rise to the development of organizations and commissions to handle this matter globally.

**Discussion on the Theory of Diversity Management.** Konrad et al. (2016) discussed that businesses’ propensity to handle diversity in particular gender diversity affects its organizational performance and utilizing diversity and equality management (DEM) practices
such as monitoring recruitment activities, promotion of women and minorities, and diversity training improves organizational performance. Dennissen et al. (2020) defined diversity management as certain policies, practices, and programs that companies have created, adopted, and employed to effectively oversee a diverse workforce. It is also to cultivate an organization that provides equal treatment to its workforce. Kundu et al. (2017) found that diversity management and motivation are very important human resource strategies to enhance workforce performance. In an environment that is competitive, hiring and keeping employees is a significant issue experienced by the greater part of organizations in multiple industries. The human resources management participants of this study expressed the need for and importance of organizations to have diversity, equity, and inclusion plans to aid in creating and maintaining a diverse workforce as well as implicit bias training. They also explained that studies have also proven that a well-developed and executed diversity program by human resources will aid in retaining and maintaining the workforce (Kundu et al., 2017).

**Actors**

**Discussion on Black Women.** Black women who are in leadership positions and/or aspire to be a member of the executive leadership team are actors. They were able to paint a picture of their efforts whether successful or unsuccessful in attaining leadership positions. The African American females of this study were integral as they were able to provide their insight on why African American women are unfairly represented in executive leadership positions within the industry.

**Discussion on Human Resources Role as an Actor in Diversity Management.** Human Resources role as an actor is to ensure the appropriateness, fairness, and equality in recruitment and promotional activities for women of color. While corporate industries do not use Affirmative
Action as a determinant to ensure fair representation, the participants of this study disclosed that measures are being implemented for the recruiters and hiring managers to ensure that candidate pools are diverse, and justifications are provided for not selecting candidates. These actors have the responsibility to make sure that employees of the organization including executive leadership, and top management are adhering to and following the policies, practices, and procedures that are in place to ensure fair hiring and promotion, adequate representation, and remain competitive (Doldor et al., 2016).

**Discussion of C-Suite Leadership Role in Ensuring Diversity in Executive Leadership.** The C-suite leadership are the decision makers who shape the makeup of the organization and the direction in which to take the organization. The executive leaders who were participants of this research study agreed that top executive positions lacked the presence of African American women and more needs to be done to increase their representation. This could be accomplished by establishing programs and through mentorship and sponsorship. If not, a lack of diversity can determine the fate of the company, as well as impact their revenue, and talent management. These actors make sure the organization’s strategic plan aligns with the mission and vision statement and effectuate any necessary changes that may impact its culture, performance, stakeholders, profits, retention of talent, attrition rate, competitive advantage, and other areas (Roh & Kim, 2016).

**Constructs**

**Discussion on Leadership Diversity.** This construct focused on the effects of organizations having diversity on their executive leadership team in particular African American females. The participants from this study noted that leadership diversity or lack thereof can have benefits or adverse effects on talent retention, competitive advantage, stakeholder and
shareholder relationships, growth, organizational performance, and other effects. According to Hughes (2018), C-suite leadership and other leaders of the organization must acknowledge, understand, and know the importance of diversity. Many times organizational leadership believe they have significant knowledge of diversity and how to execute programs. It is necessary so that C-suite leadership and other managerial personnel can adapt more to the shifting demographics in the United States and the global market by accepting the differences as strengths instead of weaknesses.

**Discussion on Talent Management.** The many challenges that businesses worldwide are encountering are attracting, developing and retaining talent (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2019). Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2019) explained that talent management is activities and processes that comprises the systematic attraction, identification, development, engagement, retention, and deployment of individual’s talents which are certain benefit to a business to effectuate strategic sustainable success. The data analysis from this research project showed the interviewees are of the belief that if professional career development programs are created and implemented, the organization would attract and retain top quality talent which in turn will improve their overall performance and success. The unparalleled challenges of present day organizations are characterized by globalization, technology, and wider socio-economic, geopolitical, and demographic changes-furthers the need to concentrate on identifying, attracting, recruiting, developing, and retaining talent to maneuver the complexities of it (Claus, 2019; Reiche et al., 2019; WEF, 2016). Dries (2013) viewed talents as distinctive strategic resources, the core to acquiring sustained competitive advantage and businesses utilize talent management to ensnare, hold, and secure these resources (Sparrow & Makram, 2015).
The C-suite leadership have expressed concern regarding talent-related matters (Bhalla et al., 2018; Groysberg & Connolly, 2015), in addition to over 75% of the C-suite leadership have drawn attention to the inadequacy of requisite skills and capabilities as a major threat to the expansion potentials of their companies (PWC, 2017). Vaiman et al. (2017) pointed out that sourcing and keeping the quality and quantity of talent has been a constant challenge for businesses. Some have criticized talent management research as falling behind in providing businesses with visions and direction in this field (Al Ariss et al., 2014; Cappelli & Keller, 2014; Cascio & Boudreau, 2016), while others have indicated that over the past 10 years, talent management has become one of the most rapidly growing disciplines in the management field (Collings et al., 2015).

**Discussion on Competitive Advantage.** Diversity is an acknowledged source of inspiration and conception that can offer a basis for competitive advantage (Savin & Cosma, 2020). Contrarily, diversity can be a source of misconception, doubt, and discord in the workplace that can potentially be a cause for absenteeism, poor quality, low morale, and loss of competitiveness (Savin & Cosma, 2020). They also noted that organizations looking for competitive advantage thus have to deal with a paradoxical situation. Savin and Cosma (2020) further indicated if organizations adopt diversity, they change workplace discord, and if they stay clear of diversity, they chance the loss of competitiveness. Examination of the data detailed that organizations were in support of diversity but has embraced it more after the recent racial events which began to change the culture of the workplace, however there is still a long way to go. If diversity is not adopted, it could impact the attraction and retention of top talent, losing individuals to the competitor and their status in the industry.
Ali and Konrad (2017) presented that strategic human resource management theory indicates that diversity and equality management (DEM) approaches equip organizations with a competitive advantage, giving way to grander performance. Strategic human resource management explains that human resource management can contribute to organizational performance (Ali & Konrad, 2017). Researchers have also illustrated that there is a positive connection between the presence of human resource management systems and an organization’s economic performance (Huselid, 1995; Huselid et al., 1997). Diversity and equality management has pulled from strategic human resource management theory to dispute that a diverse workforce can contribute to organizational performance when diversity gives capabilities that reinforces the organizational strategy (Ali & Konrad, 2017). In particular, racial diversity has been connected to profitability for businesses seeking a growth strategy, most likely due in part to a racially diverse workforce that can link the organization to a racially diverse customer base (Richard, 2000).

**Discussion of Relationships Between Concepts**

The Black Feminist Theory along with the Critical Race Theory (CRT) allowed for gaining a better understanding of the gender and racial equity (Rankin-Wright et al., 2020). The Glass Ceiling Theory identified and viewed the reasons or causes for African American women’s absence from the various levels of management or leadership positions such as entry, middle, senior, and executive levels. Theory of Diversity Management can help organizations to utilize various methods to eliminate or reduce the diversity gap in their top leadership makeup (Raineri, 2018). According to Cloutier et al. (2015), organizational leadership and human resources can look at the diversity issues that exist as well as their policies, procedures, and practices. Dreachslin et al. (2017) stated that leadership and human resources must understand the causes
and the need for change (closing the diversity gap), develop and implement measures to close the gap, and continue to provide support and methods to ensure women are provided advancement opportunities to hold titles and positions at the executive level.

The actors were African American women, human resources, and executive leadership. Human Resources has the responsibility to ensure fair recruitment, hiring, and promotional practices (Ballaro & Polk, 2017). They must also make sure that all vested parties are cognizant of and abiding by the Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action law and regulations. Human resources personnel must work with the appropriate persons to develop and implement diversity training (Gray et al., 2019).

The executive leadership have the responsibility as decision-makers to shape and take the organization in the desired direction. Their decision to effectuate change by reducing or eliminating the diversity gap can have an influence on the talent management, competitive advantage, and overall organizational performance. The constructs were having diverse leadership, talent management, and competitive advantage in the insurance industry. Having diverse leadership particularly African American women in executive leadership roles can be beneficial such as retaining talent, improved competitive advantage and relationships, growth, and other positive effects (Cloutier et al., 2015).

**Summary of the Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework illustrated the measures organizations must take to remedy the absence of African American women in leadership. According to Baker and Cangemi (2016), organizations can develop leadership, coaching, and mentoring programs to prepare women to assume leadership roles. They can also implement succession planning which is usually intended for upper level management positions (Short & Harris, 2010). The other aspect depicted some of
the potential causes for diversity gaps in leadership roles with respect to African American women. The causes are the glass ceiling effect, stereotypes and biases, the good old boys club, recruitment, hiring, and promotional opportunities, just to name a few (Baker & Cangemi, 2016).

Human Resources personnel and the C-suite leadership must identify and implement measures to alleviate the challenges African American women experience while attempting to advance their career to top level management positions. The actions of the actors can have a positive or negative impact on organizational performance if this marginalization is not addressed. According to Moreno-Gomez et al. (2018), when more women are in executive leadership roles, organizations see improved performance and greater profits. They also experience more revenue, an increased customer base, improved market, and profits when gender diversity exists.

This investigator established this research on the conceptual/theoretical framework of three theories that articulates the challenges that African American females experience when seeking to attain top leadership positions through promotional opportunities. Here are the theories (a) the Black feminist theory, (b) the glass ceiling theory, and (c) the theory of diversity management. The theories laid the foundation for the examination of this phenomenon encountered by African American females who aspire to progress to executive level positions in the insurance industry. The participants of this study provided insight on some of the challenges these women face because of perception, biases, a lack of professional development programs specific to progressing through the different tiers of management, it is a white man’s industry, bias in the hiring processes, and not being afforded promotional opportunities.
**Definition of Terms**

*Affirmative Action:* are a set of policies and procedures that seeks to eliminate discrimination and increase diversity and opportunities in the workplace or education among the under-represented groups such as women, minorities (Miller, 2019).

*C-Suite:* refers to the top management in an organization which is inclusive of the classifications chief executive officer (CEO), chief financial officer (CFO), chief operating officer (COO), chief marketing officer (CMO), chief data officer (CDO), and chief information officer (CIO; Cassidy, 2018).

*Diversity:* is the existence of differences within a particular setting. This is inclusive of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, place of practice, and practice type (Tan, 2019).

*Diversity management:* alludes to the particular programs, policies and procedures that organizations have created and executed to manage workplace diversity successfully and to encourage organizational equality (Dennissen et al., 2020).

*Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO):* are guidelines and regulations set forth by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) that are necessary for widening access to workplace opportunities and to put a stop to job discrimination in the workplace (Semanko & Hinsz, 2021).

*Executive leadership:* is a position that manages and directs employees and performs functions such as the activities, actions, and behaviors required in an effort to influence and impact the employees and external groups like customers, suppliers, financiers, etc. in order to accomplish the organizational goals (Andersen, 2019).
Gender inequity: is unfair treatment of women in the workplace which is a paramount barrier for advancement in management (Warren et al., 2019).

Glass Ceiling: this metaphor illustrates the breadth of invisible barriers that disallow women and minorities from attaining access to organizational power, prestige, and status due to the incessant eminence of white males in executive leadership positions (Glass & Cook, 2020).

Intersectionality: is a term that is founded in black feminism and highlights the interactions and salience of race and gender with connected identities and types of oppression, concealed by structural and institutional power (Rankin-Wright et al., 2020). This framework is a notion that social characteristics such as race, class, and gender interact to create qualitatively different meanings and experiences of African American women (Showunmi et al., 2016).

Racial Inequity: was hypothesized to foretell Whites’ self-image when inequity is set as White entitlement but not when set as anti-Black discrimination (Lowery et al., 2007).

Stereotyping: takes place when a person or persons discovers a pattern of characteristics used to depict or group whether for good or ill-intentions (Bleich, 2017).

Talent management: is the activities and processes that entail the recruitment, attraction, identification, development, engagement, retention, and distribution of those talents which are of specific value to the company to build strategic sustainable success (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2019).

Assumptions, Limitations, Delimitations

The purpose of this research was to examine the personal accounts and viewpoints of the African American females who were previously managers or current managers, human resources management, and leadership at the executive level within the insurance industry on the absence of African American women in top-leadership positions, the reasons for the diversity gap within
the top tier, and ways to reduce the gap. The next segments presented discussed the assumptions, limitations, delimitations related to this case study. These segments were noteworthy to this qualitative research and case study just as these aspects were paramount in defining and outlining the qualitative research study. Assumptions are paramount in proposed studies as they allow the study via conveying beliefs that cannot be proven (Simon & Goes, 2013). Limitations deal with possible deficiencies that are outside of the researcher’s control which may still have an impact on the results of the study and delimitations are the limitations knowingly set forth by the researcher (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). The segments below will further elaborate these critical components as it relates to this study.

**Assumptions**

Simon and Goes (2013) explained that assumptions are beliefs that are present within the boundaries of a research study that are paramount to conducting the study, but they are not able to be proven. The research components framing this research collected from the participants will be assumed to be genuine. Therefore, the assumption of this case study was that the research ascertained from the participants was authentic. In the process of conducting this case study, there was an implicit assumption that closing the diversity gap at the executive level and increasing the representation of African American females in top-leadership positions within the insurance industry would be crucial to talent management and maintaining a competitive advantage.

Furthermore, there was an assumption that each participant would be truthful in depicting his or her personal account and not those of another regarding the provided situations. To provide an autonomous space for participants to convey their honest beliefs, defined parameters will be taken to make certain that anonymity and confidentiality are preserved for each
participant (McLane & Pable, 2020). The researcher exercised mitigating circumstances to acknowledge the assumption such as masking the identities of the individuals participating and protecting their privacy. Ensuring the participants’ anonymity and privacy encouraged the individuals to be truthful with their responses. Furthermore, the participants had a general assumption about a situation within the research population yet were not able to prove it. According to Simon and Goes (2013), individuals conducting the research must be compelled to make every effort to affirm an assumption by deferring to the evidence with a reference citation instead of assuming.

**Limitations**

According to Theofanidis and Fountouki (2019), limitations within the realm of a research study, are possible flaws that are out of the control of the individual conducting the research. Although the flaws may be present, they can still impact the research design, results, and essentially the conclusions, thus should be clearly acknowledged on the dissertation when submitted. One of the limitations present in this case study was when analyzing the participants’ responses to the interview questions, the researcher was restricted to access only a narrow geographical location, a fact which may not have given a broad spectrum of responses. This could have been minimized by extending it to the Tri-State area which includes Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey.

Another limitation that was encountered was due to scheduling availability of the participants for the interviews. The researcher offered multiple days and longer hours of availability for participant engagement. The third limitation occurred when some potential participants expressed willingness to be a participant of the study and was aware that it was being done strictly on a voluntary basis without coercion, compensation, or stipend, they
eventually opted not to participate. The last limitation was related to societal environmental circumstances such as the pandemic (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). This limitation was mitigated by offering interviews using the platform method such as Zoom.

Theofanidis and Fountouki (2019) explained that the examination of the data approach is another possible limitation to this qualitative research study because most of the approaches cannot be authentically recreated, and as a result are not able to be verified per se. Consequently, all limitations ought to be clearly articulated so that the outcomes are not distorted and misinterpreted by the broader audience. Research methods are imperfect and not free from conscious and unconscious biases; nonetheless different techniques can be implemented to reduce the effect of research limitations (Ross & Bibler Zaidi, 2019). Ross and Bibler Zaidi (2019) provided some suggestive measures to mitigate or minimize the potential limitations in research such as using unbiased questions, shuffled response method, self-managed questionnaires to lessen the participants’ uneasiness when answering sensitive questions, and other measures. When suitable the researcher ought to furnish adequate evidence that illustrates the measures taken to mitigate or minimize limitations as part of their research method (Ross & Bibler Zaidi, 2019).

**Delimitations**

Theofanidis and Fountouki (2019) explained in their research that delimitations are decisions created by the researcher that fall within the span of their control to set forth as boundaries and limitations for their study so that the purpose and goals do not become unattainable. They also noted that delimitations are mostly focused on the research study’s theoretical background, objectives, research questions, variables under study, and the study sample size. This qualitative research study included African American female managers, human
resources managers, and executive leaders as participants. The main focus of the study interviewed 10 African American females who have navigated the career path to attain executive leadership positions and African American females who work in entry level, mid-level, and senior level management positions within the insurance industry in Connecticut.

Other participants of this study were three female human resources managers, and four leaders at the executive level. This study did not include white males, white females, and other ethnic groups outside of the human resources managers and top leaders who occupied managerial roles or executive leaders who have climbed the managerial career ladder to attain leadership positions particularly in executive leadership. Limiting the research to African American females, human resources managers, and executive leaders who were non-specific race and gender garnered sufficient information for a full exploration of this matter. However, had the researcher used a more sizable sample, it would have potentially over saturated the data.

**Significance of the Study**

Industries worldwide are faced with the underrepresentation of women in particular African American women in top leadership positions. Studies that have been conducted have shown that African American women with college degrees have a greater chance for being bypassed for leadership positions than both white females and white males (Fernandes & Alsaeed, 2014). This disparate treatment is a recurring cycle that has been taking place for a countless number of years. Minimal gains have been made to address this systemic issue. African American women with graduate level degrees are hired into entry and mid-level management roles in comparison to men and women who are white with graduate degrees as well (Patterson et al., 2017). Xiang et al. (2017) presented in their study that white men are being offered
positions and climbing the career ladder in management at a higher rate than African American women.

The significance of this study identified, gained understanding, and presented factors that were barriers for prospective African American females from pursuing opportunities in top management positions. Another objective was to understand the existence of promotional biases in executive level positions. The last objective of this research study was the need to acquire knowledge about why there is an absence of African American females in top leadership positions, develop a plan to address the matter, and present the plan to organizational leaders to aid in eliminating and/or diminish this recurring phenomenon.

Reduction of Gaps in Literature

This research study examined the potential impediments that exist within organizations that are caused by racial and gender inequality and diversity encountered by African American females, consequently resulting in their inability to attain leadership positions and navigate the corporate ladder in the insurance industry. The researcher also explored strategies to address the inequality and lack of diversity in leadership positions. There was literature available that discussed barriers for women aspiring to advance in their careers, but minimal literature specifically related to African American females’ journey to the top and ways to attain leadership positions. Manfredi et al. (2019) noted in their research study that from a gender equality point of view, in higher education they utilize an executive search firm to recruit and select for their executive level appointments. Talent management is another method used in which companies can attract, develop, and retain talent especially for managerial positions (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2019).
While talent management and search firms are avenues used for attaining talent, there was very limited literature that specifically addressed measures for reducing and/or eliminating the diversity gap with respect to African American females in executive level positions. There is a gap in literature that does not address strategies to prepare African American females for leadership positions and how to navigate and survive leadership roles in the insurance industry. Organizations need to identify and implement measures to address the diversity gap in leadership as well as the conscious and unconscious biases that are present in the workplace. The absence of diversity with respect to African American females in executive level positions is an all too common phenomenon that is cyclical but can be amenable if organizations implement systematic change by examining the policies, practices, and processes and individuals at all levels must subscribe to the change.

**Implications for Biblical Integration**

Conducting research from a Biblical Perspective or Christian worldview, faith, and practice was linked to interpretations ascertained from qualitative research methods that successfully incorporate conceptions and/or theories bringing about a spirit filled and morally based dissertation. In an effort to obtain successful and positive results from the study, the study was conducted with knowledge, understanding, and passion. If an individual is not passionate about their research and top, the work is being done in vain and is fruitless. “So then, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of [our great] God” ([*The Amplified Version Bible*, 2016/ 1 Corinthians 10:31]).

In an effort to effectively conduct business research, the researcher had knowledge of the topic they were interested in studying as well as having passion. “Commit your works to the Lord [submit and trust them to Him], and your plans will succeed [if you respond to His will and
guidance)” (The Amplified Version Bible, 2016/ Proverbs 16:3). The researcher had to decide and know how to analyze and interpret the data analysis and final results. “The naïve or inexperienced person [is easily misled and] believes every word he hears, but the prudent man [is discreet and astute and] considers well where he is going” (The Amplified Version Bible, 2016/ Proverbs 14:15). First and foremost the research was conducted with honesty, integrity, passion, ethically, humbly, transparency, and unbiased. Numerous educational institutions and professional organizations have developed and implemented codes of conduct that reflect and represent their worldview, intentions, goals, and objectives (Mogra, 2017). The individual should seek to gain the trust of the participants.

The business research study should examine, evaluate, and assess prior research conducted on the research topic. According to Trico et al. (2016), the researcher should have some familiarity with the topic, have knowledge of potential hindrances, strengths, dissimilarities, and similarities. “Also it is not good for a person to be without knowledge, and he who hurries with his feet [acting impulsively and proceeding without caution or analyzing the consequences] sins (misses the mark)” (The Amplified Version Bible, 2016/ Proverbs 19:2).

A qualitative research method specifically the case study design was used to guide this business research. This research was also motivated by scripture which commands us to look past our self-perceptions and biases. Christians must conduct themselves in a selfless manner and always honor the Lord in everything that is done. “Whatever you do [whatever your task may be], work from the soul [that is, put in your very best effort], as [something done] for the Lord and not for men” (The Amplified Version Bible, 2016/ Colossians 3:23). This researcher has the belief that everyone should be treated with fairness and equality. It is important to build a rapport with the participants because it will enable me to be confident in interviewing. A Christian’s,
faith gives them a perspective on the work that is performed for the Lord and his abundance of care and love for the world.

**Benefit to Business Practice and Relationship to Cognate**

Numerous companies within the insurance industry in the United States are experiencing a lack of diversity in the workplace particularly with the representation of African American females in executive level positions (Gray et al., 2019). C-suite leadership must change their mindset and adapt to change as well as implement measures to address and remedy the diversity gap within the many tiers of managerial positions. In an effort to address the absence of African American females in top management positions, leadership will need to develop professional trainee, mentoring, and coaching programs (Gray et al., 2019) and succession plans (Perrenoud, 2020), while targeting recruitment, implementing hiring, selection, and promotional plans, and establishing diverse interview panels. They should also provide diversity training as well as adopt the Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action laws and policies to effectuate change (Ng & Sears, 2020).

Human resources has the responsibility to enforce fair practices and equity in the recruitment, selection, and hiring practices and promotional opportunities to ensure a diverse pool of applicants and workforce (Ballaro & Polk, 2017). These persons have the responsibility to make sure that employees of the organization including c-suite leadership and top management are adhering to and following the policies, practices, and procedures that are in place to ensure fair hiring and promotion, adequate representation, and remain competitive (Doldor et al., 2016). Adopting and implementing diversity management and having a diverse workforce will enable organizations to better understand their customer base, capture the niche
market, sustain a competitive edge over their competitor(s), and attract and retain a competent and talented pool of individuals (Blouch & Azeem, 2019).

**Summary of the Significance of the Study**

The assumption, limitation, delimitations were critical components to this qualitative research study. These components were necessary for detailing and outlining the proposal for the research study. Assumptions are beliefs that cannot be proven (Simon & Goes, 2013). When the researcher conducted their study with participants it is with the hope that the individuals would be truthful when answering the posed interview questions. It was also important to mask the identity of the participants to ensure confidentiality and privacy (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). Limitations are a component of the study that are out of the control of the researcher. Various events can impact the results of the study (Simon & Goes, 2013). Some examples of events that are not in the researcher’s control are the availability of the participants, environmental situations impacting travel or technology, the inability to duplicate methodologies, and other events. According to Theofanidis and Fountouki (2019), delimitations are set by the individual conducting the research such as the sample size, geographical location, demographic, research design, etc. In essence the researcher must clearly note the assumption, limitations, and delimitations in the dissertation for the general readership so there is no misinterpretation or distorted information.

**The Problem**

Being a leader in management has an extensive history (Showunmi et al., 2016). Customarily, leadership theory, also masked and neutralized dissimilarity including thoughts of how gender and racial attributes may influence leadership (Showunmi et al., 2016). Leadership typecasts are usually associated with white men, heterosexual, middle class characteristics
(Coleman, 2012). However, history has demonstrated that women, more specifically African American women have minimal representation in upper echelon positions. According to Fernandes and Alsaeed (2014), African American females with various levels of college degrees are more apt to be disregarded for higher level positions than both white men and women. Disparate treatment continues to affect black women whose objective is to climb the managerial career ladder.

In general, the absence of racial and gender diversity more specifically African American females in executive leadership can subsequently impact the organization’s retention of talent and maintaining a competitive advantage (Graham et al., 2017). African American females have minimal presence in top level positions in corporate entities, academia, healthcare, and other businesses and industries (Eagly & Chin, 2010). This study examined more specifically the underrepresentation of this particular demographic group in the insurance industry. Although literature demonstrated that strides were being made in companies to diversify their executive team, white males still continue to get promoted to upper level positions and remain at the helm. Research also showed that women, especially African American women, are bypassed or overlooked for senior level positions impeding their ascension based on reasons such as perceptions, stereotypes, biases, and the glass ceiling phenomenon. The inaction of organizations diversifying their workforce and implementing and enforcing specific policies and procedures geared toward diversity, equity, and inclusion and fair treatment can lead to a loss of highly skilled, qualified, and talented persons in addition to an impact on competitive advantage and overall performance (Dennissen et al., 2020; Guillaume et al., 2017).
**Business Practices**

Numerous companies within the insurance industry in the United States are experiencing a lack of diversity in the workforce particularly with the representation of African American females in executive level positions (Siemiatycki, 2019). C-suite leadership must change their mindset and adapt to change as well as implement measures to address and remedy the diversity gap within the many tiers of managerial positions. In an effort to address the absence of African American females in top management positions leadership will need to develop professional trainee, mentoring, coaching, and succession plans (Dahling et al., 2016; McDermott & Marshall, 2016; Nunez-Cacho Utrilla & Grande Torraleja, 2013); do target recruitment (Rivera, 2012); and implement hiring, selection, and promotional plans, and establish diverse interview panels (Shubeck et al., 2020). Organizational leaders should provide diversity training as well as adopt the Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action laws and policies.

**A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature**

**Related Studies**

The marginalization of African American females in executive leadership is harming professional and company growth (Eagly, 2007; Graham et al., 2017; Ozkazanc-Pan, 2018; Post, 2015). Marginalization is the disparagement and exclusion of individuals. African American women are the least represented population in executive leadership. They are most often only represented in lower-level and middle-level management positions and not senior level positions. The hypothesis in the literature was that the organizational leaders have certain perceptions of this population that limits their ascension to upper echelon positions.

The glass ceiling phenomenon shows the impact of the advancement of African American women in Academia, healthcare and other industries (Bohonos, 2020; Chisholm-Burns
et al., 2017; Crown et al., 2020; Glass & Cook, 2020; Gupta, 2019; Kalaitzi et al., 2017). Glass ceiling is a term coined to describe the prevention of women and minorities from progressing to senior level leadership positions (Bloch et al., 2020). This has been occurring because elite status positions have mainly been occupied by white heterosexual men. The research says that this phenomenon is detrimental to women’s professional development. Additional reasons for the lifting of the glass ceiling effect are there is the potential for diverse decision-making, financial gains, competitive advantage, and attract and retain top talent.

The impediments experienced by African American women are harmful to their career as they seek to climb the corporate ladder (Glass & Cook, 2018; Haile et al., 2016; Kuschel & Salvaj, 2018; Parlea-Buzatu, 2010; van Esch et al., 2018). Examples of the impediments include biases, stereotypes, the glass ceiling phenomenon, and marginalization. As a result of these impediments, African American women are hindered from advancing in their career resulting in them lacking in motivation, becoming discouraged, and leaving the company for better opportunities. The literature says this is important because organizations are losing talented and skilled individuals which impacts the talent retention, competitive advantage, and overall organizational performance.

**Anticipated Themes**

**Racial and Gender Inequity**

The first anticipated theme from this research project involved racial and gender inequity as biases linked to marginalized individuals and is most notable in the workplace. This theme was anticipated due to the fact that the sample of participants were chosen from the insurance industry where mostly white men occupy the executive leadership positions. Although, there is a big fluctuation in the workforce which is denotative of a notable societal progression for
women’s positions and roles in organizations, however women remain unfairly represented at top leadership and board level positions (Baumgartner & Schneider, 2010; Metz & Kulik, 2014; Voss & Speere, 2014). Additionally, the findings of the study demonstrated that professional African American women only represent approximately 1% of the United States executive leadership (Taylor & Nivens, 2011). African American women exemplify a major and flourishing source of talent for organizations in Corporate America and have been sufficiently represented in the entry level and mid-level management positions (Holder et al., 2015). This theme was evident. The participants in this study did not find that African American women were adequately represented in executive level positions.

**Gender Diversity**

The next anticipated theme noted in this study is gender diversity can impact organizational performance (Bae & Skaggs, 2019; Blouch & Azeem, 2019; Guest, 2019; Hsu & Lawler, 2019). This theme was anticipated because gender diversity can improve many aspects of an organization. The findings of this study demonstrate that if organizations subscribe to a diverse workforce, it can grow their revenue, improve sustainability, maintain competitive advantage, develop and attract a highly qualified talent pool, share ideas, and enrich the decision-making among individuals (Guillaume et al., 2017). Although the execution of diversity policies could aid in creating a more diverse work environment, equal employment opportunity and affirmative action policies are implemented in industries and organizations to help protect persons from employment discrimination and unfair treatment as noted by (Fujimoto & Hartel, 2017; Gundemir et al., 2017; Hirsh & Cha, 2017), this was not evident in the discovered themes.
Recruitment and Selection Practices

The final anticipated theme is the recruitment and selection practices of African American females for executive leadership positions can improve the organization’s workforce diversity (Hofhuis et al., 2016; Klettner et al., 2016; Matotoka & Odeku, 2021; Ng & Sears, 2017). As well as these practices influencing top management to exhibit their responsibilities to diversity and inclusion. The aspects of this theme were not evident in this research project. However, the findings of the study did indicate that hiring managers are not being held accountable for their hiring practices and decision to not hire African American women into management positions. A key challenge that organizations face in growing workplace diversity is an adverse effect in their decision making processes (Hofhuis et al., 2016). Hofhuis et al. (2016) also explained that internal recruiters are integral in the recruitment process of which may result in organizational inequality.

The following literature review encompasses books, dissertations, and published journal articles that addresses the absence of diversity in the gender and racial demographics in the work force specifically with respect to African American females in executive level positions in multiple businesses and industries (Patterson et al., 2017). Following the review of a diverse workforce, a discussion of African American females in leadership, perceived hindrances to the climb that are experienced by this demographic group, diversity management, establishing the presence of African American females to leadership, and the role of human resources, talent management, and competitive advantage in organizational performance. A number of viewpoints from research are provided on diversity or the lack thereof in the workplace regarding women and more specifically African American women who are in pursuit of career progression to top level positions. The documented works of these opinions are grouped to identify the purported
hindrances that effectuate career development and advancement hurdles and examine the organization’s operational standards, policies, and procedures that may be critical to these occurrences (Ng & Sears, 2017). Finally, the examination of the literature strongly expressed the critical nature of establishing and maintaining a diverse workforce especially at the executive level or high level management positions. This study attempted to ascertain organizations’ operational standards, policies, and procedures for career advancement and development that may place African American females at a disadvantage or give reason for bypassing this group for promotional opportunities. The purported hindrances that African American women are plagued by is explained with the aspirations to encourage organizational stakeholders which may include but not be limited to c-suite leadership, human resources personnel, the board, decision-makers, overall vested parties to implement and impose all of the policies and laws to create a diverse workforce (Bernile et al., 2018).

**Discovered Themes**

There were five themes that emerged from analyzing the data. The themes are detailed as follows:

**African American Women are Unfairly Represented in Insurance Industry Leadership Roles.** The constituents that helped to create this emergent theme are (1) usually white male dominated, (2) no significant progress made, and (3) individuals are not being developed or recruited. The participant responses delineated examples that they believed this is a white male dominated industry, implicit bias, organizations need to get to the root of it, and positions are filled by the same people for a long time. For the majority of interviewed study participants they have described how African American women are not fairly represented in upper management positions within the industry and some of the root causes while one study participant believed
that there is not an underrepresentation of African American women in leadership within the organization. The emergent theme correlates to the underrepresentation of African American women in leadership positions within the insurance industry.

The Presence of Bias in the Hiring Process in the Insurance Industry. The second thematic categorization is a result of the coded participant responses from the interviews which outlines why the participants believe there is bias in the hiring process of African American women in leadership positions in the insurance industry. The attributes that helped to generate this thematic category are (1) biased and unconscious because with the hiring manager, (2) perceptions of the roles for black women. (3) not looking at candidates equitably, (4) no shift in culture, (5) hiring who they are familiar with, and (6) good old boy network. Many of the participants have described how there is bias in the hiring process of African American women due to the perception of where they think black women can be more successful, the unfair representation of minorities and women in leadership or management due to bias, hiring managers not looking at candidates in an equitable way, and there being the good old boys club.

There is Equity in Job Opportunities; However, African American Women are not Being Promoted into Leadership Positions in the Insurance Industry. The third developed theme is that of the participants’ belief that there is equity in job opportunities, however African American women are not being promoted to top level positions. This thematic category evolved from the coded responses of the interviewee which explained why they felt that African American women are not being promoted even though there is equity in opportunities. The constituents that aided in generating this them are (1) access to opportunities get smaller, (2) fair and equitable from a posting perspective, (3) no programs designed to promote, (4) need to delve into talents, (5) hold the hiring managers accountable, and (6) the pool is not there. All of the above attributes are
associated with equity in opportunities, but African American women are not being extended the opportunity. The interviewees have described instances and/or reasons why they believe this is occurring within the insurance industry.

A Greater Level of Exposure Through Mentorship and Sponsorship May Lead to Promotional Opportunities of African American Women in the Insurance Industry. The fourth thematic category is as a result of the coded interview responses from the participants who give accounts why they are of belief that there is a greater level of exposure through mentorship and sponsorship which may lead to promotional opportunities for African American women in the insurance industry. The attributes that helped to form this thematic category are (1) built relationships, (2) greater level of exposure, and (3) having a mentor. These aforementioned constituents are all associated with promotional opportunities through greater exposure, mentorship, and sponsorship. The participants have elaborated the reasons and instances they believe that greater exposure can lead to promotional opportunities for African American women in the industry.

The Insurance Industry Has Made Some Progress in Their commitment to Diversity, Which Creates Innovation and Increases Profits, but There is Still a Long Way to Go. The final theme is a result of the participant responses that were coded from the transcribed interviews which specifically details why the participants believe that the insurance industry has made some progress, is committed to diversity which creates innovation and increases profits, however there is still a long way to go. The constituents that aided in creating this theme are (a) innovative and creative ideas, (b) align with the community, (c) creates retention issues, (d) epicenter of everything, (e) employees envisioning options, and (f) affects the bottom line. The above attributes related to diversity impacting the industries profits, shared ideas, and talent retention.
The Diverse Workforce

Diversity encompasses more than just demographic characteristics in particular gender, age, race, and ethnicity (Risberg & Gottlieb, 2019). It may also speak to “social categories like education, political orientation, job function, and other factors” (Risberg & Gottlieb, 2019). Howard and Ulferts (2020) stated that diversity in work environments is a generally accepted form of business organization in urban areas, which depicts the broad general culture; whereupon there are diverse groups of individuals in the society, there will be an increased level of diversity in the work environment. According to Hewins-Maroney and Williams (2013), the labor force is rapidly evolving with predictions for 2023 that there will be several new entrants inclusive of subgroups that beforehand were more apt not to take part. They also noted that these ramifications will be felt not only in the United States but also worldwide. This will include more women, more individuals with diverse cultural, ethnic, and national backgrounds, persons with disabilities, and younger and older workers (Hewins-Maroney & Williams, 2013). Human resource personnel will have the adept ability to merge best practices and manage the more diverse workforce pool and make sure that it morphs into a productive workforce (Hewins-Maroney & Williams, 2013).

In this century diversity has great value to business worldwide (Howard & Ulferts, 2020). Howard and Ulferts (2020) explained that a diverse workforce is an important aspect of human resource management as businesses are changing globally. They also noted that cultural diversity has progressed in numerous organizations. On the contrary, the diversity in companies may not be inclusive of women in leadership and managerial roles as effectively as it could (Howard & Ulferts, 2020). Karim et al. (2019) ascertained that having a more populous diverse workforce has become more difficult for achieving company goals. According to Howard and Ulferts
(2020), aside from diversity bringing value in the structure of benefits, for instance, understanding the multicultural and international nature of the worldwide marketplace and connections to innovation, diversity will be expanding because of the many demographic factors in the recent years to come.

When businesses have a diverse work environment, it can improve their profits, sustainability, competitive advantage, as well as increase employee morale, customer satisfaction, employment pool, enhance decision-making, and community relationships (Guillaume et al., 2017). Guillaume et al. (2017) also explained that a diverse workforce is inclusive of individuals from different religions, races, gender, ethnicities, backgrounds, ethnicities, education, and other attributes. Working in an environment of multiple generations, genders, race, ethnicities, and different cultures can be frustrating and causes misunderstanding and often-times conflict within the workplace. This is due in part because the employees are not familiar with the groups that they are not a part of (Schullery, 2013).

Leaders and managers need to grasp an understanding of the cultural differences and the perspective and challenges to effectively communicate with and manage those they supervise (Sarros et al., 2014). Organizations can combat misunderstandings and conflict by implementing training and development initiatives, company-wide events that focus on awareness and knowledge not only for leaders and managers but the employees as well (Schullery, 2013). This can be beneficial to the organization and employees because it can lead to change in behaviors, strengthen the working relationships and increase wealth and knowledge among everyone (Menc & Lester, 2014). To make sure that every person is aware, respectful, and mindful of the differences in culture, managers, supervisors, and leaders themselves must first understand the differences and learn how to lead their employees appropriately and effectively (Al-Asfour &
Lettau, 2014). Everyone should know what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate behavior and how to interact with employees, co-workers, stakeholders, customers and the community (Norman-Major & Gooden, 2012).

Diversity and inclusion in the work environment is reflective of the current demographic, differences in cultural and social on a level dictated by society (Mateescu, 2017). Pleasant’s (2017) writing looked at the bringing together of employee engagement and workplace diversity and inclusion. Currently companies that are merging the two concepts have inspired research to analyze the disconnect between theory and practice (Pleasant, 2017). The study moves forward the views of practitioners as well as a necessary framework used to talk about the implications for human resource development (HRD) and additional studies. In the present sociopolitical environment, this subject matter of inquiry is possibly pertinent to discuss racism, xenophobia, and other forms of prejudice and discrimination in the workplace (Pleasant, 2017).

The examination of other literature identifies organizational performance as a common objective of employee engagement and workplace diversity and inclusion. As a result, Pleasant (2017) contends that organizational performance could be motivation for comprehending and using the personal interest of employees through connected employee engagement and diversity initiatives. The author states whether the two concepts are discussed in succession or together they both play an important part in HRD. Human Resources Development gives an appropriate platform to identify, reflect, and be proactive against practices that continue to marginalize minorities (Pleasant, 2017).

**Pros and Cons of Diversity**

Mateescu (2017) offered an analysis on the different current theoretical positions in the study on cultural diversity at the organizational level and practical implications coming from
these various kinds of studies. The analysis highlights two key types of positioning: the view of
the manager and necessary studies in diversity management. This literature discusses the pros
and cons of cultural diversity as it relates to organizational performance. The other case
discussed places emphasis on power relations, social exclusion, and the necessity to establish
inclusive professional environments. The author surmises that cultural diversity is the here and
now of organizational life, one that has created concerns regarding management, social exclusion
formed, and the development of an inclusive climate. Mateescu (2017) believed there are many
aspects beyond the various theoretical positions and practical implications of the concepts. The
author suggests there is a need for more involved research of diversity and diversity management
at the level of subject matter experts where many times there is a lack of skills, knowledge, and
structure required to address the matter.

Guillaume et al. (2017) offered insight on the positive and negative aspects of having a
diverse work environment. They surmise that a diverse workforce can aid in companies being
more creative, enhance decision-making, a bigger recruitment pool, and an increase to their
customer service base. Guillaume et al. (2017) noted that a diverse environment may not always
work because it can cause a decrease in employee morale, heightened conflict between workers,
and display below standard job performance. They indicated that research has deviated away
from straightforward main effect methods and began looking into factors that moderate the
results of diversity on social integration, well-being, and performance related factors. There is
plenty of research on the state among which diversity creates positive or negative outcomes, it is
still not clear which potential determinants make it work (Guillaume et al., 2017).

This literature provides several examples of predicted moderators actual evidence was
not found most times leaving managers and organizations confused about how to effectively
manage diversity. They performed manual searches of the most recent qualitative and quantitative reviews on group and organizational diversity to access the most important literature. Guillaume et al.’s (2017) literature affirms earlier results that main effect approaches are not fit to define the effects of workplace diversity on social integration, performance, and well-being related factors. Their results suggest that well-designed groups and organizations are necessary to handle diversity effectively.

**Leadership Diversity**

Baines (2020) noted in their study that leadership consists of a relationship between two or more individuals of a group, whilst a person is tasked with stimulating the skills and abilities of another and encouraging the actions of individuals to surpass the expectations of their role and position. Stewart and Perlow (2001) illustrated in their study showed that blacks are more likely to face adversity as they move into higher positions within organizations. Such patterns make it unlikely that employee demographics will be representative of the communities in which organizations are located within the United States. According to Bleich (2017), when stereotyping is present it leads to delineative factors that prevent or promote leadership capacity—it foreshadows leaders’ abilities and performance.

Samdanis and Ozbilgin (2020) discussed in their study an atypical leader and typical leader and how it can contribute to workforce diversity. An atypical leader is defined as a person who is rarely associated with leadership roles and positions arising from non-privileged, non-dominant, underrepresented, disadvantaged, or unique demographic backgrounds such as women, ethnic-minority, lower socio-economic backgrounds, and other groups (Alter, 2017). A typical leader is one who hails from socio-economic elites in Western societies that privilege white men, middle-class, and are well-educated (Nkomo & Al Ariss, 2014; Rosette et al., 2008).
Diversity in the boardroom is a much sought after social project (Glass & Cook, 2018; Hafsi & Turgut, 2013; Torchia et al., 2011) the success of which is still inconsistent and sketchy across numerous countries and businesses (Azmat & Rentschler, 2017; Kakabadse et al., 2015; Sayce & Ozbilgin, 2014; Terjesen et al., 2009). Samdanis and Ozbilgin (2020) further explained that persons from disparate backgrounds have different levels of atypicality based upon a distinctive mix of status beliefs about their social characteristics such as gender, class, race, religion, and other characteristics. Every atypical leader does not possess the same disadvantages, as some of the individuals may be faced with inequalities due to a blend of demographic factors, known as intersectionality (Carrim & Nkomo, 2016; Ozbilgin et al., 2011), while others may have fewer levels of atypicality.

Having the presence of an atypical individual in the midst of leadership is most times seen as a sign of robust levels of workforce diversity and workplace democracy (Alter, 2017). Recently diversity has picked up speed (Baehr & Gordon, 2017), workplaces should begin to see greater opportunities for persons from atypical backgrounds to progress to leadership roles and positions. On the contrary, the majority of C-suite leadership are still occupied by the dominant group of white males from elite socio-economic backgrounds (Danieli & Wheeler, 2006; Dobbin & Kalev, 2016; Lumby, 2006). In spite of numerous organizations making a commitment to diversity, equality, and inclusion, the top leadership of the biggest U.S. corporations listed in the Fortune 500 remain dominated by privileged white men (Cook & Glass, 2015; Glass & Cook, 2018). An illustration of this would be in 2018, only three black CEOs were running Fortune 500 companies, reduced from a total of eight, three years prior. Women serving at the helm of a Fortune 500 company went from 24 as of May 2018, a 25% reduction since June 2017 (Green et al., 2018, n.p.).
Liu (2018) presented there are organizations that are open to gender diversity and look to include both males and females in the decision making process for the organization and offering advancement opportunities. They also noted other organizations are not open to include both sexes in the decision making for the organization, and they support gender bias in the workplace. For the most part gender differences in businesses bring value and different viewpoints to the organization. Emotional and physical characteristics are both associated with gender differences. These characteristics influence the behavior of both sexes in the workplace (Liu, 2018). It has been said that women are more emotional than men, and they both have a different perspective on matters (Liu, 2018).

Organizational Commitment to Diversity (C-suite and Human Resources)

Ng and Sears (2017) found one of the key issues that organizations are faced with is managing a growing diverse workforce. They note CEO commitment is seen as being pivotal to organizational diversity engagement, but not much is known about how they prioritize and put in place major organization leaders to execute diversity management. These authors indicate that despite the fact that research shows that equal employment/affirmative action (EE/AA) laws encourage organizational practices, similarly minimal research has been initiated to understand the role organizational leaders play in promoting diversity management in organizations. Ng and Sears (2017) presented that CEO’s state that diversity is important, but their words are empty, and most times do not demonstrate actual diversity efforts and outcomes. Some are just merely complying with EEO/AA laws.

Ng and Sears’ (2017) research looked at the processes by which CEO’s commitment to diversity translates into the execution of diversity management practices. They also looked into the moderating role of a CEO’s moral values in engaging in workplace diversity management.
These authors use a theoretical framework to help them draw from literature to suggest a sequential mediating process of how CEO’s communicate beliefs and priorities relating to diversity and how managers decipher the communication to execute diversity management in organizations. Their paper focused on human resource managers since they have the responsibility of executing organizational diversity efforts.

The C-suite leadership are prone to place their focal point on the company’s fundamentals and contending with strategic matters paramount to the company’s entire performance (Ng & Sears, 2020). Contrarily, it is essential for human resources personnel to contend with numerous competing internal company’s needs and are most times designated with executing different policies inclusive of orders to comply with Equal Employment Opportunity/Affirmative Action laws (Durrani & Rajagopal, 2016). C-suite leadership and human resources personnel both play an integral role in creating and executing diversity management initiatives (Ng & Sears, 2020). Dobbin and Kalev (2016) noted that provided the minimal part that Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action laws play in encouraging workplace diversity, they proposed enlisting managers as “diversity champions” to aid in enhancing organizational diversity.

The organizational top leaders are the decision-makers, establish the corporate agenda, and designate the resources that are necessary to cultivate diversity management (Cox & Blake, 1991). According to Ng and Sears (2020), top management additionally act as representative leaders by standing up for the necessary changes, present as role models for the actions needed for change and help with the work of progressing the company forward. Robinson and Dechant (1997) discussed that it is paramount for the C-suite leadership to show their support as a means for the company to promote the corporate agenda on diversity management. They further stated
that diversity management needs a long-term commitment carried out by the company and C-suite leadership commitment and support are imperative to receiving and keeping managerial attention and attaining the financial resources necessary to maintain it on the corporate agenda. Ng and Sears (2020) continued to analyze in their study that C-Suite leadership commitment “makes us do what we do and continue doing, even if the payoffs are not obvious.” At the same time if leadership commitment to diversity is inadequate, this may also have a domino effect across the organization. An example provided by Ng and Sears (2020) is it may perhaps devalue the understood reliability of managers in effectuating diversity practices, consequently impeding their enactment.

Although top leaders play the main role in actuating and favoring change, human resources personnel play an integral role in championing and executing change (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Diversity management approaches in particular Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action hiring decisions can conceivably be politically and emotionally charged, and leaders who are given the responsibility of execution most times encounter considerable push back, including in some situations, extreme negative reactions from both employees and other managerial staff (Zanoni & Janssens, 2004). Therefore, HR personnel may receive their guidance from c-suite leaders and use discretion in how they effectuate diversity management practices dependent upon the understandings of their top management’s commitment to diversity (Zanoni & Janssens, 2004).

The leadership in human resources have the duties and responsibilities with putting in place the organizational strategies, have authority to assemble resources, craft policies, and execute diversity management plans (Guillaume et al., 2014; Piderit & Ashford, 2003). An example of this would be HR personnel can implement policies and practices with respect to the
hiring and promotion of women and minorities (D’Netto & Sohal, 1999; Ng & Sears, 2010) and create a culture that values and cultivates individuals from diverse backgrounds (Shen et al., 2009). Additionally, human resources personnel are at liberty to ascertain and evaluate which policies and practices are most functional in developing a climate of inclusion (Guillaume et al., 2013; Kalev et al., 2006). Kirton and Greene (2010) presented that human resources leadership are more likely to accept diversity initiatives and look at them as a priority for the organization when they ascertain favorable indications from top leadership expressing their commitment. In this respect, the amount of diversity plans that are put in place is dependent upon the extent that human resources leadership understands their C-suite leadership’s dedication to diversity management.

Ng and Sears (2020) concluded that top leadership’s words and actions are significant when creating the environment for executing diversity initiatives, however, their human resources managers’ elucidation of these words and actions additionally are key in deciding whether diversity management initiatives are in fact executed. Despite the fact that having a diverse workforce has the propensity to benefit the company financially, it does necessitate a great amount of resource investment such as time and monetary commitment before the benefits of a diverse workforce comes to fruition (Robinson & Dechant, 1997). Consequently, the C-suite leadership who think less positively about workforce diversity may display a lack of motivation toward executing diversity practices unless they see themselves as being morally obligated to do so (Ng & Sears, 2020). Furthermore, Ng and Sears (2020) noted that both top leadership and human resources personnel play an integral part in contributing to the execution of diversity practices. Others who have conducted research on this subject have indicated that more emphasis should be placed on the role of HR and line managers in executing diversity management
initiatives (Abramovic & Traavik, 2017; Guillaume et al., 2014; Tatli & Ozbilgin, 2009; Tatli et al., 2015). It is imperative for top management to undoubtedly exhibit pro-diversity behaviors for their employees to support these efforts and for diversity initiatives to be executed (Ng & Sears, 2020).

African American Females in Leadership

Businesses are small-scale versions of the societies or communities in which they are set in, and work cannot be comprehended outside the environment of the subcultural realm in which it is established (Dombeck, 2003). Systematized influences spanning economic sectors, both private and public, most times reflect the fabrics of societies, beliefs, and unease including varying results for persons based on but not limited to representatives of gender, race, ethnicity, or class categories (Showunmi et al., 2016). Therefore, the hierarchy of companies are thought of as gendered, racialized, and classed which is more apparent at higher levels (Acker, 2006). Women especially black women encounter the glass ceiling phenomenon while the power elite in corporate America, academia, political arena, and military branches in the United States are still composed of mostly white males (Eagly & Chin, 2010; Thomas, 2003). This pattern is not only observed in the United States, but it occurs in the United Kingdom as well (Showunmi et al., 2016). There are only 17.3% of women who occupied board dictatorship in 100 of the biggest corporations in the Financial Times and Stock Exchange (Sealy & Vinnicombe, 2013). The percentage is lower for minorities at 4.1% (Annesley, 2010).

A growing number of research conducted outlined more similarities than dissimilarities in leadership style amidst males and females (Seo et al., 2017). Nevertheless, according to Seo et al. (2017), the obvious hierarchical gender bias at the top management levels continues to be a standard occurrence for differing organizations. During the years 1970 to 2012, the percentage of
women’s total employment rose from 37% to 47% (Seo et al., 2017). Data shown from the U.S. Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics indicated that the proportion of women “working in management positions” increased from 17% in 1971 to 51.4% (Powell, 2014). This enormous shift in the workforce is indicative of a significant societal progression for women’s standing and roles in organizations, on the contrary women continue to be underrepresented at executive and board level positions (Baumgartner & Schneider, 2010; Metz & Kulik, 2014; Voss & Speere, 2014). For example, within the Fortune 500 companies, 14.6% of executive officer positions are held by women (Catalyst, 2013) also, in the S&P 500 companies, 23 of the companies’ top positions are occupied by 4.6% women (Catalyst, 2016). In addition to increased profitability, organizations with more gender diversity at top leadership positions are more seemingly to provide role models for women with potential to hold senior management positions, enabling them to fill looming shortfalls of talent, retaining, or attracting the most qualified individuals to occupy leadership positions (Burke & Vinnicombe, 2005; Desvaux et al., 2008).

The market for top notch qualified talent will become intense in the next 20 years owing to the forecasted lack of skilled labor in all developed countries (Burke & Major, 2014; Hewlett & Rashid, 2012). To appeal to and retain talent, companies must not gloss over the significance of professional advancement and the progression of women in management positions (Burke & Major, 2014; Burke & Vinnicombe, 2005; Clarke, 2011). Therefore, attaining top leadership positions for more women ought to be regarded as a strategic human resource development approach that plays a part in the company’s competitive advantage (Seo et al., 2017).

The rising diversification of the world economy has brought about an extraordinary flourishing market and financial opportunity (Holder et al., 2015). Minority groups have made great strides in the labor force since civil rights laws made segregation and discriminatory acts
unlawful (Hewlett et al., 2012). The rampant growth observed in the United States labor force has been labeled the feminization of the labor force (Taylor & Kennedy, 2003) and the shifting color of the workforce (Sue et al., 1998). It is anticipated that in the United States between the years 2030 and 2050, minorities will account for a numerical majority (Sue & Sue, 2008).

According to Catalyst (2013), approximately 60% of Black females were employed in the work force and forecasts signified almost a 19% rise of Black females in the U.S. work force between the years 2000 and 2020.

Regardless of the rising diversification in places of employment, minorities remain underrepresented at the executive level positions in corporate (Holder et al., 2015). This is especially noticeable with professional African American females, who represent only 1% of U.S. corporate leadership (Taylor & Nivens, 2011). According to Holder et al. (2015), Black women personify a significant and burgeoning source of talent for corporate entities and have been adequately represented in management positions that are entry and middle level.

Nevertheless, as African American females climb the corporate ladder, they face serious oppositions (Executive Leadership Council, 2008) that restrict access to C-suite leadership positions and their overall career progression (Holder et al., 2015).

According to Worters (2020), people have recognized that women are underrepresented in particular areas of the insurance industry. Also, various positions will often see more males instead of females, specifically in top management roles. As people are leaving their positions for different reasons, organizations should prepare for talent replacement (Worters, 2020). Data were provided by Worters (2020) from a 2018 report by McKinsey & Company, “Closing the Gap: Leadership Perspectives on Promoting Women in Financial Services,” studied 12 female executives and over 14,000 persons at approximately 40 financial organizations. The study found
although the females surpassed males at entry-level positions in the insurance industry, their existence in the labor force is much smaller at close to the top tier of the organigram. Women account for 56% of entry-level positions, however only 30% of the vice presidents, and 18% of the C-suite leadership (Worters, 2020). Worters (2020) also stated that 12% of women of color occupied entry-level positions and a meager 3% of this group hold C-suite leadership roles.

While progress has been made with respect to the number of women leading Fortune 500 companies, they need to be prepared for top leadership roles (Worters, 2020).

**Black Feminist Theory/Critical Race Theory**

Black feminism was not just a response to the racism Black women encountered in the Women’s Liberation Movement in the 1960s, opposite to ordinary views (Acuff, 2018). It was born out of the necessity for Black women to “ameliorate conditions for empowerment on their own terms” (Yee, 1992) and to respond to the intersections of race and gender inside the forms of suppression (Acuff, 2018). Acuff (2018) explained that throughout the modern Civil Rights Movement and the Women’s Liberation Movement in the 1960s, debate about Black Feminist Theory became established due to Black women being expected to elect to oppose either racism or chauvinism. The intersectionality of both race and gender was ignored, and Black women had no certain place in any one of the mainstream resistance movements (Acuff, 2018). Moreover, even though the feminist crusade in the United States was conceived out of the necessity to acknowledge suppression encountered by all women, the objectives and approaches for mainstream feminist resistance wound up in essence addressing just the demands of White females (Collins, 1990; Patterson et al., 2016; Taylor, 1998).

According to Davis (2020), feminist researchers have steadily articulated their concerns regarding the depoliticization of intersectionality since it has moved from its originating point in
U.S. Black feminist theory to the coast of Europe. They also stated that the matter for which the theory was purposed has been shifted, that Black feminist have been omitted from the conversation, and white European feminists have commandeered all of the credit for intersectionality as theory. Intersectionality has been changed into a result of the neoliberal academy instead of the aid for social justice it was intended to be (Davis, 2020).

It has been debated that in the United States, Title IX, despite its purpose and obligations to acknowledge gender difference, has essentially altered societal racial disparities for African American women and women of color as a result of concerns of racial marginalization (Rankin-Wright et al., 2020). Critical race theory (CRT) and black feminism are linked as they think in and between “race, gender, and other attributes; the acceptance and comprehension of the concurrence of suppressions (Rankin-Wright et al., 2020). Intersectionality is rooted in black feminism and is both a result and display of a CRT approach (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Collins et al. (1989 as cited by Rankin-Wright et al., 2020) created the term intersectionality to highlight the intersections and salience of race and gender with similar characteristics and forms of suppression, camouflaged by structural and institutional power.

Research has constructed CRT as a powerful mechanism for grasping and dealing with matters of race, racial disparities, and whiteness in UK sport policy and practice (Burdsey, 2011; Hylton, 2018). Black feminists have opposed prevalent racial and feminist debates for ignoring the centers of white privilege and gender privilege, overlooking dissimilarity and diversity, therefore generalizing the black experience and women’s experience (Rankin-Wright et al., 2020). Black feminist theory has provided the tool of intersectionality to current feminist movements to aid in fighting engaged systems of suppression (Kupupika, 2021). Kupupika (2021) believed that regardless of this immense offering, intersectionality has become totally
separated from its Black feminist roots. This is major because in the absence of heavy involvement with Black feminist legal theory, intersectionality is without its revolutionary potential (Kupupika, 2021).

**Perceived Hindrances to the Climb**

Schwanke (2013) indicated in their study that the “good old boy” standard has been a long-standing trend that keeps women from advancing in positions that helps to eliminate the gap between men and women in higher positions. Entry level positions tend to be occupied more by minorities whereas upper management or executive level positions tend to be occupied by non-minorities. Baert et al. (2016) stated that “sticky floor” is when men are more likely compared to women to be offered interviews for jobs, promotional opportunities, or advancements.

Racism has been referenced as a key factor in clarifying the underrepresentation of Black females in leadership positions in corporate America (Holder et al., 2015). Present day racism is most likely to be conveyed as hidden, roundabout, and more obscure, therefore developing issues in recognizing and avoiding its happening (Dovidio et al., 2002) while continuing to affect and suppress persons in profound manners (Sue et al., 2009; Torres et al., 2010). A recurring and often communicated form of aversive racism is racial microaggressions-brief and ordinary everyday verbal, behavioral, and societal humiliation, whether intended or unintended, that convey antagonistic, disparaging, or negative racial insults to the target individual or group (Sue et al., 2007). The progress and financial viability of organizations is dependent upon their potentiality to successfully manage a diverse workforce that enables the same access and opportunity (Stevens et al., 2008).

According to Holder et al. (2015), African American women represent the greatest female minority population to obtain their college degrees. They also provided data that
illustrated since the 1970s the number of African American women getting their bachelor’s degrees had increased by over 50%. The number acquiring master’s degrees rose almost 150% from 1991 to 2001 from 10,700 to just under 27,000—and obtained professional and graduate level skyrocketed nearly 220%. Besides representing a crucial source of talent in corporate America, African American females, on account of their diversity in being members of two characteristic groups, develop advanced flexible skills that have been shown to be a key factor of successful leadership (Holder et al., 2015). Still some organizations are slow to employ African American women to positions of elite status and high visibility most times due to the perceptions that they do not have the skills, leadership ability, acumen, and motivation to be effective in the C-suite (Holder et al., 2015).

The presence of race-based stereotypes in the work environment can negatively affect African American females’ profession and relationship with associates at work (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). Reynolds-Dobbs et al. (2008) stated that with the intersection of gender and race, African American women have been characterized by antagonistic stereotypes such as Mammy, the self-sacrificing and supportive female. Current stereotypes like super-woman or crazy woman with an attitude also create obstacles for African American women in the labor force. Even though this group may be regarded as capable, African American females may also be characterized as angry and aggressive which are not attributes that will ascent them to the C-suite (Holder et al., 2015). They also presented African American females encountering the perception of not being intelligent which can sabotage their integrity.

One of the key factors addressed by Holder et al. (2015) at the conclusion of their study was accountability. They believed that having accountability is vital in establishing an inclusive company culture. Diversity management needs to be one of the main competencies used to
elevate management’s performance and advice of promotion and compensation decisions. Organization should stress that successfully managing and developing a work environment is a requisite role of leadership (Holder et al., 2015). The approach to diversity management and transforming the culture of a company is not to establish quotas but to require managers to know the employees in their divisions and have solid plans for cultivating talent (Holder et al., 2015).

Marginalization

According to Xiang et al. (2017), marginalization is based on biases, stereotypes, traditions, cultures, and other reasons. They also discussed in their study that many women encounter biases and barriers throughout their career especially as they aspire to work in higher-level positions. Women may have equal education, knowledge, competency, skills, experience, and qualifications as men however, it is not enough to break down the barriers to afford women the opportunity at advancement. In addition to the United States experiencing underrepresentation, women in other countries worldwide are faced with marginalization in leadership positions, politics, higher education, and other occupations with top-leadership titles and positions (Xiang et al., 2017).

The marginalization of African American females in executive leadership is harming professional and company growth. Graham et al. (2017) noted in their research that women fall behind men in holding management jobs which has a negative impact on women’s career path and organization performance. The underrepresentation of women, especially African American women, is an issue because it impedes the development of a diverse labor force and limits the chances for African American women to become members of executive leadership in many industries (Nelson, 2016). According to Graham et al. (2017), advancing to a management
position is an important pivotal point in a woman’s career, however women still fall behind greatly in terms of them occupying management positions in the United States.

Graham et al. (2017) also stated there are several factors that may play a role in whether women hold managerial positions. In various areas such as economics, sociology, psychology, industrial relations, and human resource management the literature evidence was gathered supporting both labor demand and labor supply related expectations for the marginalization of women in management positions (Graham et al., 2017). Graham et al. (2017) also explained that demand-side is defined as factors that consist of labor market statuses and organizational influences in particular gender related workplace inequity. On the contrary, supply-side elucidations for the absence of women in management roles refer to the distinction in men’s and women’s human assets and job preferences, elements that put constraints on the available “pipeline” of women into the managerial tiers (Graham et al., 2017).

Women encompass a considerable segment of the workforce and middle management (Baker & Cangemi, 2016). They present in their study that 51.4% of management and professional positions are composed of women. Women also comprise 46.8% of the U.S. labor force and earned 57% of all bachelor’s degrees, and 60% of all master’s degrees conferred (Baker & Cangemi, 2016). Nonetheless, women are only representative of 18.7% of the U.S. Congress, 16.9% of Fortune 500 board seats, and only 4% of CEOs in Fortune 500 companies (Baker & Cangemi, 2016).

Labor demand and labor supply are both vital to gaining an understanding of women’s ability to climb the corporate ladder, an organization’s Equal Employment Opportunity responsibility structure for monitoring women’s representation and supporting women’s advancement into management roles (Graham et al., 2017). They also noted how crucial it is to
comprehend establishment level growth or lack thereof in gender diversity in management. More so, the interest lies in where the company’s job hierarchy does the responsibility for Equal Employment Opportunity end results rest (Graham et al., 2017).

Graham et al. (2017) analyzed two management structures that may sway gender diversity in management positions. The structures were having the presence of an executive leader from human resources on the executive leadership team or top management team to potentially improve diversity, but which could alternatively function purely symbolically—and the percentage of women in management (Graham et al., 2017). Graham et al. (2017) demonstrated a strong, positive link between a prior unexplained measure of dedication to diversity—the hierarchical rank of the person attesting to the organization required confidential federal EEO-1 report and women’s representation in management. Although they mention the structure and responsibility of an organization’s Equal Employment Opportunity, for monitoring the advancement of women in managerial positions, the findings are in contrast of the customary acumen in that Equal Employment Opportunity Commission regulations are not strong enough to gender diversity.

Xiang et al. (2017) explained in their research, unlike the United States, European women hold a higher percentage in the political arena. Unfortunately, the women still lag behind the men. In 2008, Europe was working towards gender equality and equal representation. However, due to the different issues impacting women leadership, it was not reached. The women in Mexico are limited in the leadership positions that can be occupied. Women cannot defeat men who have dominant roles in politics because they do not have enough women in executive leadership to overcome the men.
Xiang et al. (2017) also presented that Australia and New Zealand continue to think of men as “natural leaders” and women as having only the skills to be “wives” and “mothers.” The reason China’s underrepresentation of women is so prevalent is because of their belief and behavior system. For example, the people in China believe that the younger females are viewed as not having enough experience and lack preparedness to take on such a great role. Middle-aged females are viewed as being “tied down by family demand” which would prevent them from being totally committed and focused to the company and position.

Xiang et al. (2017) noted that women in Africa have several contributing factors that are preventing them from seeking higher-level positions. Some of the factors are “culture, social tradition, education, discrimination, gender-stereotype, and other factors.” African women are discouraged from pursuing any sort of career, especially one in leadership. The women are persuaded or urged to strive towards being a good wife and mother and nothing else.

**The Glass Ceiling**

Males continue to be overrepresented in top level positions with influence, more recently there has been a continuous change, as it is noted that women are breaking through the glass ceiling (Morgenroth et al., 2020). For instance, while females comprised 9.5% of Fortune 500 company boards in 1995 (Catalyst, 1995) this figure increased to 22.5% in 2018 (Catalyst, 2019). Likewise, the number of females on organizational boards in Europe rose from 13.9% in 2011 to 33.6% in 2018 (EWOB, 2018). The same movement can be seen in the number of females in legislatures globally has increased from 11.69% in 1997 to 24.58% in 2019 (The World Bank, 2019). Regardless of the strides made, study shows that the women who do not break through the glass ceiling may be more likely to discover themselves on a glass cliff- thus their leadership role can be viewed as being somewhat risky or precarious in comparison with that of their male peer
(Ryan & Haslam, 2005, 2007). For instance, it was found that women were unfairly likely to be designated to leadership roles in times of quandary, whether that be a company or political one. If companies in the Fortune 500 or Fortune 100 were performing poorly, women were more likely than men to be appointed to a top leadership or board position (Morgenroth et al., 2020).

Women encounter challenges and roadblocks in an effort to achieve top level managerial positions in comparison to the male counterparts (Sharma & Kaur, 2019). They have difficulty attempting to attain equal representation in corporate America and top level management roles. This is classified as ‘glass ceiling’ (Sharma & Kaur, 2019). Their research examined the level of glass ceiling for women (GCW) with regards to its three major hindrances, which are, personal, organizational, and societal amongst women. The difficulty that women face to achieve a major representation at the level of senior management still continues in this present day even though there has been marked improvement recognized with the advancement of many women in the corporate arena and changes in the employment policies geared toward gender equality (Sharma & Kaur, 2019). Yet, the challenges and roadblocks endured by women to achieve top level management positions are a worldwide phenomenon. In comparison to men, women are typically employed at an entry-level and lower-level management positions (Mohammadkhani & Gholamzadeh, 2016), the confidence of women being adequately represented in the workforce is barely present at the higher management levels, and this phenomenon has been coined as the glass ceiling, an obstacle so vague and transparent, yet so strong that it impedes women from progressing in the top elite hierarchy (Morrison & Von Glinow, 1990).

Glass ceiling concepts are critical because they may hinder women and possibly other underrepresented groups from pursuing and acquiring promotions (Barelka & Downes, 2019). Basically this turns into a self-fulfilling prophecy as concepts of glass ceilings quell the inspiration
to pursue promotional opportunities, which then results in a reduction in promotions and a rise in glass ceiling concepts (Barelka & Downes, 2019). Catalyst (1990, 1996, 2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2004) noted that the main components discovered as resulting in the glass ceiling concepts are futile behavior of male peers; unwelcoming corporate culture, need for judicious career development and structured job assignments; need for mentoring; insufficient opportunities from managers; social marginalization; and stereotyping and preconceptions. Comparatively, Afza and Newaz (2008) proposed that management perceptions, the work environment, work-life discord, sexual harassment, and company policy are attributes which has an impact on glass ceiling perceptions.

Studies have noted that even though women have made significant strides in the workforce because of equity programs, increased educational levels, and emergent work/life policies, they still encounter the ‘glass ceiling’ concerning progressing into managerial positions (Ng & Sears, 2017). According to Ng and Sears (2017), one of the main reasons for this inequality is that women face the biggest obstacle at the lower levels of the organizational ranks, where they are considerably unlikely to be promoted than their male peers. Hindrances to promotion at the lowest level of the hierarchy are especially troubling given that progression to lower-level and middle-level positions is key for advancing to higher level management positions (Ng & Sears, 2017). Ng and Sears (2017) explained that many researchers have discovered numerous barriers encountering women in progressing into leadership roles. They noted at an individual level, gender-role social interaction, lower confidence and assuredness than men, work/life discord, a need for family and social support, inadequate role models, and insufficient mentors and career supports critical for advancement impedes women’s promotion into managerial roles (Ng & Sears, 2017). On an organization level, attributing factors that are
barriers that hinder the advancement of women are organizational culture such as negativism and biases against women; gender categorizing of leadership positions, no organizational support, and insufficient human resources policies, procedures, and practices in favor of women (Ng & Sears, 2017). They concluded that even though organizations use discretion regarding hiring and promoting women, they are also bound by the outside environment and company particulars.

**Diversity Management**

Workforce diversity emphasizes all differences that encompass the individual, in particular culture, ethnicity, nationality, age, religion, disability, gender, education, and beliefs, and all differences that are recognized in every work environment (Edwin, 2001). A broader definition emphasizes the differences between persons with respect to any personal characteristic that results in how others perceive one another (Brimhall et al., 2014). Thus, diversity management is defined as knowing that there are differences amongst individuals and that these differences, if correctly managed, are an asset to performing work more effectively and efficiently (Futunes & Mykletun, 2007). To put it another way, diversity management incorporates a human resource strategy to successfully manage a diverse workforce (Hasson Barrett, 2012).

Dennissen et al. (2020) referred to diversity management as specific programs, policies and procedures that businesses have crafted and executed to manage a diverse workforce successfully and to support organizational equality. Although diversity management is popular, the success of these practices is understudied with the exception of data representation of marginalized groups in leadership roles (Kalev et al., 2006; Nkomo & Hoobler, 2014). Businesses are likely to institute similar practices like mentoring programs, diversity training, and networks without specific circumstances. This is suggestive that there is little difference in
diversity management practices as if “one size fits all” (Bishop et al., 2015; Foldy, 2002; Janssens & Zanoni, 2014). Many, diversity management approaches’ focal point is on single identity groups such as women ethnic minorities, and other groups without probing the heterogeneity within these groups (Tatli & Ozbilgin, 2012).

Researchers have emphasized that a lot of businesses keep their diversity management practices from prior years without much consideration on how minimal advancement has been accomplished (Nkomo & Hoobler, 2014). One possible reason for the minimal accomplishment might be that diversity management practices are still strongly rooted in identity-based initiatives geared toward raising the number of historically marginalized social classifications in companies (Kalev et al., 2006; Nkomo & Hoobler, 2014). As a result, most of the studies on diversity management practices usually focuses on the successfulness as it relates to data outcomes of these identity-based approaches in particular diversity training, mentoring programs, and networks (Tatli & Ozbilgin, 2012). Nkomo and Hoobler (2014) and Tatli and Ozbilgin (2012) examined that in a single identity group (e.g., studies addressing gender inequality and the promotion of women), women are most times thought of as a single homogenous category. They also assessed that single identity methods disregard the difficult reality of several differences and inequalities. An example provided demonstrated that diversity management approaches achieve different results for mixed groups of individuals in US businesses: just as white females greatly benefited from networking programs, black females do not, and black males are even subjugated by these programs (Kalev et al., 2006).

There is increasing proof of the impact of diversity on businesses as well as employee performance (Jauhari & Singh, 2013), diversity management has steadily acquired a lot of attention in both academic and practitioner literature (Gilbert et al., 1999; Lorbiecki & Jack,
Kundu et al. (2017) discussed in their study that maintaining a diverse workforce not only provides enormous opportunities to organizations but also brings possible challenges to persons for their possible contributions in attaining the organizations agenda. Kundu et al. (2017) also provided insight on the fact that individual personal growth, self-esteem, morale, and engagement toward the company is enhanced by diversity management, and these are some attributes that contribute to positive attitudes and behaviors. The effect of diversity management on employee motivation will affirm its utility as a major human resource initiative to boost employee performance (Kundu et al., 2017). Additionally, in a world that is competitive, retaining prospective employees is a major issue that numerous organizations are facing (Kundu & Gahlawat, 2016). People who are advocates of diversity management have opined that diversity initiatives may aid in retaining employees with the company (Choi, 2009; McKay et al., 2007).

Human resource productivity is one of the key aspects in the resistive business and economy (Ardakani et al., 2016). Contrarily, workforce diversity is one of the greatest challenges of the past 100 years; and probably for managers, managing diversity is more paramount than pursuing diversity to optimize human resource productivity (Ardakani et al., 2016). Human resource productivity is defined as maximizing the use of resources, human resources, and to gauge by scientific method to minimize costs and enhance the satisfaction of employees, managers and consumers (Talebi et al., 2012). Ardakani et al. (2016) explained that inattention to human resource productivity not only diminishes the performance and efficiency of the company, but also raises wastage, collisions, attrition, displeasure, and employee misconduct. They further noted that leadership must be cognizant of the barriers to increase human resource
productivity. When managers enhance their awareness from human resource diversity and differences, job satisfaction will improve and attrition will decrease (Ardakani et al., 2016).

Davis et al. (2016) identified the denominator and understanding of managers in Australia regarding workforce diversity management (WDM) and organizational practices and implementation of WDM. These authors utilized a questionnaire in their quantitative research to obtain information for the study. The self-administered questionnaire was sent to a total of 650 managers in Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane, Australia. There were 325 human resource managers and 325 managers classified as other.

The findings of the study indicated that workforce diversity was not well understood or appreciated particularly by the group categorized as other managers. The study also revealed that the organizations seem to not prioritize work diversity management and the tiers of senior management involvement with the topic are tentative. The authors noted the review of statistical data emphasized significant differences of opinions throughout the surveyed group. Their paper explained the gap in the literature by analyzing contemporary attributes and practices as it relates to workforce development management in Australian organizations. This gave the initial empirical comparison between human resources and other managers on the topic. The authors indicated additional research is needed to gain a better understanding of the cause and effect relationships relating to the results.

**Diversity Training**

Many times diversity training is conducted as a result of an incident that has occurred. Diversity training as training geared toward encouraging positive intergroup interactions, minimizing prejudice and discrimination, and improving the skills, knowledge, and motivation of participants to interact with other diverse individuals (Rawski & Conroy, 2020). A diversity
training program has the potential to encourage a team environment, working collaboratively together, improve interpersonal skills, and make employees feel as though they are respected and valued at work (Nishina et al., 2019).

Rawski and Conroy (2020) recognized the urgent need for more clarity of the effectiveness of diversity training so that organizations can conduct diversity training programs that encourages positive intergroup interactions. These authors discussed the importance of employers as outlets for talking about social issues which include but are not limited to sexual harassment, sex-and-race based discrimination, and the lack of respect. Movements such as #MeToo and #TimesUp raises awareness about sexual assault, harassment, and inequality issues at work. Even most recently #BlackLivesMatter movement has raised awareness of the continuing racial inequality. They also noted that these movements can impact the workplace environment causing contentious behavior and disharmony among workers.

Dobbin and Kalev (2016) presented the complexities of why diversity training is not successful. They found that almost all Fortune 500 organizations conduct diversity training and approximately 65% of 670 colleges and universities have training as well for their faculty. However, research conducted as far back as the 1930s, says that anti bias training does not diminish bias, alter behavior, or change the workplace environment. These authors have been talking to different organizations regarding this research for over 10 years, conveying the message that diversity training is costly and not the most effective program around.

They discussed the perplexities of employers if they discontinue diversity training programs. Employers fear lawsuits and litigation. Although colleges and universities mandate students and faculty to participate in diversity training, studies indicate they have the worst performance. Consultants have indicated diversity training as necessary for enhancing diversity.
Corporate attorneys have suggested that the training is imperative for avoiding lawsuits and plaintiffs have requested it in the majority of discrimination settlements. In their research approximately 65% of human resource personnel indicated that diversity training does not have positive effects and countless field studies have found no effect of training on women or minorities careers or managerial diversity.

Dobbin and Kalev (2016) provided research that proposes why diversity training may not be successful. The first reason is short-term training or educational interventions in general do not change people and their behaviors. Second, the training is viewed as activating stereotypes. The third reason proposes that diversity training encourages impractical confidence and discriminative programs enabling employees to become comfortable with their own biases. A fourth reason for an unsuccessful diversity training program is some believe that the training leaves whites feeling excluded, and the final reason is that based on organizational research, individual’s rebel against efforts to control them. Their research findings illustrated that employers usually pair the training with the incorrect complementary measures. The best measures are those that involve decision makers in solving the problems themselves. The research also notes the key to having effective training is to include it as a larger program of change.

Fujimoto and Hartel (2017) discussed ways to conquer the weaknesses of diversity training programs. The aim of their paper is to theorize an organizational diversity learning framework which shows an organizational intervention for employees’ joint decision-making process with other employees from different statuses, functions, and identities. In their literature they review the major weaknesses of diversity training programs as it relates to group composition, design, content, and evaluation. Next it acquires the major fundamentals of
diversity learning, integration and learning perspectives, and the major practices informed by deliberative democratic theories to explain the organizational diversity learning framework. Finally, the literature will exhibit a table of the approach compared against the weaknesses of the diversity training program and talk about practical and theoretical contributions, including directions for future research.

These authors provided some major practical and simple implications in this paper to manage diversity learning. The first practical implication is a framework that provides an approach to an organization wide diversity learning through interconnecting networks within the confines of the organization, which is intended to minimize the upper level of the organization decision making. The structure for the second implication is ingrained in the organizational decision-making process making the learning for employees relevant to main activities contributing to diversity learning and organizational growth. Finally, the structure gives an initial model for shifting employees’ diversity and learning in work and applying their learned behavior to interacting with different groups.

With social implications, Fujimoto and Hartel (2017) noted that work environments globally are becoming more diverse, and at the same time, the gap and tension among demographic representation in upper and lower ranks is getting larger. The authors worked collaboratively with other authors who have championed the need to move past diversity training programs to create the organizational diversity learning structure for important co-participation of employees who do not have the same status, functions, and identities. These authors stated in this literature that there have not been other conceptual papers written that explains the diversity inclusive decision-making process in a workplace environment. They developed the
organizational diversity learning structure based on diversity learning, organization diversity integration and learning perspectives, and deliberative democracy practices.

**Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action**

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) is a federal organization that imposes federal laws that forbids employment discrimination and protects job applicants and employees against discrimination when it brings about unfair treatment based on an individual’s race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, or genetic information (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2021). Another caveat to this law imposed by EEOC is Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII). This particular law makes it unlawful to discriminate against individuals on the premise of race, color, religion, national origin, or sex (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2021). The Equal Pay Act of 1963 (EPA) is one of a few laws within the Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The EPA makes it wrongful to pay different wages to men and women if they are doing equal work in the same workplace (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2021).

Kurtulus (2016) provided an historical overview of Affirmative Action. The main objective of Affirmative Action legislation is to broaden the representation of minorities and females throughout employers within the United States. In 1961, then president, John F. Kennedy made Affirmative Action in the workplaces a federal law and instituted Executive Order 10925 ordering that government contractors “take to ensure that applicants are employed, and employees are treated fairly during employment without regard to their race, creed, color, or national origin” it also created the Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity (Kurtulus, 2016). Four years later, former president Lyndon B. Johnson implemented Executive Order 11246 which broadened affirmative action to include women (Kurtulus, 2016). According to
Kurtulus (2016), the order also required federal contractors to prepare affirmative action plans on an annual basis which highlights the underutilization of women and minorities as it relates to their representation in the workforce from which they are recruited and created goals and timelines for their hiring.

Affirmative action continues to be a contentious matter in the United States (Holzer & Neumark, 2000). Holzer and Neumark (2000) examined the effects of affirmative action on hiring, recruitment, and policies. They found that affirmative action boosts the amount of recruitment and screening processes utilized by organizations. It also increases organizations’ amenability to hire disparaged applicants, raise the number of female and minority applicants in addition to employees, and increase organization’s readiness to give training and regularly evaluate individuals (Holzer & Neumark, 2000).

According to Holzer and Neumark (2000), when organizations applied affirmative action in the recruitment process, it usually does not populate individuals with lower credentials or performance of minorities and women selected for hire. Contrarily when affirmative action is used in the hiring and selection process it can generate minority applicants whose credentials are not as strong, although the performance is usually not. Generally, the more thorough recruitment, evaluation, and training that coincide with affirmative action seem to counteract any biases of the policy to lead to selecting women and minorities not as qualified or productive (Holzer & Neumark, 2000).

Establishing the Presence of African American Females to Leadership

Human capital is strategic when it lines up with the company’s mission (Engel & Curran, 2016). An organization’s ability to attract experienced, qualified, competent, and educated individuals depends upon an organization’s hiring processes, related policies, and goals (Osoian
& Zahrie, 2014). Despite the steady increase in the number of women and minorities receiving degrees, these groups remain underrepresented in executive level, high paying positions in both the public and private sectors (Rivera, 2012). According to Rivera (2012), understanding diversity is vital for anyone following managerial and professional career paths. Organizations must find ways to assess the degree to which unconscious or conscious bias is contributing to the lack of diversity at the highest levels. The challenge is to find reliable methods of identifying, addressing, and eliminating, or at least minimizing, such bias in hiring practices and related policies.

Stewart and Perlow (2001) conducted a study that showed individuals who were more biased toward blacks were more confident in choosing to hire black individuals over white individuals for entry level jobs. Willard et al. (2015) noted that individuals’ biases, conscious or unconscious, influence how they view others, how they behave toward others, and/or the decisions they make about others such as whether to hire them.

According to Holzer and Neumark (2000), the use of affirmative action goals in recruitment, selection, and hiring processes usually does not mean that minorities and women who are hired are less qualified than non-minority candidates. The study also examined the degree to which hiring managers pre-judge candidates based on stereotypes and biases. Thomas (2003) found that some hiring managers perceive black individuals as less cooperative, less reliable, and less qualified for entry level jobs compared to those of other races and ethnicities. Policies that are designed to increase organizational accountability are more effective at affording opportunities in management for minorities by developing, implementing, and monitoring plans for recruitment, selection, hiring, and promotion (Hirsh & Cha, 2017).
The importance of enhancing workplace diversity has been illustrated across numerous sectors of business and industry via improved productivity, financial performance, and employee satisfaction (Shubeck et al., 2020). Shubeck et al. (2020) stated to enhance workplace diversity, several organizations have instituted purposefully inclusive hiring practices for instance wide posting of job vacancies, thoughts for a diverse pool of interviewed applicants, mandatory diversity training for all employees taking part in the recruitment process, regulated behavioral-based interview questions and group interviews. On the contrary, de Larquier and Marchal (2016) stated that despite the number of requirements, it can be anticipated that the specific hiring process selected by organizations can have an effect on the underrepresentation or overrepresentation of some groups of staff among new hires.

A hiring process comprises two phases, recruitment and screening, and it can be identified by various connected dimensions: not just the degree of formalization but also the depth of search and the kind of methods being used (Engel & Curran, 2016). According to Engel and Curran (2016), the recruitment stage is where direct applicants are identified, word-of-mouth referrals from company employees, friends and professional contacts as informal approaches, and public or private employment agencies, advertisements, and referrals from educational institutions, unions or professional business as formal methods. The screening stage they suggest that the process be characterized instead of taking each method individually to comprehend how information about the selected candidate has been collected and how the assessment has been structured (Engel & Curran, 2016).

**Recruitment and Selection**

Cultural diversity in the work environment has become a crucial matter in human resource management and has increasingly garnered attention in both research and practice
Researchers have stressed that hiring individuals with diverse cultural backgrounds may be critical to a company’s competitive advantage, as the growth in exceptional skills, experiences, and opinions may provide advantages for company creativity and flexibility (Hofhuis et al., 2016). According to Hofhuis et al. (2016), one of the main challenges that companies encounter in enhancing workplace diversity is negative effect in their selection processes. Research previously conducted indicates that recruiters inside of companies play a key part in the recruitment processes, which result in workforce disparity (Hofhuis et al., 2016).

Hofhuis et al. (2016) further explained that in the selection and assessment process, the recruiter may demonstrate reverse discrimination toward applicants who have similar worldview or background and may unintentionally deny candidates who in some way veer away from the usual. Furthermore, Hofhuis et al. (2016) stated when recruiters are screening possible applicants, have the responsibility of selecting individuals whom they believe will be the greatest asset to the company. However, the recruiters analyze the level to which the applicant is anticipated to carry out his/her assigned responsibilities and is able to immediately contribute to the company’s productive output- the task performance aspect of the evaluation. On the flip side, recruiters judge applicants’ expected contribution to forming the company, social, and emotional context that acts as the catalyst for task activities and procedures-the social aspect (Hofhuis et al., 2016).

**Developing the Talent Within**

According to Perrenoud (2020), the workforce is getting older, and employees are beginning to retire in droves, which makes it more evident that retention and developing employees is crucial. He also noted that the workforce is constantly changing with the employees who are older that have the extensive knowledge, experience, and skills are leaving and the
younger, not as experienced with minimal knowledge are entering the work scene. Executive leadership have to take charge by establishing long-term plans for the organizations and their employees. They can take charge by coaching, developing, and getting their employees prepared to assume the duties of the positions that are becoming vacant.

C-suite leadership, top management, and human resources can take the initiative to prepare employees for leadership roles, positions, and responsibilities by creating and implementing training and development programs and through succession planning (Madichie & Nyakang’o, 2016). Madichie and Nyakang’o (2016) explained in their research that succession plans are not only used for grooming employees for leadership roles but also for advancement in their careers. Creating a development and trainee program for career growth would minimize employee turnover, high rate of attrition, retain and increase the workforce, as well as improve employee morale (Madichie & Nyakang’o, 2016).

McDermott and Marshall (2016) analyzed in their research that C-suite leadership and/or top management will learn that a number of their workforce do not possess the knowledge, skills, abilities, and experiences requisite to take over positions and roles in leadership. They also noted that top leadership should create and implement succession planning and coaching programs that would build upon abilities, experiences, knowledge base, and skills to provide training to employees for leadership roles. McDermott and Marshall (2016) are of the belief that the succession plan and coaching programs would aid in preparing employees for promotional opportunities in management roles and reduce the underrepresentation of women and minorities selected to participate in such programs and occupy leadership positions. Succession plans are designed to enable companies to select individuals who meet the minimum qualifications to be participants in the professional development programs targeted toward preparation for leadership
positions and roles (McDermott & Marshall, 2016). They also indicate that professional development would enable individuals to be provided with coaching to develop the skills, experience, abilities, and knowledge base needed for success.

According to Hall-Ellis and Grealy (2013), minorities are exiting companies in large numbers in pursuit of greater opportunities due to the insufficiency of professional growth and promotional opportunities. Every top manager or leader should develop a succession plan as part of the organization’s overall strategic plan. Ballaro and Polk (2017) are of the belief that the marginalization of women and minorities exist in top management positions and leadership. They also believed that the responsibility lies with human resources to ensure that C-suite and top leadership are appropriately and fairly adhering to the procedures and processes for implementing the succession plan.

Bleich (2019) presented in their study that human resources (HR) role is to make sure that individuals who were identified and selected for the target title and position meet the minimum qualifications, have satisfactorily gained the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) requisite to complete the professional development program. Their role and responsibility are to ensure that individuals successfully complete the development program and hire the employee into the targeted position once available. Ballaro and Polk (2017) also explained that HR has the responsibility to make sure that the succession plan is implemented and that top leaders are cognizant of its objective.

According to Dahling et al. (2016), coaching is a method that organizations can adopt to prepare their employees for leadership and management positions. Coaching is key to enhancing knowledge, skills, abilities, experiences, and successful individuals. They further explained that if coaching is properly administered it can benefit the growth of individuals in leadership roles,
positions, and programs. This method can also be paramount in strengthening the employee’s abilities in leadership and management roles. Kowalski (2020) indicated in her research that managers and others in leadership positions and roles are accountable for the building up of employees and their work performance. To be an effective and successful coach, the coach should have been a coachee who participated in a development program at some point in his/her career. The coach must be encouraging, motivating, knowledgeable, available, supportive, and willing to participate as a coach.

According to Ladyshewsky and Taplin (2017), there are three areas of coaching that are geared toward professional development. They are executive coaching, life coaching, and leaders who coach their direct reports which is called managerial coaching. The level of executive coaching is generally targeted toward executives and persons in management leadership positions. This coaching is conducted by an individually trained person who can be another internal employee or an outside vendor. A managerial coach is one who is available at all times to help employees discover the areas of performance that need improving, help them to acquire new and additional knowledge, experience, and skills to use in higher level positions. The managerial coach is also tasked with empowering individuals to perform above and beyond what they may know and already do. Coaches are helping employees to enhance themselves for better opportunities.

While Dahling et al. (2016) explained the importance of coaching in the development of employees, Westcott (2016) believed that employees may feel that they have not received adequate training to take on the specific roles of a leader. This may keep them from successfully performing their job (Westcott, 2016). According to Westcott (2016), top level management and C-Suite leaders should be preemptive in developing their employees for management and
leadership positions prior to moving them into their new position. On the contrary, if there is not an effective organizational strategic plan in place that details a plan inclusive of a succession plan, organizations are setting people up for lack of success (Westcott, 2016). This may have individuals believe that they are not supported in their growth and development adversely causing them to exit the organization for other opportunities or go back to previously held non-managerial positions with minimal responsibilities which can impact the company’s leadership and managerial chain (Westcott, 2016).

Nunez-Cacho Utrilla and Grande Torraleja (2013) discussed in their study that a coaching program can be created and customized by the organization’s top management, human resources, and other stakeholders. They further discussed that when a coaching program is successful, it can aid in the retention of experienced and valued company employees, prepare them to assume managerial positions, and foster a cohesive work environment. According to Nunez-Cacho Utrilla and Grande Torraleja (2013), developing and executing a professional leadership program can be one of the crucial factors to the success or demise of the company. A well developed and executed development program can aid in proving an organization’s ability to have more flexibility to change and a market that is competitive. Kim (2012) ascertained that leadership who effectuate a culture within the realm of the company is attentive to the employee’s professional growth and development can enrich the company’s operational performance, fruitfulness, their business relationships, status in the market, competitive advantage, and other areas.

Janssen et al. (2017) discussed in their research study that individuals who were afforded the opportunity to enhance their experiences, skills, abilities, and knowledge through professional development programs, created pathways and prepared them for growth and better
opportunities internally and externally. Additionally, they also stated the development of employees internally helps in maintaining and increasing the retention of employees. When employees are developed internally, they are more apt to stay with the company, boost work performance and productivity, improve employee morale, improve customer and stakeholder relationships internally and externally, increase revenue, enhance and maintain competitive advantage, and overall performance (Janssen et al., 2017). According to Jones et al. (2016), by fostering and promoting internally, the company is exhibiting its confidence in the employee’s potentiality to successfully perform the duties of the job while remaining aligned with the organization’s mission, purpose, vision, objectives, and goals. Jones et al. (2016) noted that fostering and promoting internally rather than hiring externally for the position(s) demonstrates that the company is compassionate about their employees and want to maintain growth within the company. Analyzing from a financial perspective, the organization does not have to incur the cost of additional compensation by promoting internally which can impact their profitability and bottom line (Jones et al., 2016).

Griffith (2012) outlined the benefits of both succession planning and coaching programs. Both of these techniques are necessary for the retention and development of employees for managerial positions and roles and aid in maintaining the company’s competitive advantage. As explained by Griffith (2012), a succession plan and coaching programs enable top management to select and prepare employees to assume leadership responsibilities, roles, and duties. A succession plan allows the decision-makers to determine the individuals who are capable and can assume a leadership role and a coaching program enables them to aid in fostering the employees selected for the succession plan (Griffith, 2012). When a company fails to have a strategic plan and succession plan in place, they plan to fail and not be successful or competitive (Ballaro &
Polk, 2017). Hiring externally could cause high turnover which could impact staffing levels. Employees would seek employment with companies that offer growth and career advancement (Ali & Mehreen, 2019). When utilizing succession planning, companies have the potential of experiencing approximately a 60-70% retention rate among their employees (Acree-Hamann, 2016).

The Role of Human Resources, Talent Management, & Competitive Advantage in Organizational Performance

Jafari and Khanmohamadi’s (2016) study recognizes that rivalry between companies has gone from creating tangible assets into creating intangible assets. The skills, expertise, knowledge, talents, and abilities of its human resources and staffing are vital components of intangible assets of any company. Companies seek to conduct special recruitment to fill the holes identified so it can assist them in accomplishing higher productivity in the area of talent management. The purpose of this study was to find correlation between performance of talent management strategy with attracting, recruiting, and human resources development.

Jafari and Khanmohamadi (2016) explained in their study that human resource management in general terms is part of management intended for human resource management to attain competitive advantage. Human resource management in prior years was seen as an instrument for preservation and a factor of production. In modern businesses human resource management is linked to the success of a business, more recently it has obtained strategic importance and perceived as a vital resource in business processes. They noted that the fate of a business is determined by how it attracts and retains human resources.

Jafari and Khanmohamadi (2016) discussed the importance of recruiting and hiring the most qualified persons for the positions. Training and human resource development are also key
for attaining job-related skills, knowledge, expertise, and abilities. Training and staff development are noted to be essential in entrepreneurship, acquainting employees with crucial organizational changes, activities, and decisions. This study indicated that currently businesses are seeking to establish a practical model for talent management. By doing so would require the organization to increase their management staff at all levels and fill the positions. Organizational top leaders would need to hire qualified talent from within and if those efforts are unsuccessful, they would need to recruit external candidates.

Jafari and Khanmohamadi (2016) identified some human resources strategies in their research that companies can utilize for talent management to attract top qualified individuals. Training, human resource development, and staff development are some strategies. With the development and determination of thoughts and knowledge management systems in conjunction with education and human resource development, businesses are able to utilize knowledge management capabilities to enhance the level of information, knowledge, skills, and staff experience, in addition to increasing competitive advantage, and accomplish business goals and benefits. They concluded in their study that knowledgeable persons in human resources believe success of a business is the effective use of talented and skilled individuals and feel that the only competitive advantage is retaining educated and valued employees and the efficiency of their staff is the most challenging of newer managers. They also noted there is a notable positive relationship between the ability, opportunity, and skills with the development of human resources.

Lee et al. (2010) noted the purpose of this literature is to look into the correlation between human resource management practices, business strategy, and organizational performance. They indicated that human resource management practices consist of (a) training
and development, (b) teamwork, (c) compensation/incentives, (d) HR planning, (e) performance appraisal/management, and (f) job security. Industries have become unstable and competitive at the same time. They do whatever it takes to remain competitive in their market. In an effort to do so, resources must be available and have the means to fight.

Lee et al. (2010) explained in their study at one time technology and process, accessible capital, and other sources were all companies needed to gain competitive advantage. Practitioners have looked into other kinds of assets to attract and retain competitive advantage while simultaneously not imitated and browbeaten by rivals. Their study found that human resources is an important intangible asset of a company. They explained that it has been acknowledged that human resources are critical to businesses for attaining success in the most efficient and effective manner. Customarily human resource management responsibilities were thought of by my management as an instrument to address anything related to staff and administrative duties. Now, human resource management has become an intricate part of strategic planning and development collaborating with marketing, fiscal, and accounting departments in organizations.

Lee et al. (2010) explained that other persons conducting research on this subject found a connection with some attributes seeming to improve company performance. During the study they found that business strategies redesign the association between human resources practices and company performance. Human resource management is a unified strategy and planned development procedure for active use of human resources for the fulfillment of company objectives. Human resources have many functions that support the growth of the company and individuals. This paper identified key areas that human resources have responsibility for: job analysis and job classification, talent management, recruitment and selections, training and
development, performance appraisal and management, compensation and benefits, labor relations, and other responsibilities.

Lee et al. (2010) indicated that all noted human resource management procedures are integrated with three business strategies cost reduction, innovation, and quality improvement. All of the human resource management procedures aid in improving the organization’s performance. They noted the study encountered many constrictions such as not have enough items to examine the connection between human resource management procedures, business strategy, and organizational performance, thus causing the outcome to be potentially biased. The other constructions including only surveying management working at steel companies and concentrated on the Taiwanese steel industry which could be different from other regions and locations.

Lee et al. (2010) noted in their research that strategic views of human resource management look at the relationship between the different human resources procedures and the organization’s business strategies. They also indicated that one of the principal goals of strategic human resource management is to make sure that human resource management is blended in with the strategic needs of the organization in an effort to attain competitive advantage. Based on the contingency theory, there is a direct connection between business strategy and human resource management procedures. The contingency theory also believes that human resource procedures are decided upon by the kind of business strategy the organization implements. This theory also believes that organizations that meld a relationship with their strategies and human resource procedures are more successful than organizations that do not build a relationship between the two.
Summary of Professional and Academic Literature

The labor force is continually expanding in diversity with regards to race, ethnicity, and gender as immigration increases and more women become gainfully employed (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2018). They also explained in the study that by 2045 the United States will become “minority white” with the pivotal movement of individuals. In subsequent years minority post-millennials will surpass whites (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2018). These transformations will persist with erecting new opportunities and challenges for companies that remain primarily male and white holding leadership positions (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2018). A diverse workforce has become a critical component in organizational success, innovation of talent, enhanced morale, increased productivity and profitability, and more positive relationships with the community, customers, workforce, and stakeholders (Mencl & Lester, 2014). However, the examination of literature emphasizes the need for organizations to embrace racial and gender equity by creating, adopting, and enforcing policies and procedures that enable them to become a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment (Dennisen et al., 2020). Although there are many advantages to a diverse executive leadership team such as innovation, profitability, retention, and decision-making, African American females continue to remain an absence of their representation in upper echelon positions within the insurance industry (Worters, 2020). African American females continue to endure the enigmas because of their gender and racial/ethnic identity, which has recurrently brought about the act of being bypassed and overlooked for top tier positions as illustrated in the glass ceiling theory and black feminist theory (Barelka & Downes, 2019; Rankin-Wright et al., 2020).
Summary of Section 1 and Transition

The number of African American females who are obtaining their master’s degree and higher is steadily rising (Rivera, 2012). However, this particular demographic group remain underrepresented or absent from top and executive level positions or not being granted promotional opportunities in companies (Patterson et al., 2017). Although African American females may possess the same education, knowledge, experience and have similar credentials as the population of white females and white males they are hired only for entry level and mid-level management positions (Baker & Cangemi), while white males are achieving executive level status at a greater rate (Xiang et al., 2017). Baker and Cangemi (2016) noted there are potential roadblocks that may hinder African American women from navigating the career path to executive level positions.

To comprehend and address this phenomenon the researcher conducted a qualitative case study research which was aligned with the problem and research questions. Analyzing the potential deficiencies that may exist within organizations, the behaviors of organizations, identify measures in which organizations can close the diversity gap, ways to adopt diversity to retain African American women and a competitive advantage, the challenges that exist and how do they overcome them, and the benefits of having a diverse executive leadership team will provide insight to this researcher. This qualitative research study allowed this researcher to explore and understand the absence of diversity at the executive level within the insurance industries in the United States and how to retain African American women and maintain a competitive advantage. The results of this research study will aid in organizational leaders’ ability to begin to identify the cause(s) for the diversity gap in executive level positions by examining their policies, procedures, recruitment, promotion, and selection processes, hiring and
succession plans, and training programs. These results will hopefully encourage the top leadership, human resources, and other vested parties to adopt a diverse workforce and begin making changes to hire and promote African American females to executive leadership positions.

Section 2 of this research study will consist of an exhaustive literature review and detail of the research which discusses the role of the researcher and the appropriateness of the research methodology. This section will also outline the participants, population, and sampling. An overview of the data collection and analysis of the study will be provided. The final two portions of Section 2 will include the project, the research proposal, and proposal defense.
Section 2: The Project

Section 2, the project was critical to developing the framework for this qualitative research study. This section will explain the purpose of the study. Additionally, the study will potentially illustrate and help the readers to grasp why there is an absence of African American in top management positions. An overview of the role of the researcher and a discussion of the research methodology which includes the paradigms, designs, methods, and triangulation will be provided. The next portion of this section will explain the target groups for this project and the population sampling. The final part of section two will provide discussion on the processes for data collection and organization, data analysis, and reliability and validity.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative research case study design was to explore the degree to which the influence of diversity has on the representation of African American women in executive leadership positions. It was to gain an understanding as to why African American women are underrepresented and marginalized in top leadership positions. The purpose of this research was to study the impact that diversity may have on the insurance industry’s talent management and competitive advantage. Managing talent which includes but is not limited to recruitment and retention is paramount for the industry to maintain its status, profits, relationships, and reputation (Cloutier et al., 2015).

To what extent do biases whether conscious or unconscious influence promotional opportunities, recruitment, selection, and hiring practices of African American women seeking advancement to executive leadership positions within the insurance industry (Rivera, 2012). Findings from the case study research provided insight into how C-suite leadership can identify and implement measures to address the diversity gap in executive leadership positions. It also
provided ways that organizational leaders can reduce and/or eliminate the absence of diversity and increase the representation of African American women in leadership positions.

**Role of the Researcher**

Creswell and Poth (2018) identified some responsibilities that are encompassed in the role of the researcher. They noted that prior to conducting the research, the researcher must obtain the approval of the college or university. The next step should be to inform the participants of the purpose of the research. One of the many aspects of collecting data is to avoid misleading the participants. When analyzing the data, abstain from taking the side of the participants and revealing only the positive outcomes. The researcher should also keep steer clear of fabricating authorship, evidence, data, findings, and conclusion. Finally, customize the reporting to diverse readership as well as disclose the reports to them (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Along with every research methodology it is necessary for researchers to explain the kind of theoretical framework planned for their research (Sorsa et al., 2015). Considering the researcher has an impact on qualitative data itself, they need to select how to make use of prior knowledge during the research (Sorsa et al., 2015). They also stated that the researcher’s personal history can influence the study’s focus, planning, interpretation, and analysis in addition to the technique used to deliver the results. According to Geddis-Regan et al. (2021), when a researcher conducts a qualitative study, they are the research tool that directly influences the data collection and analysis. They further explained that unavoidably, a researcher’s personal and professional circumstances will frame how data are generated and interpreted.

The role of the researcher changes between the various research methods with reference to process, planning, interviews, and attitudes in the course of interviews (Sorsa et al., 2015). Sorsa et al. (2015) stated in descriptive paradigm researchers exercise bracketing to lay aside
their knowledge and assumptions so the center of attention can be on the participants’ point of view. The participants’ stories are detailed through experiences in the way they subjectively depict the events without adding anything to it (Sorsa et al., 2015). Sorsa et al. (2015) defined bracketing as a method to expand awareness, to lay aside assumptions, and to view a situation with an open mind.

The study must be conducted with an open mind, unbiased, and without prejudice (Sorsa et al., 2015). They explained that with an interpretive paradigm the researcher utilizes historical knowledge throughout the study in developing newfound ideology via the study. In this investigation, the researcher performed open-ended interviews and observed the interviewees, with the purpose of documenting their body language, demeanor, disposition, and tone.

Following the process of collecting the data, this researcher was tasked with deciphering the information through identifying and analyzing additional themes for the forming of conclusions regarding if diversity has an influence on talent management and competitive advantage and why is there an absence of female African Americans in executive leadership positions in the insurance industry.

**Summary**

The researcher was responsible for determining the appropriate qualitative research method for finding answers to the research questions and topic. Once the method had been identified, the next step was to select the source(s) to use in the collection and analysis of data. The researcher then determined the participants, the number needed for the study, and the location. They must remain cognizant of the need to minimize the influence of their biases, personal thoughts and opinions to focus only on the lived experiences of the individuals participating in the study (Sorsa et al., 2015). Being open minded and keeping their biases at bay
may be challenging. However, if the researcher does not remove their personal feelings when conducting the study, the outcome or findings can be biased, mirroring their personal views and opinions, and the findings will not accurately depict the lived experiences of individuals (Sorsa, et al., 2015).

**Research Methodology and Discussion**

For this methodology paper this research paper was guided by a research paradigm that was characterized as various ways of looking at the world many times from the foundation which the study is taken (Davies & Fisher, 2018). This methodology enabled this researcher to use qualitative methods. Post positivism was the research paradigm, and the methodology was flexible design using qualitative methods, specifically a single case study. Using the post positivism approach allowed this researcher to study the behaviors of individuals in organizations and the real-world issues (Kankam, 2019). The case study design allowed for flexibility in qualitative research and helped to answer what, why, and how research questions posed. Utilizing post positivism, flexible design, qualitative methods specifically, a single case study enabled this researcher to analyze and address the specific problem of why an absence of diversity with respect to African American women in executive level positions within insurance industry exists and how it may result in the loss of talent and a competitive advantage.

**Discussion of Paradigms**

The first paradigm to be discussed is pragmatism. Shannon-Baker (2016) discussed that pragmatists are of the belief that a research question(s) is the utmost pertinent epistemological, methodological, and ontological components that one takes on for research. Researchers that use pragmatism to guide their study rely upon the ideology that theories can be both contextual and
widespread by analyzing their transferability to another matter. They set out to highlight the significance of undertaking various methods rather than examining them for success.

Ryan (2018) stated that interpretivism or constructivism is defined as an epistemological position that necessitates the social scientist to comprehend the intuitive meaning of social action. The interpretivists contend that there is neither intrinsic truth nor worldview. Valuing the vast number of human phenomena is the crucial function of interpretivism in research. Interpretivism depends greatly on the perspective of the participants of the subject being explored.

Kankam (2019) explained that positivism is interpreted as an autonomous, unconventional, and impartial presence of truthfulness. This particular paradigm was founded on the ontological philosophy and ideology that truth and reality is devoid of and self-governing of viewer and observer. Positivists have the belief that information is genuine if it originated using scientific methods. The conceptualization of positivism normally examines the process of collecting the data, noting regulations, and pulling out laws. This paradigm is applicable to social sciences.

Kankam (2019) presented post-positivism as having some similarities as positivism with respect to ontological and epistemological. The post-positivism paradigm offers a suggestion that knowledge is not unbiased, and that all knowledge is socially constructed. Post-positivism is most appropriate in social sciences using a flexible, fixed, or mixed methods design. The post-positivist believes that all observations are imperfect and error prone and all theory is amendable. This paradigm enables, recognizes, and inspires researchers’ ambition and devotion to the research topic.
This research paradigm is post positivism. According to Kelly et al. (2018), post positivism is important when planning research and can form the study for comprehending. They indicated that this paradigm makes sense of the real world which encompasses morals, values, and attributes. It also impacts the way in which research questions are asked, examined, and methodologies that ought to be used. Post-positivism places importance on meaning and looks to clarify societal issues, convey that fixing meaning(s) is not unbiased, and express those questions posed dwell on specific interests (Kankam, 2019).

Post positivism guided this research because it allowed this researcher to analyze the behaviors of individuals in organizations and the real world issues of the diversity gap in executive leadership roles. According to Davies and Fisher (2018), this research paradigm also uses triangulation of methods to conduct research, as it was founded on the belief that there is imperfection in determining the truth, and that using various methods enables the weaknesses of one method to be balanced out by the strength of another. They also indicated the use of triangulation can take place within methodologies, methods, and data analysis. Post-positivism can be used in both qualitative and quantitative research allowing flexibility. The post-positivism research paradigm allowed this researcher to look into the behaviors that attribute to the absence of diversity with respect to African American women in executive level positions within the insurance industry resulting in the loss of talent and a competitive advantage. This researcher also set out to clarify this societal issue, express the posed questions that are of specific interest, and express that fixing meaning(s) is unbiased.

Discussion of Designs

According to Anderson (2017), qualitative research is generated by an abundance of views and opinions of the participants in the study. They also discussed that the individuals using
the qualitative approach share in the belief regarding the existence of numerous actualities acknowledged as intangible, contextually located, formed, sustained, or reshaped by the lived experiences of the participants. This form of research is delineated by the significance linked to interpretive, naturalistic, and holistic study. The majority of qualitative research offers varying paradigmatic views including but are not limited to constructivism, interpretivism, critical realism and theory, and feminism. This form of research is also used in different research methods such as case study, ethnography, phenomenological, narrative, and ground theory.

Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that a researcher’s findings in the written form have a flexible framework. Researchers who participate in this form of study support a way of viewing research that favors an inductive approach, attention on distinctive meaning, and the significance of presenting the depth of the matter. Many researchers utilizing a qualitative approach end up having to substantiate the validity, reliability, importance, and authenticity of the study (Anderson, 2017).

Creswell and Poth (2018) presented that quantitative research is a design used for testing objective theories by analyzing the correlation between variables. The variables are usually measured on instruments in such a manner that numbered data can be examined using statistical procedures. According to Robson and McCartan (2016) the quantitative approach is also known as a fixed design. They noted that quantitative research is theory driven that depends on the collection of data in statistical and numerical form. This approach is used to conduct scientific research. An individual utilizing quantitative research must have considerable theoretical knowledge regarding the phenomenon prior to devoting time and resources. Robson and McCartan (2016) also explained that individuals conducting quantitative research will generally stay at a broader physical and emotional separation from the study.
Baskarada and Koronios (2018) defined mixed methods approach as the style of research that comprises both quantitative and qualitative approaches. According to Denscombe (2008), mixed methods came into sight as a “third paradigm” for social research. This approach provides a level of diversity in research. The researcher must have a solid understanding of both quantitative and qualitative approaches when embarking on the mixed method approach.

McKim (2017) discussed in their study that the researcher will need additional time for research because they will have to collect and examine information from both approaches. In the field of business the mixed method design is found to have significance because it improves the validity in the findings, edifying the collection of the second source of data, and aiding in creating knowledge. The mixed methods approach provides readers with more assuredness in the findings and conclusions they ascertain from the study. This mixed method also promotes cultivation for research being conducted in the future.

Robson and McCartan (2016) presented that quantitative or fixed design is based on experimental research, focuses on the collection of numbers and statistical data, determines relationships between variables, the research questions are not open-ended, they are objective, descriptive, comparative, and relationship based. They also stated that quantitative approaches are not flexible, driven by theories, and more scientific than social research. Robson and McCartan explained that mixed the methods approach is a culmination of both quantitative and qualitative approaches which will require the researcher to become knowledgeable in both designs. The quantitative research approach was not appropriate for this study because it was based on statistical data, not flexible, theory focused, and more scientific. Because mixed methods have a component of quantitative research this method was not appropriate for this
study. Neither method aligned with the path of this research, the research problem nor research questions.

Discussion of Methods

Harrison et al. (2017) stated that this research method is broadly used in realms such as business, education, law, medical, political and social sciences, psychology, and social work. Creswell and Poth (2018) indicated researchers utilize case study to focus on genuine-life and current issues occurring in certain areas. They also noted that individuals conducting the research should have an in-depth knowledge of the identified case, dilemma, or subject of interest or concern.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), there are identified aspects of case study which individuals conducting research should consider:

1. Identifying the particular case(s) to be examined;
2. Significance to identifying the case is affirming it is well-defined within specific parameters;
3. Intentions for conducting the research;
4. Have an in-depth knowledge of the case;
5. The selection of how to approach the data information will be different;
6. The key to constructing the description of the case will require pinpointing case themes (differences, similarities, organized chronologically, or shown as a theoretical method);
7. Studies most times commence with the researcher coming to a conclusion about the general meaning of the case(s).
Yin (2018) mentioned that the data collection for case study research is done by way of audio visual, data analysis, interviews, observations, and reports. This style of research asks and discusses the “how” and “why” questions posed. Harrison et al. (2017) explained that a researcher selects case study because greater detail is given and available for trying to ascertain knowledge of the dilemma, matter, issue, or situation in real-life circumstances.

According to Hyett et al. (2014), this research method has three kinds of studies determined by the purpose of the research for the cases which may include evaluating an individual, multiple individuals, a project, or an association of some sort. The three kinds of studies are single case study or instrumental, multiple case study or collective, and intrinsic case study. A single case study’s focal point is a singular issue or concern. Once the person conducting the research has determined the particular issue, they will choose a single bound case to detail the situation. A multiple case study pinpoints the concern(s) by using multiple studies to detail the matter. The researcher that utilizes multiple case studies can elect to examine a number of entities from many programs or places within the area. Lastly, intrinsic case study has a focal point on its own case (e.g., evaluating a program or assessing a struggling business) due to the fact that the case’s situation is unusual (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

Creswell and Poth (2018) presented five key steps for the researcher to take when conducting a case study:

1. Determine the appropriateness of this method for the research problem and question(s);
2. Decide the purpose and choose the case(s);
3. Implement methods for obtaining the data (audio-visual, interviews, reports, etc.);
4. Define the specific analysis approach: if it is holistic (whole case) or embedded (certain aspects of the case); and
5. Detail in a written report what was obtained by utilizing case assertions (final thoughts regarding the general meaning fashioned by the researcher).

Wall (2015) noted that ethnography is one of the earliest methods of qualitative research that began in anthropology. According to Madden (2017), ethnographic researchers study a minimum of 20 participants in their own environment. At times, the number of participants may not reach the minimum number. In order to successfully conduct the research and collect the data, the ethnographer must have in-depth understanding of the culture within the locality that he/she has garnered interest in. Draper (2015) stated that the researcher must meld themselves into the community as they were a part of the population. The ethnographer may participate in the daily activities inside of the community and the experiences of the people within the community. Ethnography is relevant to the fields of sociology, social sciences, and other social realms.

Vesa and Vaara (2014) identified several forms of ethnography such as autoethnography, confessional, electronic media, ethnographic novels, feminist, ethnography, life history, videos, and visual found in photography. They also stated that realist and critical ethnography are the most favored forms. In realist ethnography the researcher provides an impartial report about the situation. The ethnographer articulates the research in the third-person based on the information acquired from the participants. With this method, the researcher communicates just the facts. The collected data are also communicated objectively and not marred by their own biases, views, opinions, and judgments. The individual conducting a realist ethnographic study has the final word on how it is interpreted and presented.

According to Palmer and Caldas (2015), the individual utilizing the critical ethnographic research is provided it in their own perspective. Critical ethnography is in response to current
issues impacting society whereupon persons who are in power, have authority, status, and sense of entitlement embark on minimizing individuals who are not the same as them. The ethnographer takes a stance against the biases, inequity, and disparate treatment that individuals may encounter because they come from a different cloth and backgrounds including but not limited to gender, race, socioeconomic, and education.

Creswell and Poth (2018) discussed some suggested measures for conducting realist and critical ethnographic research:

1. Determine the appropriateness based on the research problem and question(s);
2. Establish and find cultural groups;
3. Choose cultural themes, situations, or theories;
4. Decide on the form of ethnography being used;
5. Assemble the information;
6. Create an entire interpretation of the participants from the collected data analysis; and
7. Detail the themed patterns of the participants in a written report which includes the perspective of the participants and researcher.

According to Corbin (2017), ground theory research generally occurs in a distinct location with the attention placed on a particular phenomenon in the real world and challenges of the environment. This theory is used to determine, augment, and meld ideas. The participants of the study are not the subject of the analysis. Charmz (2017) stated that the ground theory researcher evaluates the data given by the participants via data collection. This approach enables synchronous data collection and keeps the researcher continuously engaged with the collection of information and developing analysis.

Creswell and Poth (2018) discussed the key features of ground theory research:
1. Attention is on the method or action;
2. The researcher looks to create a theory of the method or action;
3. The method of memoing becomes a part of creating the theory;
4. Methods for collecting data and analysis are considered to be undertaken concurrently and repetitively; and
5. The inductive processes involved in data collection are described based on the approach—choosing one category to be the focal point of the theory and then describing the sub-categories to form a theoretical model.

According to Chong and Yeo (2015), systematic procedures and Charmz constructivist are the two favored approaches in grounded theory research. Systematic procedures are continuously juxtaposing data from the field of research with developing groups having to do with categories, codes, and coding. With the systematic procedures approach, the researcher may conduct anywhere between 20 and 30 interviews with the participants and potentially follow up interviews if more information is required. This approach entails several visits of going back and forth (zig zag) from the field to the office to gather data and evaluate it at the same time while gathering information. The data are collected and evaluated from sources such as events, instances, and occurrences. Information and data will constantly be added to the research or saturated until all information has been depleted or can longer be accessed.

Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that the focal point of Charmz constructivist approach is on theory development from collaboration among the participants and the researcher. With this approach emphasis is placed on real-world issues and challenges such as diversity, certain life situations, views and actions. This approach also places attention on the groups and
participants behaviors, beliefs, cultures, languages, and views rather than the methods of the study. Charmz is an advocate of the perspective of a social constructivist.

Chong and Yeo (2015) discussed the steps necessary to conduct a ground theory research combining systematic procedures and the Charmz constructivist approaches:

1. Decide the appropriateness of ground theory for the research problem and question(s);
2. Interview questions should focus on comprehending how individuals experience the process and determine steps in the process;
3. Theory developed occurs via concurrent data collection, analysis, and memoing processes;
4. Format analysis procedures as open (grouping of formed information), axial (data put together after coding), and selective coding (researcher crafts storyline that links groupings);
5. Axial coder provides a coding paradigm or diagram in which the primary phenomena is identified;
6. Selective coding hypothesis or proposition may be explained pinpointing predicted connections; Develop a concrete theory crafted by the researcher; and
7. Present the theory as a framework or discussion.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the narrative approach starts with the experiences as conveyed in lived and shared stories of participants of the study. This approach is used in research in instances such as the process of assisting stories being told. The basis of a narrative study is not to just solely validate persons’ experiences, but it is also a probe of the social, cultural, familial, linguistics, and institutional narratives amid which persons’ experiences were, and are constructed, formed, articulated, and pursued. This particular research design is
implied as a verbal or written record providing a narration of an event/action or series of events/actions chronologically linked.

Creswell and Poth (2018) outlined some key characteristics of the narrative approach:

1. The researcher collects stories from participants (and documents and group discussions) about the lived and told experiences;
2. Stories describe the experiences, and may crystalize the participants’ characteristics and how they view themselves;
3. The stories happen within certain places or situations;
4. Stories are amassed through several various forms of data such as via interviews that may be the main form of collection but also via observations, documents, pictures, and other sources related to qualitative data;
5. Stories are assessed using different strategies such as thematically, structural, dialogic/performance, or through visual analysis;
6. Most times the stories are heard and formed by the researcher into a chronological order; and
7. Many times the stories have turning points or certain tensions, transitions, or interruptions featured by the research in the recitation of the story.

Robson and McCartan (2016) stated there are three types of narratives: autoethnography-autobiography, biography, oral and life history. Creswell and Poth (2018) noted that autoethnography-autobiography is choreographed by the persons who are the subject of the research. They defined this form of narrative as the conception of several layers of consciousness, the exposed self, the lucid self, examining the self in social point of view, the subversion of dominant discourse, and reminiscent possibility. The biographical study is when
the person conducting the research writes and records the experiences of another individual’s life. Oral history includes collecting self-reflections of events and their interconnectedness from one person or many persons. Life history illustrates a person’s total life, while a first-hand experience story is a narrative approach of an individual’s first-hand experience brought about in a single or multiple incidences, confidential matters, or shared traditions.

As demonstrated with other research methods there are steps to follow when conducting a narrative study. Creswell and Poth (2018) outlined some steps:

1. Determine the appropriateness of the research problem and questions for this design;
2. Select the number of persons who have stories or life experiences to share and spend a significant amount of time collecting their stories;
3. Think about how the data collection and their recordings can take different forms;
4. Set information regarding the circumstances of these stories into data collection, data analysis, and writing;
5. Evaluate the participants’ stories and restructure the stories into some form of framework also known as restorying;
6. Establish a collective approach in the gathering and recitation of the stories; and
7. Give the narrative in a written format.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018) the phenomenology method is highly favored in the fields of social and health sciences particularly in sociology, psychology, nursing and the health sciences, and education. The individual conducting this method of study will focus their attention on illustrating the similarities of the participants as a phenomenon occurs. Creswell and Poth (2018) outlined many characteristics included in phenomenological research:
1. Attention is placed on the phenomenon to be studied, phrased in terms of a single thought or notion;

2. The study of this phenomenon together with a group of persons who all have endured the phenomenon;

3. A philosophical conversation regarding the fundamental concepts related to conducting this form of study;

4. The researcher brackets themselves out of the research by talking about personal experiences with the phenomenon;

5. The process for gathering the data usually involves interviewing persons who have experienced the phenomenon;

6. A data analysis that follows systematic procedures that transition from the narrow units to broader units, then details that summarizes the “what” and “how;” and

7. Conclude the research with a descriptive report that talks about the nature of the study for persons including “what” they have experienced and “how” they experienced it.

Creswell and Poth (2018) discussed that phenomenology has two approaches which are hermeneutical and transcendental. Hermeneutical phenomenology is research explained as concerned with lived experiences and interpreting the “texts” of life. Transcendental phenomenology or Moustakas’s (1994) phenomenology has less concern about the interpretations of the individual conducting the research and more concern on the details of the experiences of the participants. Additionally, Moustakas’s approach targets one of Husserl’s concepts epoch or bracketing, whereupon the researcher withholds their experiences as much as is feasible to gain a newer perspective for the phenomenon being studied. Utilizing the
Moustakas’s approach, Creswell and Poth provided critical steps to conducting the phenomenological research:

1. Decide the appropriateness of the research problem and questions;
2. Determine a phenomenon of interest and detail it;
3. Identify and define the broad philosophical assumptions of the phenomenon;
4. Using in-depth and many interviews to ascertain data from the participants who have experienced the phenomenon;
5. Develop themes from the analysis that are noteworthy statements;
6. Create textural and structural descriptions;
7. Detail the nature of the phenomenon by using composite descriptions; and
8. Articulate the understanding of the nature of the experience in a written report.

The ethnography approach was not appropriate for this study because it focused on the researcher becoming engrossed into the natural surroundings of the individuals to better understand their culture, community, and societal issues (Robson & McCartan, 2016). This approach requires the researcher to thoroughly assess the culture of African American females, while on the contrary their views and patterns of behavior were not the subject of the study to align with the logic as to why African American females experience roadblocks to attaining executive level positions in organizations. In ground theory design the purpose is to build or find a theory that incorporates the phenomenon in the real-world (Corbin, 2017). The research problem and questions posed for this project were not anticipated to develop any new theories.

However, it was to validate the commonalities amongst African American females’ experiences to establish an illustration of the diversity gaps that are present and how these women handle the adversities. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), with the narrative
approach, the researcher focuses their attention on a sole individual with the intent to depend on the verbal and written stories of that person as they remember the life challenges and issues they have experienced. This will become a narration delivered by the researcher. The narrative approach examines the intimate experiences and stories of persons as they occur throughout and written is down chronologically to restructure the stories into some form of framework. This approach was not applicable for this project because the focal point was not storytelling the lives of African American women, but the purpose was to assess the diversity gaps and absences of the women in executive leadership roles.

Creswell and Poth (2018) explained the intent of phenomenology research is to study a single thought or notion of multiple persons who have experienced the same phenomenon. It is to study the lived experiences of persons. This approach was not applicable to this research project because it was looking to examine the lived experiences of African American females who have experienced the same phenomenon. However, the intent of the case study was to explore the absence of African American females in leadership and if diversity has an influence on talent management, competitive advantage, and overall organizational performance. The designs of ethnography, ground theory, narrative, and phenomenology did not fit in the realm of this case study nor align with the research problem and questions.

This study was conducted with a flexible design using qualitative methods specifically, a single case study design. A single case study focuses on an issue or concern. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), this approach is used to focus on real-world perspectives and present-day situations occurring in certain locations. The case study design is generally used in fields such as business, social sciences, psychology, and other fields (Harrison et al., 2017). Creswell and Poth (2018) noted that case study research is divided into two categories concrete and less
concrete. They described concrete cases as being smaller in nature and are labeled as individuals’, small groups, partnerships, or organizations. A less concrete case focuses on a greater scale and labeled as community, relationships, certain projects, and decision-making process.

The case study research data are acquired by means of reports, data analysis, interviews, audio-visual, and observations (Yin, 2018). He also stated that this specific research design asks and addresses the why, what, and how questions and is one of the three qualitative methods that is flexible and is used depending on the posed research question(s). The case study design was ideal for this research because greater detail was provided and acquired for trying to analyze and make sense of why there is an absence of diversity with respect to African American women in executive level positions within the insurance industry and how it may impact an organization’s talent and competitive advantage (Harrison et al., 2017).

The flexible design enabled this researcher to be flexible in the case study. This researcher was able to use various methods such as interviews, observations, data analysis, audio-visual, and reports to conduct the research. The case study allowed for focus on the reason(s) why African American women are absent from executive level positions in the insurance industry. This research method provided greater detail and accessibility for analyzing and understanding the gap in diversity with respect to African American women in executive level positions within the insurance industry and the impact it may have on organizations.

Discussion of Triangulation

Triangulation permits the researcher to gather an abundance of relevant data and therefore rely upon a great number of sources (Yin, 2018). According to Robson and McCartan (2016), there are four types of triangulations:
1. Data triangulation which uses more than one method of collecting data (e.g., interviews, documents, observations, etc.);

2. Observer triangulation uses more than one observer in the research;

3. Methodological triangulation merges qualitative and quantitative methods; and

4. Theory triangulation uses many theories and perspectives.

They also noted, although the various triangulations can aid in the validity of the study, there is always the potential to encounter inconsistencies and variances between the different sources. These issues may be more apparent using a mixed methods approach. Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that the use of a triangulation can help build plausibility.

The qualitative methods that were used for triangulation to conduct this case study were interviews, questionnaires, and documents. The aforementioned tools enabled the researcher to view the organizations current processes for cultivating employees and other pertinent documents related to the study, interview the identified actors, and conduct surveys. Reviewing the various documents enabled the researcher to look at the hiring and promotional practices, diversity training programs, trainee programs, succession planning, and other documents, using different interview approaches (e.g., fully structured, semi-structured, and unstructured) allowed this researcher to be flexible with the interview, and conducting surveys provided the latitude to ask additional questions not included in the interview process and it was more anonymous (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

Summary

Case study was determined to be the most appropriate research method to explore how and why diversity may have an influence on talent management and competitive advantage which may create an absence of African American females in executive leadership in the
insurance industry. This qualitative research design was preferred over the other four research designs because of its key purpose for being investigatory, because of emotions, viewpoints, and first-hand experiences of African American females, and non-specific gender and race of human resources managers, and executive leaders generated the diversity gaps that exist in the places of work. There were other practicable qualitative approaches under consideration; but the case study approach was decided upon to be the most applicable for analyzing the experiences of diversity gaps and adversity that African American women encounter, conceivably resultant of biases which may include but are not limited to race and gender impacting their potential for advancement. This case study focused on delineating diversity and the absence of African American women in executive leadership within the insurance industry where they may encounter obstacles with progressing in their careers.

**Participants**

The individuals who were eligible for this research project worked previously or currently within the insurance industry in Connecticut and included African American or Black women in the different tiers of management, human resources management, and executive leaders whose race and gender were not limited to Black women only. African American women were the focus of this study. This demographic group was the focus as this researcher attempted to ascertain the possible reasons for their underrepresentation in top management positions. It was also to gain knowledge about whether diversity has an influence on talent management, competitive advantage, and overall performance. The human resources managers were able to provide some possible insight on their hiring practices, recruitment processes, and diversity management. The executive leadership members were able to provide theirs views on diversity.
Population and Sampling

The purpose of population and sampling was to detail for the readership the participant(s) of the study as well as the form of sampling that was used. Participants were one of the key aspects to the study as they were the main focus of the study and the information obtained from them helped to develop the research. Several forms of sampling were identified, and the appropriateness discussed. The final portion of this section will discuss the sample selected, the sample size, saturation, and how to gain access to the sample.

Discussion of Population

Participants for this study were specific to high school or college educated women over the age of 18, who identified as African American or Black females who were previously employed or currently employed in managerial positions, human resources managers, and executive leaders within the insurance industry in Connecticut. This study examined African American women who were qualified to be participants of this research such as those who have navigated the career ladder in management; those in entry level, mid-level, and senior level management positions; as well as those who aspire to work in higher level management positions; human resources managers, and leaders at the executive level. However, age, religious affiliation, political affiliation, school affiliation (where the degree is from), sexual orientation, marital status, and socioeconomic background were not considering factors in this study. Through their lens they were able to share the barriers, experiences, and challenges facing them in their pursuit of and/or attaining top level position in the insurance industry as Black women. The size of the eligible population was 10 African American females, three human resources managers, and four executive leaders.
Discussion of Sampling

Robinson (2014) explained that sampling is a process that is integral to qualitative research. According to Robinson (2014), there are four-point measures to sampling in qualitative research that is interview-based that combines theory and process for the following:

1. Establishing a sample universe, through detailing inclusion and exclusion standards for possible participation;
2. Determining a sample size via the combined review of epistemological and practical concerns;
3. Choosing a sampling strategy, for instance random sampling, convenience sampling, stratified sampling, cell sampling, quota sampling, or a single-case selection strategy; and
4. Sample sourcing containing matters of advertising, incentivizing, avoidance of bias, and ethical concerns applying to informed consent.

Taherdoost (2016) further explained that there is probability sampling-associated with quantitative research and non-probability sampling-associated with qualitative research. Probability sampling consists of simple random, stratified random, cluster sampling, systematic sampling, and multi-stage sampling. The other category is non-probability which is inclusive of quota sampling, snowball sampling, judgment sampling, and convenience sampling.

According to Taherdoost (2016), probability sampling is defined as every piece in the population has the same opportunity of being included in the sample. This method has the best liberty from bias but may illustrate as costly with respect to time and energy for a particular level of sampling. With simple randomness every case of the population has the same likelihood of inclusion in the sample. However, the costs of getting the sample can be up there if the participants are geographically spread out.
Systematic sampling is where all cases following a random beginning are chosen. This sampling method is simplistic. In the case of stratified sampling where the population is split into strata (or subgroups) and a random sample is obtained from each subgroup. The researcher would use stratified sampling where there is a larger difference within a population (Taherdoost, 2016).

Taherdoost (2016) continued to explain that cluster sampling is where the entire population is split into clusters or groups. This method would be used when the participants are divided over big geographical areas as it conserves time and money. He also noted that multi-stage sampling is the mechanism of transitioning from a broad to a narrow sample, employing a step by step process. Multi-stage sampling is proposed to choose samples which are focused on a smaller geographical region conserving time and money (Taherdoost, 2016).

Taherdoost (2016) presented quota sampling as a non-random sampling method by which participants are selected in accordance to pre-established attributes so that the entire sample will have equal distribution of attributes as the larger population. Snowball sampling is another aspect of non-probability sampling which is a non-random sampling measure that utilizes a few cases to assist in supporting other cases to be involved in the study, consequently expanding the sample size. This method is most appropriate in small-scale populations that are hard to infiltrate because of their inaccessibility such as secret societies and professions (Taherdoost, 2016). Convenience sampling is choosing participants due to the fact that they are most times readily and easily available (Taherdoost, 2016). With this selected method, the researcher most times is able to conquer many of the constraints connected with the research. The final sampling method is purposive or judgmental sampling. This sampling is a technique in which specific settings, individuals, or events are chosen on purpose in an effort to give critical information that cannot
be ascertained from other choices. The researcher would include cases or participants in the sample due to the fact that they are of the belief that they necessitate inclusion (Taherdoost, 2016).

This research study used purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling was the most appropriate method for this case study research because it deliberately sampled a community of individuals that enlightened the researcher about the research problem under analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The sample of this project were African American female managers, human resources managers, and executive leaders who previously worked or currently work within the insurance industry in Connecticut. Connecticut was the selected location because in the event that an in person interview needed to take place, this researcher was in proximity to conduct the interview. The interviews were conducted via the video conferencing platform Zoom enabling this researcher to observe the participants body language, expressions, and demeanor as they thought about instances and their experiences. Snowball sampling was an additional method used which allowed the researcher to solicit the participants from recommendations of others they may know who might qualify to take part in the study, leading to “referral chains” (Robinson, 2014). The sample size included 10 African American women in the various levels of management ranging from entry level to senior level, three human resource managers (two African American females, one Caucasian female), and four executive leaders (one African American female, one Caucasian female, one African American male, and one Latino male) who previously worked or currently work within the insurance industry in Connecticut as they were qualified to answer the raised questions.

Including individuals into the study who were of another race and male with the exception of human resources managers and executive leadership and not previously or currently
employed within the insurance industry in Connecticut were not considered. Incorporating all managers who are male and non-Black or African American into the study would not paint a true picture of the phenomenon because some managers may not have experienced the barriers and challenges of navigating the corporate ladder at the same magnitude as African American women. Including individuals other than the specified group may not have identified the challenge’s African American women are faced with or experience; the reason(s) for being bypassed for top leadership positions; or have the same or similar motivating factors that had an impact on their pursuit for executive level positions. Excluding non-Black or non-African American women, narrowed the size and scope of the study allowing the researcher to solely focus on the women who have the same or similar experiences to share (Gill, 2014).

Saturation is when the researcher has collected ample information to fully develop the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This research involved interviewing 10 participants who were African American females, three participants from human resources, and four participants from executive leadership who were both male and female and/or of other races and ethnicities. The number selected for the prospective participants ensured that sufficient data were collected to fully develop the research. Any number less than 17 participants may have risked not collecting enough information and greater than 60 participants could cause oversaturation which would impact the study. This researcher gained access to participants through social media platforms such as LinkedIn and Facebook and networking and presenting communication with the intent of the study.

**Summary of Participants, Population, and Sampling**

Participants, population, and sampling were integral parts of this research project. The participants were identified as African American women who had previously worked or were
currently working in the various levels of management within the insurance industry in Connecticut. Also included in the participants were African American women who aspire to work in top level positions as well as other races and ethnicities and males who work in human resources management, and executive leadership. Purposeful or purposive sampling and snowball sampling were the sampling methods selected for this qualitative case study research. The sample size selected was an amount that enabled the researcher to collect sufficient data to fully develop the project. Social media platforms such as LinkedIn and Facebook and networking were methods used to gain access to participants for this research study.

**Data Collection and Organization**

The data collection and organization section of this paper discussed the data collection plan, instruments, and data organization. Data collection techniques for a qualitative research study usually consist of interviews and focus groups using video, audio, telephone communication, observations, or diaries. The instruments that were used by this investigator were video, audio, diaries, observations, documents, field notes, questionnaires, interview guides, and the researcher.

**Data Collection Plan**

When conducting qualitative research the central point is to comprehend the phenomenon in detail instead of universalizing it (Setia, 2017). Data collection methods most often used in qualitative research are interviews and focus groups which can occur via video conferencing, in person, or on the telephone, observations of interactions, or participant diaries (Keedle et al., 2018). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), a data collection plan consists of obtaining permission, performing a good qualitative sampling strategy, creating ways to record information, addressing situations as they happen in the field, and securely storing the data.
Developing a data collection plan is essential to the design of the study (Keedle et al., 2018). According to Keedle et al. (2018), many factors, besides the research questions, determine the choice of data collection techniques, including but not limited to the participants location and the researchers’ financial status for the project, and access to resources.

Creswell and Poth (2018) noted there were several steps to take to collect and analyze data for the study conducted. The first step in this research project was to determine if case study research design was the most appropriate for the problem statement and research questions. Based on the answers being explored, the researcher collected data from interviews. The next step taken was to identify the participants and develop interview questions reflective of the research questions.

This researcher recruited participants through the social media platforms LinkedIn and Facebook and by word of mouth. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), every participant of the study was provided a written and informed consent form (Appendix A and Appendix B) to participate for completion. A recruitment form (Appendix C) was also included. This study was conducted in compliance with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines. All data collected throughout the study are secured in a locked file cabinet and also password protected on the computer to maintain the confidentiality of the participants.

The researcher contacted the individuals who were going to participate in the study to schedule appointments for the interviews that were conducted via Zoom, a video conferencing platform. A rapport was developed with each participant as well as identifying a secluded location to ensure their confidentiality was maintained (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Each interview conducted was transcribed verbatim (Nascimento & Steinbruch, 2019). The interviews were also audio taped. After transcribing the interviews, the researcher then highlighted within the
transcript similarities among the interviewees. A chart with columns was created to insert each person’s quoted excerpt from the transcript. From that point, themes were created, and the excerpts were placed under the correlating theme. Finally, a summary of the findings was written, providing details about the similarities and differences among the participants’ comments that had been identified.

**Instruments**

The instruments that were used to conduct this study is the researcher, observations, documents, field notes (Appendix I), questionnaires for African American females (Appendix F), human resources (Appendix G), executive leadership (Appendix H), and the crafted interview guide based on the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research questions used semi-structured and open-ended formats to gain a more thorough understanding of the participants. Other instruments that were used to conduct the interviews were a diary to write down any notes as well as an audio recorder to ensure the stories of each participant was captured accurately (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Questions were included at the beginning of the interview guide asking the potential participants to provide their race, gender, location, classification as well as the level of the position, and educational level to make sure they met the criteria to be participants of the study.

The interview guide consisted of the date and time of the interview, the interviewer’s name, the interviewee, their title, a brief description of the study, and interview questions for the African American women participants (Appendix C), human resource participants (Appendix D), and executive leadership participants (Appendix E; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Developing interview questions allowed the researcher to gather additional information on the reasons for the underrepresentation of African American females in leadership, the diversity gap, diversity and
the potential impact on talent management, retention, competitive advantage, and overall organizational success. The interview questions aided in answering the posed research questions as well as identifying any possible patterns. Some of the interview questions were created specifically for African American women in the various tiers of management. While other questions that were phrased differently were created for human resources managers, and leaders at the executive level.

Part A questions 1 and 2 of the interview guide set out to ensure that all participants met the criteria to participate in the study. Question one of the interview guides was the consent verification which asked if the informed consent form had been signed, any questions or clarification needed prior to the start of the interview session, explained the study and the purpose. Question two for instance asked were the participants over the age of 18; do they work in the insurance company in Connecticut in a managerial capacity; and other questions specific to the participant group. The interview guides were specific to the African American female participants, the human resource participants, and the executive or top leadership participants respectively.

Interview questions three through seven for the African American female participants; questions three through six for the human resource and executive leadership attempted to address how there is an absence of diversity with respect to African American females in executive level positions and the attributing factors that lead to a diversity gap at such level. Questions eight, nine, ten, and eleven in the African American female category; number seven under human resource participants, and numbers seven and eight for executive leaders addressed research question two of how to close the diversity gap and increase representation of Black women in top level positions. The developed interview questions twelve, thirteen, and fourteen for African
American female participants; human resource participants’ question eight through twelve; and number nine for executive leadership addressed research question three and the sub-question of the challenges manifested when the absence of diversity exists and how to overcome the challenges. Question thirteen for human resource participants and question ten for executive leadership set out to answer research question four on how they value diversity in their organization.

**Data Organization Plan**

The most challenging part of qualitative research is attempting to assess the data in a timely manner (Watkins, 2017). This researcher experienced some challenges with obtaining the initial documents (Participant Verification and Criteria (Appendices C, D, E; Consent to Participate (Appendix A; and Questionnaires Appendices F, G, H)). Depending on the kind of data and researchers involved, the amount of time needed to collect, transcribe, and organize the data can be lengthy (Watkins, 2017). Prior to gathering the information from every participant for this project, each one was identified with a special code. Utilizing a special code for each individual precipitated subsequent examination of the data. Data organization requires the use of proper tools to perform the task and an organized technique helps to organize, reduce, and analyze the data (Watkins, 2017). This researcher used Microsoft Word, Excel, NVivo, and a journal to help with the organization of the data. The use of these formats would have allowed the researcher to save and share files with the dissertation team, as necessary.

Using a journal specific for the data collection enabled the researcher to document throughout this portion of the study. The researcher also utilized the qualitative analysis software program NVivo to aid in the organization of the data collected. NVivo enabled the researcher to upload the audio recordings of the interviews from Zoom to transcribe each participant’s
interview separately. This process and program helped the research to examine the data in its entirety (QSR International Software, 2020). NVivo enables researchers to transfer data from surveys, journal articles, interviews, social media, and web content, and color coding the interviewee’s responses from the questions asked during the interview (QSR International Software, 2020). According to Watkins (2017), developing a data organization plan will allow the researcher to have a more concise process by using the various methods which can help in organizing, reducing, and analyzing the data providing an intelligible and more put together presentation of data, using the coding and sorting capabilities, and share files. The qualitative software program was used to manage the data collected from conducting interviews and observing the participants, while the transcripts, quotes from the interviewees, and notes were arranged for examination.

Summary of Data Collection and Organization

The methods used to collect data were through means such as video conferencing, observations of interactions, or participant diaries (Keedle et al., 2018). Creating a data plan was requisite to the design of this study. Other important key factors in a data collection plan are the location of the participants, access to resources, and the financial status of the project (Keedle et al., 2018). Questionnaires and interview questions were developed and used based on each participant group. The method of data collection for this study was conducting individual interviews for the 17 participants of this research project. An audio recording device and notes jotted down were used to make sure that the data acquired was precise and transcribable. The main instrument of the collection of data is the researcher. The other instruments used in this process were the interview guides located in Appendices C, D, and E. Each of the interview guides were crafted to address the research questions located in Section One of this research
study. The data organization plan included using special codes to identify every participant of the study and encapsulate the rudimentary particulars of all of the participants.

Data Analysis

Individuals conducting qualitative research study often experience challenges with examining the many forms of data collected (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Another challenge that researchers are faced with is determining the manner in which to represent the data, for instance in tables, matrices, and narratives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). They also discussed that many times researchers liken data analysis with approaches for examining text and image data. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the method of analysis entails a great deal more such as organizing the data, performing an initial read-through of the database, coding and organizing themes, representing the data, and developing an interpretation of them. This process is known as data analysis spiral. They also stated these specific steps are linked and establish a spiral of activities all connected to the analysis and representation of the data. Computer software programming is a method that is useful but not necessary for aiding with configuring and completing data analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) presented three analysis strategies in qualitative research which are managing and organizing the data, reading and memoing emergent ideas, and representing and visualizing the data.

There may be ethical issues that emerge and should be thought through prior to and during conducting the case study research as noted by Creswell and Poth, 2018. They also noted that some of the issues may be with the relationship between the researcher conducting the study and the participants. Prior to the start of the research certain guidelines ought to be established (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Sanjari et al. (2014), because qualitative research is non-numerical in nature this will necessitate the individual who is conducting research to assess what
had been observed and proceed with interpreting the information which can present a conflict. They also stated this process is one of the reasons why some may surmise the findings from a qualitative research study are not trustworthy, are erroneous, and capricious. Further issues that researchers may encounter during the course of the study may include but not be limited to the anonymity of the participant, confidentiality, informed consent, and the potential influence the researcher may have on the participant (Dongre & Sankaran, 2016).

According to Sanjari et al. (2014), precautionary measures should be in place prior to the start of the study. Those measures would include protecting the researcher, participants, the university, and other vested individuals. Before starting the research process, the researcher thought about the significance that ethical issues may have on the study. Ethical issues may present during the course of the many segments of the research process (Sanjari et al., 2014).

Creswell and Poth (2018) also discussed the necessity in receiving prior approval from the IRB and school board before conducting the research. The investigator received approval from the IRB prior to beginning the field study. Many colleges and university review boards are regulated by policies necessitating evidence of cognizance of pertinent ethical matters (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Dongre and Sankaran (2016) presented that the evidence of cognizance of pertinent ethical matters must include plans to address the ethical matters as it relates to the three principles of respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice. They also stated the following:

1. Respect for the person warrants the researcher to present documentation for respecting privacy, verify the consent process, and the participants’ right to withdraw from the project are all communicated and understood;

2. Concern for the well-being of the participant is ensuring protection and evidence showing that the researcher will not place the participant at risk or in harm’s way; and
3. Justice is making sure that all are treated equally and fairly.

According to Keller and Alsdorf (2016), Christians should be cognizant of these principles to work and live by, to serve with respect and fear, be humble, respectful, and kind to others, and do not have a contrite heart. Additionally, Christians should work and live with ethical behavior, not with dishonesty, but with sincerity.

Creswell and Poth (2018) provided measures to ensure ethical matters are properly handled. The researcher should employ the following measures:

1. First obtain the approval of the review boards;
2. Inform the participant the purpose of the study and participation is completely voluntary;
3. Obtain the consent of the participant;
4. Be respectful of any cultural, religious, gender, or other differences;
5. Build a rapport and gain the trust of the participant;
6. Discuss the purpose of the study;
7. Maintain the participants’ anonymity and confidentiality;
8. Always be truthful in the reporting; and
9. Disseminate copies of the report to the participants and stakeholders.

“Honesty guides good people; dishonesty destroys treacherous people” (The New Living Translation Version Bible, 2016/Proverbs 11:3). “Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets” (The New Living Translation Version Bible, 2016/Matthew 7:12). These two scriptures substantiate how the researcher ought to conduct the research and corroborates how to address ethical matters.

There are three analysis strategies presented by Creswell and Poth (2018) that are used in qualitative research. The strategies are:
1. Handling and arranging the data;
2. Examining and memoing emergent themes; and
3. Interpreting and visualizing the data.

Handling and arranging the data will involve managing the collected data in a digital format and developing a nomenclature system. The homogeneous implementation of a nomenclature system guaranteed the information could be efficiently found in sizable databases of texts, images, or recordings for analysis either done manually or electronically. It was imperative for the researcher to efficiently locate the files, and this was accomplished by developing a spreadsheet or database that was searchable by the data form, participant, date of collection, and other features. Another component in handling and arranging the data is the process of converting the data and creating plans for continuing secure file storage (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

**Emergent Themes**

Creswell and Poth (2018) noted that the process of examining and memoing emergent themes should occur after the researcher has organized the data. This process allowed the researcher to gain a better sense of the entire database. This feat was accomplished by this researcher completely immersing themselves in the data, jotting down notes or memos within the margins of the field notes or transcripts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) defined memos as short phrases, thoughts, or main concepts that materialize to the reader. Memoing is the process of reviewing digital representations of audiovisual information, document memos of emergent themes either on the digital representation or in a supplementary text file. The following suggestions are provided by Creswell and Poth (2018) that facilitates the memoing practices:
1. Give precedence to memoing all through the analysis process. Start memoing upon the first read of the data and continue through to the writing of the conclusion;
2. Distinguish a method for memo organization: a) segment memos which captures thoughts from reading certain phrases in the data that can help identify initial codes; b) document memos capture ideas developed from examining a single file or as a way of writing down evolving thoughts from examination across multiple files which can aid in summarizing and identifying code groupings for themes and/or comparisons; and c) project memos capture the homogenizing of concepts across one view or as a way of recording how multiple views might join together across the research study; and
3. Establish sorting strategies for memo retrieval. Memos ought to be retrievable without difficulty and sortable over time, content, data form, or participant.

**Coding Themes**

Once the researcher had gone through the process of examining and memoing the data, the next step was to describe, classify, and interpret the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). They discussed that this process entails developing codes or categories that will represent the nucleus of qualitative data analysis. At this point the researcher established detailed descriptions, applied codes, created themes, and presented an interpretation considering their own beliefs or beliefs of perspectives in the literature (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These authors defined detailed description as researchers describing what they see. The detail is brought forth within the environment of the setting of the participant, place, or event. Description emerges as a good place to begin in qualitative research and is key in case studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the process of coding is essential to qualitative research and comprises understanding the text gathered from interviews, observations, and
documents. They also stated coding includes aggregating the text or visual data into sub-categories of information, searching evidence for the code from other databases being used in the research, and then designating a label to the code. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested the researcher should begin the coding with a short list also known as lean coding which is composed of five or six categories which is expandable as the review of the database continues. Deciding a list of codes and crafting descriptions provides the groundwork for a codebook (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) noted that the codebook verbalizes the individual boundaries for each code and plays a significant role in evaluating inter-rater reliability amid multiple coders. They have provided the following information that should be included in a codebook:

1. Name of the code, and if needed, a condensed label appropriate to place in a margin;

2. Description of the code detailing the boundaries via use of inclusion and exclusion criteria; and

3. Example(s) of the code using data from the research to delineate.

Creswell and Poth (2018) identified some situations that are critical in the coding process and need addressing. The first situation is determining if the qualitative researcher should count codes. The second situation is the use of preexisting codes that influences the coding process. Another situation is the uncertainty of the origin of the code names or labels. Code labels arise from many sources. The labels were NVivo codes, names that were the same words used by the participants. They perhaps are also code names taken from the social or health sciences, names the researcher devices that appear to best describe the information, or from metaphors that are linked with the codes.

The final situation is the sorts of information the qualitative researcher codes. A
researcher may potentially seek out stories conducting narrative research; individual experiences
and the background of those experience in phenomenology research; processes, actions, or
interactions conducting a grounded theory research; in ethnography research looking for cultural
themes and how the culture-sharing community works; or a detailed description of the specific
case(s) in case study research. Creswell and Poth (2018) presented data analysis techniques
qualitative researchers can use to dissect and aid in concentrating on the kind of information to
analyze from qualitative data in all methods:

1. Breaking down a dichotomy, revealing it as a fallacious distinction;
2. Reviewing silences-what is unsaid;
3. Addressing disruptions and contradictions; areas where a text is not made clear or
discontinues;
4. Concentrating on the component that is most unfamiliar or strange in the text-to find the
limits of what is plausible or acceptable;
5. Interpreting representations as an infinite source of multiple meanings;
6. Evaluating double meanings that may imply an unconscious subtext; and
7. Dividing group-specific and more widespread sources of bias by “reconstructing” the text
with replacement of its key components.

In the final discussion on coding, Creswell and Poth (2018) explained there are a few
techniques for examining and creating themes:

1. Use memoing to capture emergent themes;
2. Mark noteworthy quotes including a description of why it is noteworthy;
3. Develop a diagram showing relationships among codes or emerging themes;
4. Craft summary statements indicative of recurring or striking characteristics of the data;
5. Before shifting to focus on the process of interpretation, it is necessary to acknowledge some present thematic analysis as a substitute to coding.

At the conclusion of the interviews, the 17 participant responses were downloaded from the Zoom recordings, transcribed, and reviewed for accuracy. The process of coding the participants’ interviews responses had occurred, and the information was then transferred from NVivo to a spreadsheet to examine and administer the process of coding proficiently and methodically. Organizing and grouping the responses based on the research questions took place. After organizing the responses’ themes had evolved. Spreadsheets were created to place the responses under each theme to gain a better understanding of the significance of each response. Only the most significant responses were selected for each thematic category. The final step in the process was writing the findings of the study.

Interpretations

Interpreting data is one of the key components to conducting qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This process consists of understanding the data and the “lesson learned” (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Patton (2015), the interpretative process is an approach that necessitates both creative and critical reasoning in making purposefully calculated assessments about what is significant in the patterns, themes, and categories propagated by analysis. The author also explained that interpretation in this form of research precipitates drawing out past the codes and themes to a wider meaning of the data. This researcher started the process by establishing the codes from the data, next grouped the themes from the codes in which five themes evolved, and then arranged the themes into bigger units of withdrawal gaining a clearer understanding of the data. Hunches, insight, and intuition are some forms that
interpretations are based upon (Patton, 2015). Patton (2015) discussed that interpretation may also be within a social science paradigm or concept or a combination of personal beliefs in comparison with a social science paradigm or concept. Therefore, this researcher interconnected their interpretation to the bigger research literature created by others (Patton, 2015).

**Data Representation**

Representation and visualization of data is the last segment of the data analysis spiral, or the three analysis strategies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), in this final segment the researcher will present the data, a packaging of the findings in text, tabular, or figure form. There are several options available to researchers for representing and visualizing the data, therefore it can be challenging to determine which method is most appropriate. The researcher selected a table format to present the data. The first table details the participants’ gender and manager status such as being a previous or current manager. Table two illustrates the participants’ level of management and the gender and level of management. For instance the number and percentage who are classified as entry level, mid-level, senior level, and executive level. The second portion of Table 2 identifies both female and male and the tiers of management. Table 3 provides an outline of the participant characteristics for example the participants race, management level with the number and percentage, level of education with the number and percentage, and the years of work experience. They provide an action plan for developing and using matrix displays, which they are of the belief that these approaches to be repetitious and practical for data displays outside of matrices. The action plan includes:

1. Searching data and choosing the level and type of data to be displayed;
2. Outline and seek feedback on preliminary structuring ideas;
3. Evaluate completeness and readability revise as needed;
4. Document patterns and likely comparisons and clusters in the display; and

5. Reexamine accompanying text and verify conclusions.

The data analysis and representation for case study research consists of creating a detailed description of the case and its setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018). If the case exhibits a chronology of events, Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested the researcher examines the many sources of data to decide evidence for each step or phase in the development of the case. Furthermore, the setting is especially crucial. Creswell and Poth (2018) identified four modes of data analysis and interpretation in case study research. Categorical aggregation is the first mode which allows the researcher to look for a collection of ideas from the data, anticipating that the issue-relevant meanings will arise. On the contrary, direct interpretation, which is the second mode, the researcher will look at one idea and form meaning from it without looking for several ideas. Cross-case synthesis is an analytic method a researcher uses to study two or more cases. This will allow the researcher to research similarities and differences between the cases. The final mode is naturalistic generalization developed by the researcher from examining the data, generalizations that individuals can learn from the case for themselves, apply learnings to many cases, or move them to another similar context.

Analysis for Triangulation

Triangulation is integral to a research study and should not be underestimated to affirm reliability and validity of the data and findings (Fusch et al., 2018). A technique used to encourage social change, alleviate bias, and increase data saturation is through the use of triangulation (Fusch et al., 2018). Fusch et al. (2018) explained that triangulation provides profundness to the data that are gathered. They also noted that the triangulation of many sources of data can improve the reliability of the research study results.
The qualitative methods used for triangulation to conduct this case study were interviews, observations, and documents. The aforementioned tools enabled this researcher to view the organizations current processes for cultivating employees and other pertinent documents related to the study and interview the identified actors. Reviewing the various documents enabled this researcher to look at hiring and promotional practices, diversity training programs, trainee programs, succession planning, and other documents, using different interview approaches (e.g., fully structured, semi-structured, and unstructured) allowed this researcher to be flexible with the interview, and conducting surveys provided the latitude to ask additional questions not included in the interview process and it will be more anonymous (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

This researcher used triangulation in this case study to enhance the credibility and validity of the findings from the research that was being conducted. Noble and Heale (2019) defined credibility as the trustworthiness and how plausible a study is. Validity is focused on the degree to which a study authentically depicts or analyzes the concept or ideas being studied. Through triangulation this researcher homogenized theories, methods, and observers in the qualitative research study, assisted in making sure that essential biases emerging from the use of a single technique, or a single observer were conquered (Noble & Heale, 2019).

**Summary of Data Analysis**

Data analysis entails examining the data, organizing the data, organizing coding and themes, and representing and interpreting the data. The researcher was cognizant of any potential ethical issues that may disrupt the study (Dongre & Sankaran, 2016). To alleviate any potential issues the researcher established protocols and guidelines for the research project (Sanjari et al., 2014). The researcher gained prior approval from the IRB before proceeding with the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Emergent themes, coding, interpretation, and data representation were
all discussed in this section. Lastly, analysis triangulation is critical to a qualitative study. This method is used to affirm validity and reliability of the data and findings (Fusch et al., 2018) and enhance the credibility of the findings (Noble & Heale, 2019).

**Reliability and Validity**

This section will discuss reliability and how this researcher ensure reliability in the research study. Validity is the next component of this research paper. This researcher provided an overview of validity and how it was ensured in the case study research. The last aspect of the section will explain bracketing and the techniques that were used to mitigate biases in this study.

**Reliability**

Spiers et al. (2018) explained that reliability in qualitative research is embedded in the concept of data adequacy, which provides the means to illustrate regular support for one’s analysis across participants. Researchers who use fixed design methods use standardized research tools such as formal tests and scales to ensure the study’s reliability (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Unlike fixed designs or quantitative research, qualitative research or flexible designs use non-standardized techniques of creating qualitative data makes it impracticable for formal reliability testing (Robson & McCartan, 2016). They also noted that researchers conducting qualitative research ought earnestly with the reliability of their techniques and research strategies. This will entail the researcher to be thorough as well as careful and honest conducting the research but also provide evidence to others that carefulness and honesty were employed (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

For this research study, the researcher employed systematic approaches to authenticate reliability starting from cataloging notes, detailing the experiences and instances of the participants to support the study’s findings, and triangulation (Boletto, 2018). The specifics of
the data analytics techniques and depiction of the findings was intelligible and succinct
whereupon the researcher recognized the likeness and dissimilarities amidst the interviewees personal account to authenticate various points of views were detailed in the study’s completion (Boletto, 2018). The researcher kept a journal that elaborated on the analyzation steps applied, to show the conundrums encountered over the course of the research whereupon any individual tendencies were managed to affirm that the study’s findings were not manipulated, however reliability and clarity were visible amid the research (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), reliability can be improved if the researcher acquires detailed field notes by executing good-quality recording devices and by transcribing the digital files. Additionally, the recorded interviews must be transcribed verbatim to capture the trivial but most times critical, pauses, and overlaps. Reliability is to ensure that if another individual conducting research follows the same process as a previous researcher and repeatedly conducts the same research, they should arrive at the same findings and conclusions (Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) explained that following this process in qualitative case study research means repeatedly studying the same case, not just reproducing the results of the first case study by researching another case.

**Validity**

Validity is connected to data suitability, which provides the means to give a concise account of the experiences of participants within and outside the immediate context (Spiers et al., 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) identified several strategies for validation in a qualitative research study. The strategies that the researcher found most useful and suitable for validating the findings are Researcher’s Lens: Authenticating evidence by use of triangulation of multiple
data sources; Reader’s or Reviewer’s Lens: Having a peer review or debriefing of the data and research process; and Participant’s Lens: Member checking or seeking participant feedback.

Authenticating evidence via triangulation of multiple data sources permits the researcher to utilize multiple and different sources, methods, researchers, and theories to support the evidence (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This strategy permits the researcher to examine evidence from other sources that imparted understanding on themes or perspectives. Triangulation materializes when the researcher discovers documented evidence to code or theme in the different data sources. This process validates the findings.

Peer review or debriefing of the data and research process produced checks and balances which permitted the researcher to solicit the advice, guidance, and/or feedback from peers who were acquainted with their project or topic. The peer review corroborated that the research process, questions, findings, and other parts of the review are accurate and appropriate. Additionally, this gave credence to the findings. Member checking or seeking participant feedback affirmed to be integral in a qualitative study. Engaging participants in the research process was necessary because their perspective demonstrated the trustworthiness or reliability to the findings, which augments the credibility of the research.

For the purposes of validating the study’s outcome, the researcher was certain to examine and ask the participants depiction of their encounters as it concerned the subject matter and elucidated any replies that were not clear with an attempt to surmise recommendations for organizations experiencing an underrepresentation of African American women in top-executive positions (Hayashi et al., 2019). The recommendations were concluded through completely becoming cognizant of the experiences and idiosyncrasies of the interviewees at the same time recounting the influence the phenomenon could have ascribed to African American women’s
quest to climb the corporate ladder. To substantiate internal authentication and believability, triangulation was utilized for managing the results acquired from conducting interviews with the study participants and putting together assessments of the participants albeit the theories glass ceiling, diversity management, and Black feminist helped the researcher in verifying information via various sources of data (Maher et al., 2018).

**Bracketing**

According to Geddis-Regan et al. (2021), when a researcher conducts a qualitative study, they are the research tool that directly influences the data collection and analysis. They further explained that unavoidably, a researcher’s personal and professional circumstances will frame how data are generated and interpreted. The role of the researcher changes between the various research methods with reference to process, planning, interviews, and attitudes in the course of interviews (Sorsa et al., 2015). Bracketing is a technique used to develop a framework around suitable instances and/or people and clarifies situations a researcher should avoid from displaying and/or acting in line with their own notion and biases (Esmene & Kirsop-Taylor, 2021). According to Esmene and Kirsop-Taylor (2021), the exact administration of bracketing will be controlled by the studied subject itself. This researcher employed bracketing as soon as possible and during the course of this research study through design, data collection, data management, data analysis, and reporting it was guided by the research study’s purpose and the communication that unravels (Esmene & Kirsop-Taylor, 2021). Sorsa et al. (2015) stated in descriptive paradigm researchers exercise bracketing to lay aside their knowledge and assumptions so the center of attention can be on the participants’ point of view.

The participants’ personal accounts were detailed through experiences in the way that they subjectively depicted the events without adding anything to it (Sorsa et al., 2015). Sorsa et
al. (2015) defined bracketing as a method to expand awareness, to lay aside assumptions, and to view a situation with an open mind. Before starting the process of data collection and data analysis, this researcher instituted bracketing to alleviate any imminent pernicious consequence fixed ideas may have on this research project (Sorsa et al., 2015). Although this researcher is an African American woman, the study was conducted with an open mind, unbiased, and without prejudice (Sorsa et al., 2015). They explained that with an interpretive paradigm the researcher utilizes historical knowledge throughout the study in developing newfound ideology via the study.

**Summary of Reliability and Validity**

Reliability is important in a qualitative research study because it requires the researcher to accurately document his or her process followed when conducting the research. This process enabled not only the researcher but others to follow the procedure and garner the same results (Yin, 2018). Validity is linked to data suitability, which gives the means to give a precise account of the experiences of the participants inside and outside of the immediate realm (Spiers et al., 2018). Strategies were provided by Creswell and Poth (2018) to assist with validation in a qualitative study. The methods are Researcher’s Lens, Reader’s or Reviewer’s Lens, and Participant’s Lens. Bracketing is employed to mitigate biases that may present itself throughout the course of the research project. This technique was executed through the research design, data collection, data management, data analysis, and reporting which was all be guided by the study’s purpose and the communication that unravels (Esmene & Kirsop-Taylor, 2021).

**Transition and Summary of Section 2**

Organizations in the public and private sectors, health care, academia, insurance, and other industries are faced with diversity gaps in their leadership positions, particularly at the
The purpose of this research project was to examine the extent to which diversity influences the representation of black women in executive level positions and other leadership roles. Additionally, understanding the potential influence that diversity may present on the insurance industry’s competitive advantage and talent management. The objective of this study was to gain additional knowledge of the phenomenon by conducting case study research. This particular method of research may possibly pinpoint any potential roadblocks that may limit black women from navigating the career ladder to higher level positions. To what degree do biases sway the recruitment, selection, and hiring practices and promotional opportunities of African American women looking to pursue top level positions in the insurance industry.

In an effort to address the purpose of this research key factors were in place. Every part of the project was important and helped to shape the study. One of the most integral components of this research project was knowing and understanding the role and responsibilities of the researcher. Before proceeding with this project it was requisite that the researcher gained approval from the necessary governing bodies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The next important factor was identifying the participants. The participants were identified as past or current employees within the insurance industry in Connecticut who are African American females in managerial positions, human resources managers, and executive leaders.

Post-positivism, case study, and flexible design were selected to guide and conduct this qualitative research study. The case study design enabled the flexibility of this qualitative research project and will assist in addressing the how, what, and why crafted research questions. Additionally, all of these methods permitted the researcher to address the specific problem of why an absence of African American females in executive level positions within the insurance industry is present and how it may potentially result in the loss of talent and competitive
advantage. This researcher set out to recruit African American women in managerial positions, and human resources personnel and executive leaders whose gender, race and ethnicity were not specific to African American to participate in this research study. Purposeful sampling was the sampling method that was used for this case study as it provided for sampling a community of persons that can inform the researcher as it pertained to the research problem under examination.

Data collection and analysis were also paramount to qualitative research. It was necessary for the researcher to develop a plan for collecting, organizing, analyzing, and presenting the gathered data (Keedle et al., 2018). The data for this project was collected through observations, questionnaires, and interviews that were conducted via video conferencing using technology application Zoom. Once the data had been collected this researcher utilized NVivo data collection software program, Microsoft, and Excel to help maintain organization.

The analysis of data consisted of establishing emergent themes, coding, interpretation, and representation of the data. Analysis for triangulation is critical in qualitative research as it helps to prevent any possible biases in the study and increase the saturation of data (Fusch et al., 2018). This researcher used interviews, observations, and documents for triangulation to conduct this qualitative research study. Reliability, validity, and bracketing were necessary for conducting the study and presenting the findings.

This researcher made sure that all steps and processes were accurately documented to ensure reliability of the study and findings. Proper and accurate documentation will permit others to follow the same process this researcher used to net the same conclusion and findings (Yin, 2018). Validity is a way to provide an exact account of the occurrences experienced by the participants with specific context (Spiers et al., 2018). This researcher ensured the validity of the research project by employing strategies outlined by Creswell and Poth (2018). This researcher
authenticated the evidence by using triangulation, through peer review to corroborate that the research process, questions, findings, and other aspects of the study were accurate and appropriate, and seeking feedback from the participants added their prospective and illustrated the trustworthiness or reliability of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Bracketing is the last critical component to conducting a research study. This method helped the researcher to mitigate any biases that may have become apparent throughout the entire research project. Bracketing was implemented in this research via the research design, data collection, data management and analysis, and reporting which guided the study’s purpose and the communication that unravels (Esmene & Kirsop-Taylor, 2021). Section 3 is the presentation of the findings. This section will illustrate the emergent themes and detail how they correlate to the posed research questions. A summary of the findings will be made complete, and the section will end with suggestions for action and additional study.
Section 3, Application to Professional Practice

The purpose of this research project was to examine if diversity has an Influence on Talent Management and Competitive Advantage and why there is an absence of African American female executive leaders within the insurance industry in Connecticut. Seventeen women and men were participants in the study. All of the participants worked in various tiers of Management positions within the insurance industry. There are 13 African American women who are or were in management positions ranging from entry level to executive level.

These women have an educational level that ranges from high school, some college, associate degree, bachelor's degrees, master’s degree and their Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree. Two of the remaining four participants are Caucasian women who were in senior level and executive level. The other two are male participants who are Latino and African American executive leadership. The participants were asked three separate sets of questions determined by their classification. For instance if they were African American female managers, human resources management and Executive level. Ten of the participants were in the African American managerial category, three were human resources managers, and four executive leaders.

To provide a more concise picture of the participants categorically, they have been identified as African American, human resources, and executive leaders. The African American women's classification level (e.g., entry level, mid-level, senior level, or executive level) and education level, human resources level of position and educational, and executive leadership and education level will be illustrated. The African American female managers group has three working at the entry level and they have a high school diploma, an associate degree, and a master’s degree. Four of the African American females were mid-level managers with some
college, a bachelor's, masters and an MBA. The senior level African American female participants comprised three and they all have their master’s degree or Master of Business Administration. The second group of participants are human resources managers. There are two who are African American women with a bachelor's and a Master of Business Administration degree and a Caucasian woman who holds an MBA. Executive Leaders are the last category of participants who are made up of one each an African American female, Caucasian female, African American male, and a Latino male. The participants respectfully have a bachelor's, MBA, masters, and a law degree with additional college.

The perspectives of the participants were explored to illustrate the unfair representation of African American females in leadership positions and how diversity is not present in executive level positions within the insurance industry. The perspectives and experiences of the participants were explored to detail the bias in hiring practices and the factors that effectuate a diversity gap at the executive level. The perspectives of the participants were explored to demonstrate that job opportunities are equitable, but African American women are not being afforded the promotional opportunities to leadership and how can the diversity gap be closed to increase this demographic representation. The experiences of the participants were explored to detail how being exposed through having mentors and sponsors may elicit opportunities for promotion and enable the insurance industry to prevail over the challenges to increase the representation of African American women in leadership and retain their talent, all the while maintaining a competitive advantage and success. The perspective of the participants was explored to illustrate how being committed to diversity can create innovation and increase profits as well as the advantageousness of having a diverse representation at executive leadership.

The research questions that are in accordance with the research study are:
RQ1. How is there an absence of diversity with respect to African American women in executive level positions?

   RQ1a. What are the attributing factors that lead to a diversity gap at the executive level?

   RQ1b. What are the attributing factors that lead to reducing the diversity gap at the executive level?

RQ2. How do organizations close the diversity gap at the executive level?

   RQ2a. What measures can organizations implement to increase the representation of African American women at the executive level?

RQ3. What are the challenges that are manifested with the presence of a diversity gap at the executive level?

   RQ3a. How do organizations overcome the challenges to increase representation, retain talent, and maintain a competitive advantage while achieving organizational success?

RQ4. What is the importance and values of diversity in organizations and the benefits of having diverse representation at the executive level?

The absence of diversity and the reasons for the diversity gaps at the executive level with respect to the African American woman were explored to gain a deeper understanding of why this specific group of women are not fairly represented in executive level positions and the attributing factors that causes this phenomenon. Potential measures to implement and close the diversity gap and increase the representation of African American women may be in this demographic receiving greater exposure within their company. Promotion and commitment to a diverse work environment and increasing diversity can be beneficial to the overall organization
by retaining talent, improving relationships and revenue. The data suggest there are imminent perceptions of impediments that are existent in the insurance industry that African American women encounter when pursuing careers in higher tiered positions, contrarily the interviewed participants expressed similar challenges for African American women who have aspiration for promotional opportunities and being fairly represented in top leadership positions. The imminent perception of impediments for unfair representation include: (a) usually white male dominated, (b) no significant progress made, (c) individuals not being developed or recruited, (d) bias and unconscious because with the hiring manager, (e) perceptions of the roles for black women, (f) not looking at candidate equitably, (g) no shift in culture, (h) hiring who they are familiar with, (i) good old boy network, (j) access to opportunities get smaller, (k) fair and equitable from a posting perspective, (l) no programs designed to promote, (m) need to delve into talents, (n) hold the hiring managers accountable, and (o) the pool is not there. Participants from the African American female managers and the executive leaders group noted that in order for African American women to achieve promotional opportunities they will need to: (a) build relationships, (b) have a greater level of exposure, and (c) have a mentor.

Presentation of the Findings

This section presents the findings of the research conducted. There were 17 participants for this study who were both female and male working in different tiers of management. The participants were African American females who worked in entry level, mid-level, and senior level management positions, human resources managers, and executive leaders. All of the participants worked currently or previously within the insurance industry in Connecticut in a managerial capacity. The findings will address the problem, answer the four posed research questions and subsequent questions, and the discovered themes that emerged from the responses
transcribed from the participant interviews. Additionally, the findings of this study will address how it relates to the anticipated themes, conceptual-research framework, and the literature.

Yin (2018) suggested that an interview is one of the essential attributes of case study evidence. He also noted that interviews can chiefly assist by proposing elaboration for instance the “how” and “why” of significant occurrences, in addition to understandings demonstrating participants’ relativist views. This qualitative case study used unstructured questions for the conducted interviews. According to Yin (2018), this case study interview style will bear resemblance to a led steady conversation instead of an inflexible structured format.

The interview process began with the participants being provided with three different sets of questionnaires (Appendices G, H, & I) to ascertain information on the study participants gender, race/ethnicity, level of education, title, level of the title, and the number of years in the position. After completing the questionnaires, the set of interview questions were determined by the group the participants identified as for instance if they were an African American female manager, human resources manager or an executive leader. Interviews were conducted with seventeen research study participants utilizing the Interview Guides located in (Appendices G, H, & I). The study participants were both female and male.

Of the 17 participants, 15 were female and two were male. To further identify the participants thirteen of the females were African American and two were Caucasian. The two males were Latino and African American. Each of their positions have been identified as entry, mid, senior, executive level, and human resources. The women study participants are identified as African American Female Manager 1, African American Female Manager 2, African American Female Manager 3, through African American Female Manager 10, Human Resources Female Manager 1, Human Resources Female Manager 2, Human Resources Female Manager 3,
Executive Leader Female 1 and Executive Leader Female 2 and the men are identified as Executive Leader Male 1 and Executive Leader Male 2. Each participant group is categorized as African American female manager, human resources female manager, and executive leader.

All of the 17 participants have some form of education that ranges from high school, college and to a law degree. One participant has a high school education, two of the participants have some college, one has an associate degree, three have their bachelor’s degree, nine have their master’s degree or MBA, and one has college and a law degree. Their years of experience in managerial, human resources, and executive level ranges from 3 years to 33 years. The tables provided below will illustrate attributes related to the participants of this study. Table 1 will detail the participants’ gender and current and prior status in a managerial capacity. Table 2 will show the participants’ classification level of management and the gender and level of management. The last table will provide an outline of the participants which includes their race, level of education, and their number of years of experience.

**Table 1**

*Gender and Manager Status*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender of Participant</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female Manager</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Manager</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Managers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Managers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

*Participants Level of Management*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification Level of Manager</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entry Level</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Level</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior-Level</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Level</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female Entry Level</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Mid-Level</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Senior Level</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Executive Level</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Entry Level</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Mid-Level</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Senior Level</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Executive Level</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

Outline of Participant Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Management Level</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Entry Level</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Mid-Level</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Senior Level</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Executive Level</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Entry-Level</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Mid-Level</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Senior Level</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Executive Level</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>Entry Level</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>Mid-Level</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>Senior Level</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>Executive Level</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tech School, Some College Courses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-2 years of college</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associates Degree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s Degree or MBA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Education-Law Degree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
During the course of analyzing the data from the transcribed conducted interviews five themes were discovered that supports the body of knowledge vis-à-vis the absence of African American females in executive leadership within the insurance industry. Upon conclusion of the interviews, analyses were effectuated using the transcriptions from the interviews, questionnaires, personal observations, and the literature. Furthermore, the five themes authenticate the research questions posed for this project. The five themes discovered during the analyses that are in accordance with each established research question include:

1. There is not a fair representation of African American women in leadership in the insurance industry.
2. There is bias in the hiring process.
3. There is equity in job opportunities, however African American women are not being promoted into leadership positions.
4. A greater level of exposure through mentorship and sponsorship may lead to promotional opportunities
5. The insurance industry is committed to diversity, it creates innovation, and increases profits, but there is still a long way to go.

The Problem

Historically, it has been recognized that African American women are not fairly represented in top tier positions. Although this population is highly educated, has the credentials, experience, and skills to work at a higher level of management, white women and men will climb the ladder quicker than African American women (Fernandes & Alsaeed, 2014). African American women have minimal presence in executive leadership roles in several industries, but more specifically the insurance industry (Eagly & Chin, 2010). With minimal presence of
African American women in top management positions it can have an adverse effect on the organization’s revenue, acquiring and retaining highly talented individuals, solid decision making, creativity among a diverse group, and generally the overall performance (Graham et al., 2017). Research has shown that biases, stereotypes, perceptions, the glass ceiling, and other factors may be key indicators why African American women are bypassed, not considered, and overlooked for top tier management positions (Glass & Cook, 2018; Haile et al., 2016; Kuschel & Salvaj, 2018; Parlea-Buzatu, 2010; van Esch et al., 2018).

The findings of this study have shown that African American women are underrepresented in the insurance industry. Most of the African American female participants have their master’s degree or Master of Business Administration (MBA) but they are working in lower tiered management positions. In examining the data, the participants identified some reasons why they believed there is an underrepresentation of African American women in higher leadership positions. Some of the reasons given that contribute to the unfair representation is unconscious and conscious bias in the hiring process, this industry is predominantly white and headed by white men, there are not any programs, women are family oriented, not holding hiring managers accountable for their hiring decisions, and a few other reasons. The study participants also outlined the importance of diversity, the value, and benefits. They stated that diversity improves decision-making, the company’s bottom line, impact retention, the competitive advantage, creative ideas and other things. The participants felt that the organization is committed to diversity and has made some progress but there is still a long way to go.
Anticipated Themes

Racial and Gender Inequity

The first anticipated theme from this research project involved racial and gender inequity as biases linked to marginalized individuals and is most notable in the workplace. This theme was anticipated due to the fact that the sample of participants were chosen from the insurance industry that mostly white men occupy the executive leadership positions. Although, there is a big fluctuation in the workforce which is denotative of a notable societal progression for women’s positions and roles in organizations, however women remain unfairly represented at top leadership and board level positions (Baumgartner & Schneider, 2010; Metz & Kulik, 2014; Voss & Speere, 2014). Additionally, the findings of the study demonstrated that professional African American women only represent approximately 1% of the United States executive leadership (Taylor & Nivens, 2011). African American women exemplify a major and flourishing source of talent for organizations in Corporate America and have been sufficiently represented in the entry level and mid-level management positions (Holder et al., 2015). This theme was evident. The participants in this study did not find that African American women were adequately represented in executive level positions.

Gender Diversity

The next anticipated theme noted in this study is gender diversity can impact organizational performance (Bae & Skaggs, 2019; Blouch & Azeem, 2019; Guest, 2019; Hsu & Lawler, 2019). This theme was anticipated because gender diversity can improve many aspects of an organization. The findings of this study demonstrate that if organizations subscribe to a diverse workforce, it can grow their revenue, improve sustainability, maintain competitive advantage, develop and attract a highly qualified talent pool, share ideas, and enrich the decision-
making among individuals (Guillaume et al., 2017). Although the execution of diversity policies could aid in creating a more diverse work environment, equal employment opportunity and affirmative action policies are implemented in industries and organizations to help protect persons from employment discrimination and unfair treatment as noted by (Fujimoto & Hartel, 2017; Gundemir et al., 2017; Hirsh & Cha, 2017), this was not evident in the discovered themes.

**Recruitment and Selection Practices**

The final anticipated theme is the recruitment and selection practices of African American females for executive leadership positions can improve the organization’s workforce diversity (Hofhuis et al., 2016; Klettner et al., 2016; Matotoka & Odeku, 2021; Ng et al., 2017). As well as these practices influencing top management to exhibit their responsibilities to diversity and inclusion. The aspects of this theme were not evident in this research project. However, the findings of the study did indicate that hiring managers are not being held accountable for their hiring practices and decision to not hire African American women into management positions. A key challenge that organizations face in growing workplace diversity is an adverse effect in their decision making processes (Hofhuis et al., 2016). Hofhuis et al. (2016) also explained that internal recruiters are integral in the recruitment process of which may result in organizational inequality.

**Discovered Themes**

“African American Women are Unfairly Represented in Insurance Industry Leadership Roles.”

How is there an absence of diversity with respect to African American women in executive level positions?
The first thematic categorization is resultant of the coded study participant responses from the interviews which illustrates that the participants believe there is not a fair representation of African American women in leadership positions in the insurance industry. The constituents that helped to create the thematic category are (a) usually white male dominated, (b) no significant progress made, and (c) individuals not being developed or recruited. All of the above attributes are linked with the unfair representation of African American women. The participants have identified them as cases or reasons why they believed African American women were not being fairly represented in leadership within the insurance industry. The interviewee responses delineated examples that the participants believed this is a male dominated industry, implicit bias, organizations need to get to the root of it, and positions are filled by the same people for a long time.

For the majority of interviewed study participants they have described how African American women are not fairly represented in upper management positions within the industry and some if the root causes while one study participant believed that there is not an underrepresentation of African American women in leadership within the organization. Some of the participants have described occurrences when at times they were the only African American woman in meetings and/or there was only one in their unit. The emergent theme correlates to the underrepresentation of African American women in leadership positions within the insurance industry. This theme was used to answer research question 1.

African American Female Manager 9 gave insight into the underrepresentation of African American women leadership within the organization describing Black women were being presented as leaders but were not really put into the roles as well as hiring managers should be held accountable. The participant noted:
I worked for the company for nine years and during that time I think there were no African American women in senior leadership roles. About the time that I was leaving, there was one woman that got promoted into a senior vice president role. But during the time that I was there, even though there were black women that were presented as leaders, they were not actually in the role legitimately as leaders, let me put it that way. They were influential leaders, and they were called upon to operate as leaders but did not hold the titles of leadership.

Human Resources Female Manager 2 acknowledges there is an underrepresentation of African American women leadership within the organization in general but are fairly represented in human resources. The participant explained:

So in general, no, I think we’re probably in the spirit of H.R., we probably are fairly or well represented. I think we do have our success that tends to be in roles like H.R. for Black women. But overall, I don’t think we’ve made significant progress in our representation for black women and for black people overall in the insurance industry and in corporate and largely, you know, we still suffer.

Executive Leader Male 1 unequivocally states there is an underrepresentation of African American women leadership within the organization and it being a male dominated industry. The participant described:

You rarely find any black or brown women in the executive level. The last frontier of the insurance industry is usually a white, male dominated thing. But you don’t really see too many black or brown women when you do the numbers.

Human Resources Female Manager 3 acknowledges that many of the positions have been filled by the same people. The participant explained:
I would say, first and foremost, is many of the positions those positions have been filled by the same people for a long period of time. They have not seen the relevance in ensuring that there have people, women of color in particular on their succession plans. And so those individuals are not being either developed in the organization or recruited into those positions.

African American Female Manager 4 believes that organizations need to get to the root of things to address why more African American women are not in roles. The participant detailed:

So I really think that they should really advocate not in a way to make it, you know, the last thing we want to be viewed as are tokens. It shouldn't be token based because we need X number of African Americans in these positions. Why don't we have more African American women in these roles and try to really get at the root of it and address the root? But I think if we can start to understand why it is that gap and what's causing the gap is the gap widening. Are we shrinking the gap? I think we really need to get to the root of what that is and then address it from the root.

Participant African American Female Manager 5 was asked Do you believe there is an underrepresentation of African American women in leadership? She responded:

In my organization, it’s not underrepresented because me, I’m seeing more than voice is not underrepresented because I’m saying the organization is really big on diversity. We have diversity classes and I see a lot of managers that are African American women.

However, when Executive Leader Female 1, who works for the same organization, was asked a similar question, she provided a different view by stating:
I don’t from my perspective, and you know, I work for the organization, which has around seventy-five thousand employees. So, just in general, I think there’s a lack of women and especially African American women in leadership roles from observing and my own at my company, which is a Fortune 12 company. So, I think it’s a pretty good sized company to have as a representation.

The findings from this study mirror the existing outcomes from the literature and other research in which despite there being gains in the aforementioned areas in the past several years, one particular area that is still of concern is the inadequate representation of women in business leadership roles, especially in the C-suite or as business owners (Sanchez & Frey, 2020). They also explained that this phenomenon of inequality amid leadership roles is a global issue, with the invisible barriers’ women encounter concerning professional ascension branded as the ’glass ceiling.’ Not as many women climb to top leadership roles, attributable to inopportune informal networks, gender stereotyping, and shortage of mentors (Sanchez & Frey, 2020).

The theme was viewed through the glass ceiling theory in which both social and organizational influence’s structure barriers that prohibit women from top level management positions in organizations (Cohen et al., 2020). It was also viewed through the lens of the Black feminist theory where Johnson and Joseph (2020) explained that the term intersectionality was invented by Black feminist critical race intellectual Kimberle’ Williams Crenshaw in 1989 to denote how the many-sided forms of discrimination that Black women encountered to no avail was acquired within the established realm of race or gender system of laws. According to Johnson and Joseph (2020), where the law-exhibiting hegemonic ideology- viewed such race/gender barriers as individually endured, the intersection of racism and sexism in Black
women’s lives was not able to be obtained completely by examining the race or gender peculiarities of those encounters independently.


What are the attributing factors that lead to the diversity gap at the executive level? What are the attributing factors that lead to reducing the diversity gap at the executive level?

The second thematic categorization is a result of the coded participant responses from the interviews which outlines why the participants believe there is bias in the hiring process of African American women in leadership positions in the insurance industry. The attributes that helped to generate this thematic category are (a) bias and unconscious bias with the hiring manager, (b) perceptions of the roles for black women, (c) not looking at candidates equitably, (d) no shift in culture, (e) hiring who they are familiar with, and (f) good old boy network. All of the constituents are connected to bias in the hiring process of African American women. The participants have detailed reasons or instances why they felt that there is bias in the hiring process of African American women in the insurance industry.

Many of the participants have described how there is bias in the hiring process of African American women due to the perception of where they think black women can be more successful, the unfair representation of minorities and women in leadership or management due to bias, hiring managers not looking at candidates in an equitable way, and there being the good old boys club. A few of the participants have detailed examples where bias is prevalent. The emergent theme is linked to why there are inequities and biases in the hiring process of African American for leadership positions in the insurance industry. This theme was used to answer the research questions 1a and 1b.
African American Female Manager 6 identified some factors that attribute to the underrepresentation of African American women in leadership within the organization. The participant detailed:

I attribute it really sort of I'll say some of it back to networking. I think a lot of it probably does go back to the good old boys’ club, right? People bring along who they're familiar with or maybe who they put into the organization. Right. So are opportunities even presented to us that we may have an interest in, right?

Executive Leader Female 2 emphatically stated that there is not a fair representation of minorities and women in leadership or management. The participant detailed:

I do not believe there is a fair representation of minorities and women in leadership or in management, and I think a lot of that has to do with bias, unconscious bias because hiring managers tend to hire in their likeness. And if you are sitting down with someone who does not look like you and you're answering questions as part of that interview, they're already coming into that interview with some bias. Just judging your resume, perhaps by your name. Oftentimes ethnic names do not get those interviews or if they do get the interviews, again, it comes with some bias and unconscious bias that that particular manager may have that hiring manager may have.

Human Resources Female Manager 2 acknowledges that there is implicit bias in hiring and that it takes educated black women longer to get noticed for roles. The participant stated:

What I would feel, I feel like, is of implicit bias, both in hiring and who we choose to sponsor, access to the right people who can help make those kinds of decisions. That’s still an uphill battle for black people in corporate America, and we’re seeing that we’re asking more about it since George Floyd. But there was a lot more to words than what we
actually see in action in a lot for organizations. You know, I wouldn’t say it’s straight up racial, I’ll say this, I think it’s unconscious bias. I still think there are perceptions of where they think black women can be more successful. We tend to be in service oriented types of roles. We tend to be in roles that people think we’re best suited for. I feel like, you know I run into a lot of people like myself with graduate degrees and, you know, black women are some of the most educated groups as a population, but that it takes us significantly longer to be noticed for those bigger roles.

African American Female Manager 10 finds it hard to believe that there are not any qualified people. The participant explained:

I believe that it is the culture. I find it hard to believe that there are no folks that are qualified, and so to give you an example of that, I believe when we do have the talent or the talent comes in the door as a company, larger companies have a hard time retaining that talent because there's no shift in culture. So the same culture or some of the things that we dealt with decades ago, women, especially minority women, are dealing with now.

African American Female Manager 9 believes that individuals responsible for hiring select the people who they want. The participant noted:

I think that there are there is always, people in roles that are hiring, and the people choose who they believe are the best people for the job. Is choosing people devoid of bias, no. So there are roles and there are people going for those roles, but the people who are deciding are not looking at the candidates in an equitable way. Or even going out of their way necessarily to make a difference. I remember a manager once telling me that in order to really make a difference, we have to measure and there's always a thing with that around,
you know, where it be numbers or not. I don't want you to hire me because of that. I want you to hire me because I'm the best person. And he felt as though if he has to hire, and there are two people going for the position and the two people have exactly the same credentials unless you tell him he must hire, or he should hire a black person because there's a problem, he will likely hire the white person. This was a white manager speaking. I think that it still comes down to whoever is making that hiring decision is who drives the equity or not.

Executive Leader Male 1 feels that the insurance industry is an old boy network. He detailed:

If you think about it, you say it's an old boy network and it's not a sexy career. Another thing is that the good old boy network fathers passed it on to sons and daughters. We just don't have that pool of people, black and brown people that pass it on to their kids or nephews and so forth.

Executive Leader Male 2 believes this is a systemic issue. He explains in his response:

So I think we have a tendency to want to say that it's a lack of exposure. But the reality is that it's a systemic issue. You know, there's this I don't remember who said it, but I'm going to say this quote that the insurance industry is made up of friends, of family, of friends, of family and if all of the families are predominantly white and they don't have very broad definitions of friendships. Then the industry is not going to get any more diverse than what it is, right? So it requires a purposeful, intentional reach out mentorship, sponsorship of black women in order for them to get to those tiers.

In other studies researchers have detailed in their findings some of the very same reasons of underrepresentation identified in the data of this researcher’s study. These findings show
existing outcomes from literature in which research studies have illustrated that despite the fact that African American women continually symbolizes a burgeoning talent within the workforce, however, results of barriers can foster bias and discrimination which influences their rise to leadership roles (Sales et al., 2019). History has shown that White men have led and continue to lead and be entrenched in the upper and executive levels of business, management, and political ranks in which is indicative of a culture that restricts African American women’s ascension to top leadership and management roles and continues a glass ceiling (Sales et al., 2019).


This theme was also viewed through the lens of the glass ceiling theory which is the invisible hindrances that prohibit women from achieving the top levels of leadership (Manzi & Heilman, 2021). Bloch et al. (2020) detailed in their study that prior research analyzed the opportunity for positions that women had within a large company. It was also stated that women were mainly slated in low paying and low status jobs. Their study explained that men who hold powerful roles do not elevate women because of gender biases about women’s skills and demeanor, perceptions about their competence to effectively communicate with men, biases regarding job positions, and men’s apparent dispositions for leadership (Bloch et al., 2020).

“There is Equity in Job Opportunities; However, African American Women are not Being Promoted into Leadership Positions in the Insurance Industry.”

How do organizations close the diversity gap at the executive level? What measures can organizations implement to increase the representation of African American women at the executive level?
The third developed theme is that of the participants’ belief that there is equity in job opportunities, however African American women are not being promoted to top level positions. This thematic category evolved from the coded responses of the interviewee which explained why they felt that African American women are not being promoted even though there is equity in opportunities. The constituents that aided in generating this them are (a) access to opportunities get smaller, (b) fair and equitable from a posting perspective, (c) no programs designed to promote, (d) need to delve into talents, (e) hold the hiring managers accountable, and (f) the pool is not there. All of the above attributes are associated with equity in opportunities, but African American women are not being extended the opportunity. The interviewees have described instances and/or reasons why they believe this is occurring within the insurance industry.

African American Female Manager 6 believes as the roles go up the access to opportunity gets smaller. The participant detailed in her response:

But as the roles go up, I think that the access to the opportunity gets smaller, right? So I think to a certain extent, there's a lot of stuff that's out there lower level, whether it's management or just individual contributor that we would have access to. But as the roles and the levels get higher, especially in the management position, they're usually decisions or conversations that are happening behind doors before you know about or both for an organization change or opportunity presented.

Human Resources Female Manager 3 thinks there is a fair and equitable process from a posting perspective. She explained in her response:

So I think there's a fair and equitable process from a posting perspective. Meaning positions are posted and everybody internally has the opportunity to apply to those roles.
Where I think inequities continued to exist is how hiring decisions are made and those calibration conversations that happen. That is something that we have a program that we're rolling out that I think will help with that so that people can ask questions in a not non-judgmental way to ensure that candidates are being considered in an equitable way.

Executive Leader Female 2 provides a viewpoint that some of the inequity of leadership positions is that there are not programs designed to promote people as they enter the company. She explains in her response:

Some of the inequity of those leadership positions is that there aren't programs that are designed to promote people as they come into different companies. They get a mentor who's an executive leader and they also get a sponsor who's an executive leader. But it definitely does take, you know, an advocate at the table. Sometimes many of us do not have advocates at the table. And so if companies were to create programs such as that mentoring program, it would give access, you know, because at the end of the day, people can't hire you if they're not exposed to you. And so having senior leaders be involved in that development both personally and professionally for potential candidates, I think is a game changer, is a business imperative that I think all companies need to foster.

African American Female Manager 2 notes from her standpoint that organizations need to delve into the talents that exist in the organization. The participant stated:

I think organizations really need to delve into the talents that they have already in their organization. Right, feed the talents that's there because you have people African American women that's there in organizations today that's sitting there with a ton of
knowledge and they’re just bypassing them. You know have an open conversation with managers. There are managers out there that is holding back employees.

African American Female Manager 9 feels that hiring managers are not held accountable for why African American women are not being promoted or retained. The participant discussed:

I think that there are that we do not hold the hiring managers accountable for why they are not promoting African-American women or retaining African-American women. But time and again, they were not promoted. Yeah, I don't think that it is a conscious bias. It might be that they really think that these folks are the best people, but they're not seeing that there is really a problem in what they're doing.

Executive Leader Male 1 stated the pool is not there and cannot talk about equity until the numbers are there. The participant provided explanation:

Again, it's all about the numbers. The pool is not there, so on paper the answer is no. I think it once we start getting the numbers, we can start talking about equity. Right now, you're talking about less than two or three percent. So we're not even at the table. We need to get to the table. This industry is always going to be a white, male dominated industry. You're not going to have people look like me, people who look like you at a leadership level. We simply had to make the pitch that we need, that we belong at the table.

The findings of this research project are similar to those of the outcomes from current literature and conducted studies. The findings show current results from literature in which research has shown that there is a huge gap in leadership for women and minority directors (Field et al., 2020). Recently organizational shareholders and regulators have been concentrating more on the diversity of corporate boards (Field et al., 2020). Even though diverse (women and
minorities) board delegates have risen, diverse directors are considerably less likely to occupy leadership roles regardless of having higher qualifications than white directors (Field et al., 2020). African Americans experience a *glass ceiling* to upper levels of management corporate ladders and to purporting organizational dominance (Velasco & Sansone, 2019). The glass ceiling theory is associated with this theme.

Velasco and Sansone (2019) noted that U.S. businesses with 100 plus employees and women in management roles increased from 22% to 29% between 1985 and 2000; but since then the numbers have not moved much. They have also stated that in Fortune 500 companies Caucasians continue to be predominant in corporate with 90.3% of it being board members, African Americans only make up 4.6% and other races and ethnicities make up the remaining percentage. Velasco and Sansone (2019) further explained in their research that traditional business standard practices are conformed by “racialized” precepts that give rise to very low expectations for workers of color and continue racial structures by their carrying out duties considered undesirable. According to Field et al. (2020), possessing specific skills such as previous leadership or finance experience improves the potentiality of appointment, that potentiality is diminished for diverse directors.

While the diversity of directors has increased over a period of time, the representation in diverse leadership has straggled. In an effort to erase the gap among representation and leadership during the course of broadening diversity, the percentage of diverse leadership would have to burgeon at a substantial pace than total diversity (Field et al., 2020). When reviewing experience and qualifications, they essentially determined that diverse directors illustrated a wider number of professional credentials, have more comprehensive external board and other firm committee expertise, and arise from grander director networks than their white male peers
According to Ramohai, 2019, revolving door is used to allude to unreceptive organizational behavior and cultures that pressure women to vacate their positions—somewhat of tactic dismissal. In top leadership, these obstacles come because of power struggles that seek to repress women to lower roles or positions and establish spaces for men in top management roles (Ramohai, 2019).

According to Velasco and Sansone (2019), creating organizational accountability and promoting managers’ participation have demonstrated to be effective in broadening the share of Black and White women in leadership. The have stated in their study that intentional strategies to training have led to a growth of 9.0% to 13% in non-white males and women in roles of leadership during a 5-year period with there being no decrease in Black or White women in the upper echelons. Furthermore, enlisting every person in management in recruitment and mentoring initiatives broadens their buy-in for organizational diversity (Velasco & Sansone, 2019). Mentoring programs and delegating the function for diversity to a diversity manager or also a group of managers from various departments have demonstrated effectiveness (Velasco & Sansone, 2019). Additionally, in their research Velasco and Sansone (2019) have presented that diversity committees have increased the number of black women in managerial positions by 30%.

“A Greater Level of Exposure Through Mentorship and Sponsorship May Lead to Promotional Opportunities of African American Women in the Insurance Industry.”

How do organizations overcome the challenges to increase representation, retain talent, and maintain a competitive advantage while achieving organizational success?

The fourth thematic category is as a result of the coded interview responses from the participants who give accounts why they are of belief that there is a greater level of exposure
through mentorship and sponsorship which may lead to promotional opportunities for African American women in the insurance industry. The attributes that helped to form this thematic category are (a) building relationships, (b) greater level of exposure, and (c) having a mentor. These aforementioned constituents are all associated with promotional opportunities through greater exposure, mentorship, and sponsorship. The participants have elaborated the reasons and instances they believe that greater exposure can lead to promotional opportunities for African American women in the industry. This theme is used to answer research question 3a.

Executive Leader Male 2 acknowledges that during his time at the organization he has built relationships and gotten sponsorship. The participant detailed:

I can say from my experience, like I've had my last four years at the organization have had a great run. I've built relationships, have gotten sponsorship, you know, I have a great I have great mentors. You know, I'm standing on all the right stages are all the right times, but I am the exception, not the rule. And so, you know, if there were more opportunities, if someone just laid out a blueprint of everything that's happened for me over the course of the last four years, these insurance companies would be vastly different.

African American Female Manager 10 believes that opportunities have been provided to her. The participant detailed:

I believe that the opportunities have been provided to me because I have a greater level of exposure to folks that have the authority to hire and promote within. You know, in prior positions, I wasn't given that same opportunity. I believe that I was encouraged because I'd start to build those relationships with people that have the ability to sponsor me as opposed to just having a mentor. You definitely need someone that is willing to advocate
for you and kind of push the envelope. Most of the time, if you're looking to bridge that
gap, it's really difficult to do it alone. So if you don't have that support system, and in
those folks that are willing to advocate and speak about you in a positive light when
you're not in the room, it is almost impossible to make those transitions.

African American Female Manager 7 feels that if you do not have someone in your circle
you are at a disadvantage. The participant stated:

We have a system right where you can see all positions that are posted again, unless
you're out there all the time, you're not going to know in which promotional opportunities
take place. I think again, similar to what I mentioned around having that, that those
mentors and people who are sponsors were saying your names and roles that you're not
in. And so unless I have someone in my back pocket or in my circle who is going to make
me aware of opportunities that exist kind of before they hit the news, you're not you're at
a disadvantage.

Existing literature has detailed the significance in having a mentor specifically in higher
tiered leadership positions. One study in particular explained that it is particularly important for
women to have mentors for career progression specifically, having a male mentor who is in top
leadership positions and the decision maker. The researchers who had conducted the study stated
that while men had the power and authority to advance women in their careers, no one in mid-
level management had the capability to effectively mentor. The findings of this project are
similar to the existing research that illustrated women could benefit from having a mentor if they
are seeking to climb the career ladder. However, the findings of this study did not specifically
imply that a woman would be more successful with a male mentor in a high level position. The
findings demonstrate prevalent results from literature whereupon studies have shown that even
though mentoring is linked with an array of successful career outcomes for both women and men, researchers have insinuated that these type relationships may be especially essential for women’s career accomplishment (Ramaswami et al., 2010).

According to Choi (2019), data were provided from a 2007 Career Advancement Survey (CAS) in which the results concluded that when a woman has a supervisor and/or mentor who are supportive they would most likely be appointed to essential roles and given important assignments. It was also noted that females were more conceivably to be provisionally promoted than men when they have an encouraging supervisor and/or mentor (Choi, 2019). Ramaswami et al. (2010) conducted a study that found top-male mentoring, monetary compensation, and career progression fulfillment were major among women working in male-dominated industries. Gender differences in career achievement is thought to be one of the most comprehensively researched topics in management and social research and is recommended to be resultant from work-related developmental, interactional, and situational factors (Ramaswami et al., 2010).

Their research also focuses on the collaborative outcomes of protégé sex and mentoring on occupational achievement because the study on those evolving relationships is key to understanding critical happenings, for instance the glass ceiling and the use of promising female talent. According to Ramaswami et al. (2010), from the perspective of mentoring, “signal strength” alludes to the degree to which a mentor is powerful and decides who (or what type of mentor) can best impact a protégé’s career advancement. Because mentoring is connected to developing the proteges’ power resources which includes control over individuals, information, organizational resources, the development of authority, credibility and assumed expertise, this viewpoint is especially pertinent to mentoring relationships given status differences among mentors and proteges, particularly among high level-male mentors and female proteges.
(Ramaswami et al., 2010). Additionally, Ramaswami et al. (2010) indicated that high level-male mentors have reins of power, rooted in entities to which female or junior-male mentors might not have the same opportunity due to the fact that men predominantly occupy more key positions in organizations and are thought to be more persuasive, influential, and domineering. Thus achieving a greater outcome for their proteges career advancement over mentors in lower level positions (Ramaswami et al., 2010).

“The Insurance Industry Has Made Some Progress in Their commitment to Diversity, Which Creates Innovation and Increases Profits, but There is Still a Long Way to Go.”

What are the challenges manifested with the presence of a diversity gap at the executive level? What is the importance and value of diversity in organizations and the benefits of having diverse representation at the executive level?

The final theme is a result of the participant responses that were coded from the transcribed interviews which specifically details why the participants believe that the insurance industry has made some progress, is committed to diversity which creates innovation and increases profits, however there is still a long way to go. The constituents that aided in creating this theme are (a) innovative and creative ideas, (b) align with the community, (c) creates retention issues, (d) epicenter of everything, (e) employees envisioning options, and (f) affects the bottom line. The above attributes related to diversity impacting the industries profits, shared ideas, and talent retention. This theme is driven by the theory of diversity management. According to Konrad et al. (2016), the organizations tendency to manage diversity, to be specific gender diversity has an effect on its organizational performance and making use of diversity and equality management (DEM) approaches for example reviewing recruitment activities,
progression of women and minorities into management positions, and diversity training which enhances overall performance.

Executive Leader Male 1 believes the more diverse you are the better you are. The participant stated:

I think the more diverse you are, the better you are. And it's going to affect the bottom line. You're going to make more money if you have people that look like us because they'll be people in the minority communities in the black and brown communities, that's going to want to do business with people that look like us. So diversity will help the bottom line.

African American Female Manager 10 feels innovative and creative ideas should align with the communities they serve. The participant explained:

Yes. I mean, if you're bringing together, if you're looking for innovative ideas and creative ideas that align with the communities, we serve it would benefit the company to have a more of a diverse panel on people that are doing those jobs and making decisions.

Executive Leader Male 2 explains that when individuals do not see representation that looks like them, it can create retention issues. The participant stated:

Yeah, I think it creates a lot of different issues. So a couple of things, when people do not see representation that looks like them, they have a tendency to look around and say, where else can I find it? So it creates retention issues. It creates perspective issues, right? The more myopic your world is, the more the more your worldview is colored down.

Executive Leader Female 2 mentions that diversity is the epicenter of everything that we do. The participant detailed in her response that:
Diversity is the epicenter of everything that we do and without diversity in your products, diversity in your services, diversity in your leadership again, as a business, you're not going to be able to last. You've got Gen Z and millennials, specifically Gen Z and millennials, where they only know diversity. It's all part of your DE and I story if you are serious about bringing diversity, equity and inclusion to your company.

Human Resources Female Manager 3 provides the perspective that a diverse population brings richness to experiences. The participant explained:

So from the heart perspective, having diverse employee population brings a richness to people's experiences and their day and their ability to learn and appreciate other people and other cultures and you know, just expand their experiences and their knowledge. That's the heart answer. The business case for diversity and inclusion is that you see that when organizations have diverse employee populations, and they listen to those points of views that those companies outperform their competitors.

Human Resources Female Manager 2 believes that people will not work for a company that does not clearly state their diversity, equity, and inclusion plan. The participant further explained:

We see it in studies time and time again that we get the best kinds of decisions when we can bring people in the room across a wide variety of backgrounds, representation, etcetera. And we've seen disasters when that doesn't occur, right? So for a financial standpoint, from a productivity standpoint, from frankly a stock price, we have seen those companies that do diversity better actually get better results. We also just, you know, you just have an opportunity to really solve problems quicker, faster when you can bring people with different backgrounds and experiences in the room. And, you know, we just
can't look like we look today. We don't have a workforce that is all white men. We have a workforce now that is highly diverse. That will be majority people of color by 2050. And we have to get there as a workplace to bring these employees in. It's just not even an option.

Other studies that exist have demonstrated the effects of having a diverse workforce. The researchers have indicated in their findings that diversity in the workforce and in leadership can enable an organization to maintain its competitive advantage, attract highly qualified talent and improve decision-making that can impact the status of the organization. The decision to embrace and commit to diversity can determine the success or failure of an organization. The findings of this study are not different from the other existing literature and research conducted. The findings illustrate present-day implications from literature at which research has shown that the number of women entering the workforce is on the rise, but few of them are ascending to managerial positions (Coetzee & Moosa, 2020).

Human resource management has a greater problem to address such as the massive number of women in managerial roles leaving organizations (Coetzee & Moosa, 2020). According to Coetzee and Moosa (2020), adding women to management is beneficial. Women’s propensity to add value to organizational quality and the incorporation of soft skills bring intangible and tangible benefits that could translate into enhanced organizational performance. The incorporation of women at managerial levels additionally culminates and adopts creativity and innovation (Coetzee & Moosa, 2020). As discussed by Coetzee and Moosa (2020), women make up an integral part of any workforce because they provide a great deal of knowledge and experience. In their study they presented a point of view and saw the elevation of women not
only as an equity strategy but furthermore as a key for sustainable widespread development and a source of intellectuality that should be used to gain competitive advantage.

High-level organizational leadership affirm that diversity is essential, however their words do not match their actions, and most often do not display genuine diversity actions and results (Ng & Sears, 2017). In order to get employees to buy-in to diversity, executive leadership must demonstrate their commitment and implement diversity management practices (Ng & Sears, 2017). According to Howard and Ulferts (2020), in these times diversity is of immense worth to businesses universally. Diversity has developed in many organizations. However, the diversity in organizations may not be all-encompassing of women in leadership roles and management positions as effectively as it could (Howard & Ulferts, 2020). Guillaume et al. (2017) presented that when organizations have a workforce that is diverse, it has the potential to inflate their revenue, improve sustainability, boost up competitive advantage, in addition to improving employee morale, customer satisfaction, talent pools, strengthen decision making and community relationships.

**Summary of the Findings**

The findings from the study helped to address the problem of there being an underrepresentation or marginalization of African American women in executive leadership positions within the insurance industry in Connecticut. After the data were analyzed, five themes were discovered which helped to answer the research questions for this project. The themes are that the participants believe: (1) there is significant underrepresentation of African American women in leadership positions within the insurance industry; (2) there is bias in the hiring; (3) there is equity in job opportunities, however, African American women are not being promoted into leadership positions within the insurance industry; (4) there is a greater level of exposure
through mentorship and sponsorship which may lead to promotional opportunities for African American women in the insurance industry; and (5) the insurance industry has made some progress, is committed to diversity which creates innovation and increases profits. The findings of this study have addressed the themes and research questions.

Sixteen participants of the study agreed that African American women are unfairly represented in leadership positions. One of the participants disagreed and from her perspective this specific demographic group was not underrepresented in her particular organization. From the analyzed data, a few of the African American female managers told of instances where they were often the only one in meetings and/or on their teams. One of the participants, an African American woman who is a senior level manager in human resources said they are fairly represented in human resources but in general not represented in executive leadership.

All of the interviewees believed the reasons for the underrepresentation were as a result of there being biases in the hiring process. One of the reasons given is that there are conscious and unconscious biases in the process because they tend to hire their likeness. Another reason provided is that the insurance industry is white male dominated; it is the good old boys club. There is a systemic issue where they bring in their family and friends. With actions like this taking place the industry will continue to experience a diversity gap within its higher tier management positions.

Many of the participants felt that there is equity in job opportunities, however African American women are not being promoted into leadership positions. The responses from the study participants demonstrated that there are not any specific programs designed to promote African American women, there is talent within the organizations that they need to delve into, holding the hiring managers accountable, and simply the pool is not there. Some existing studies have
noted in their findings that African American women are one of the most educated populations but are being overlooked for higher level positions and hiring managers are more apt to hire individuals who look like them even though they might not have the same education, qualifications, skills, and experience as the African American women.

Several of the participants were fortunate enough to attain their positions through having a mentor and sponsor who advocated on their behalf. They expressed the importance and necessity to have those individuals to support them, to get their names out there, and see and know the work that they are doing, so it could be brought to the attention of the individuals who are the ones responsible for elevating employees. If an individual is seeking a promotional opportunity and does not have a mentor and sponsor in higher level positions, they are less likely to be recognized and promoted. The data from the study indicated that having greater exposure through a mentor and sponsor in higher tiered roles may help them achieve higher level management positions.

The final theme discussed how the study participants are of the belief that a diverse workforce particularly in leadership is important to the organization as well as there being a value and benefit. The participants feel that the insurance industry is making strides toward being diverse, but it is still a work in progress. Diversity among individuals can help with decision making, create innovation, and increase the organization’s revenue. A few of the participants indicated that when an organization does not have a diverse population it can impact retention, attracting talent, relationships, the profits, and a competitive advantage.

Overall, based on the findings of this study and existing literature and research conducted on the subject matter the underrepresentation of African American women in leadership positions, the reasons for the underrepresentation, why this population are not being promoted,
the potential factors that may help her career progress, and the importance and value of diversity are similar. The only difference between this study’s finding and current findings is regarding mentoring programs and that men in higher level positions would be better suited to mentor a woman for the purpose of advancing her career. This study did not distinguish between having a male or female to mentor and sponsor African American women who are seeking to attain leadership positions. The findings detailed that the mentor and sponsor should be a person in high level positions, the gender was non-specific.

**Application to Professional Practice**

A countless number of companies within the insurance industry in the United States more specifically in Connecticut are faced with minimal diversity in the workplace especially with the representation of African American women in the top tier positions (Gray et al., 2019). Leaders in the C-suite status must shift their behaviorism and acclimate to change as well as put into practice tactics to focus on and mitigate the diversity gap within the many layers of management positions. The study findings summate that there is a significant underrepresentation of African American women in executive level positions within the insurance industry and the presence of imminent hindrances that impede their ability to ascend to the top tier. This is due in part to biases, diversity gaps, and racial and gender inequities (Baker & Cangemi, 2016).

The potential imminent hindrances have detrimental effects on the professions of African American women pursuing opportunities in leadership, retaining top quality talent, and the overall organizational performance and success. Rather the behavior of the top tiered leaders is purposeful or due to unconscious or implicit bias, the participants believe there are obstacles in climbing the career ladder and once African American females have achieved the position in leadership they are faced with adversity (Fernandes & Alsaeed, 2014). Inferences of the research
project findings may potentially justify the necessity for the insurance industry to transform their recruitment, selection, promotional, and hiring practices that dictates developing a more diverse workforce, improving the representation of African American women in higher level managerial positions, and attracting and retaining top quality candidates to the company. These organizations are becoming more committed to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion especially in the wake of the many recent racially charged events. In an effort to address the unfair representation of African American females in top-executive positions and effectuate change of this adversarial matter of this specific demographic group in the workplace, top-executive ought to acknowledge and address the underlying or root causes of this phenomenon. The findings of this study are pertinent to the professional practice of business attributable to the furtherance companies’ disregard when they fail to develop highly qualified talent, ingenuity, and intelligence because of biases and perceptions instead of qualifications.

In order to try to deal with the unfair representation of African American females in top-executive positions and close the diversity gap, it will require top organizational leaders to establish professional training, mentorship, sponsorship, and coaching programs (Gray et al., 2019), effectuate succession plans (Perrenoud, 2020); conduct target recruitment; create and execute hiring, selection, and promotional plans, and establish diverse interview panels. Top-executives must be intentional with their commitment to diversity by providing diversity, equity, and inclusion training in addition to adopting the Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action laws and policies to effectuate change (Ng & Sears, 2020). The organization’s human resources department should be responsible for enforcing fair hiring practices and equity in the recruitment, selection, and promotional opportunities to ensure a diverse pool of applicants and workforce (Ballaro & Polk, 2017). Human resource management
is responsible for ensuring that all employees including top-executives, and senior management are complying with and following the policies, practices, and procedures that are in place to make sure that there is fair hiring and promotions, sufficient and diverse representation, and they remain competitive (Doldor et al., 2016). Adopting and implementing diversity management and having a diverse workforce will enable organizations to attract and retain a competent and quality talented pool of individuals, better understand their customer base, capture the niche market, and sustain a competitive edge over their competitors (Blouch & Azeem, 2019). The improved general practice necessitates top-executives in the industry to take notice of the demographics and population that occupy top leadership positions, acknowledge the underrepresentation of African American women in higher level positions, and take action to rectify this marginalization. Executive leaders will also need to affirm that the perceptions and biases of African American women are not prohibiting this demographic from ascending to hire level positions within the organization.

Application Strategies

The outcome of the study’s findings demonstrates the imminent urgency for reconfiguration within the hiring strategies, policies, and procedures, the culture of the business, and the industry’s ideology who have a diversity gap among its top management and construct possible obstacles for African American females to climb the corporate ladder. In the course of examining the data information, three recommendations evolved from occurrences of the African American female managers, human resources managers, and the executive leaders whereupon explanation emanated from the participants point of view, discernment, and through experiences at the workplace. The purpose of the recommendations for the organization was to give support to the top-executives in an effort to reconceptualize their hiring strategies, professional
development programs, and bias training so that it will enable them to reduce the diversity gap and underrepresentation of African American women in top level leadership positions.

**Recommendations for Top-Executives**

**To Develop and Implement a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Hiring Strategies.**

Organizations have to be conscious of the intensifying observation of the paucity of diversity in the workforce in addition to the insufficiency of major progress in broadening the proportion of underrepresented African American women (Glastonbury et al., 2021). Hiring individuals from underrepresented gender, racial, and ethnic backgrounds at organizations is very important. Executive leaders in collaboration with human resources can address this need by providing training to individuals who will be a member on search committees relating to bias and discriminations that influences the search process together with ways to circumvent them (Cavanaugh & Green, 2020). The training for members of the search committee were aimed to refine diversity and equity in hiring (Cavanaugh & Green, 2020). Organizations have been prompted to increase the diversity of their workforce to better emulate the demographics of the community in which they are located and the United States (Glastonbury et al., 2021). Businesses have made attempts to improve their workforce diversity, however in spite of the efforts, a persistent and repeated issue comes about in the manner that the pool ought to be expanded from the beginning-high school, college.

The recommendation is for organizations inclusive of top-leaders and human resources to develop an efficient and effective hiring strategy to attract diverse talent who are very qualified for top management positions (Warwood, 2019). Human resources and organizational leaders must review, develop, and implement hiring strategies and processes for expanding their pool and increasing the representation of African American women in leadership positions.
(Glastonbury et al., 2021). Their hiring strategies should align with the organization’s diversity and inclusion endeavors (Warwood, 2019). The organizational leaders and human resources have the responsibility to ensure that the hiring strategies and processes are enforced without deviation and consistently used by the hiring manager and recruitment team (Doldor et al., 2016). This should ensure equity in the recruitment, selection, hiring, and promotional opportunities and create a broad diverse pool of applicants (Ballaro & Polk, 2017). Organizations should have a developed strategy for recruiting, hiring, promoting, training and retaining its employees to ensure that they represent the diversity of the community (Warwood, 2019).

To Design and Implement Professional Development Programs for Leadership Preparation. Organizations in corporate America continue to function as ethnicized social systems that subscribe to racial disparities and inequities in the work environment (Sisco, 2020). The organizational leadership and human resources and/or career development specialists should invest resources in developing and promoting African American professionals and the communities in which they serve (Sisco, 2020). Human resources and senior management are in an employee’s quest in career development (Wickramaratne, 2020). Professional career development is a mechanism for deliberate control and development (Wickramaratne, 2020).

According to Wickramaratne (2020), developing an individual’s career has an effect on the organizational goals and the individual’s personal goal. Support from top management is imperative to a complete and plausible professional development process (Wickramaratne, 2020). The organization including the leaders, supervisors, and employees all have the responsibility to help the employees to maintain their careers and garner support for their professional career development (Yoon et al., 2021). Human resources professionals can aid employees’ professional career development by enlisting the organization as a whole (Yoon et
al., 2021). Within the confines of the organization, its executive leadership and supervisor support are imperative in an employee’s professional career development, impacting their anticipative career state, work involvement, employment satisfaction, job performance, and retention (Yoon et al., 2021). Organizations should have development programs in place. Additionally, they ought to review the program and the outcome of prior participants to guide the need for restructuring the program to authenticate gender and racial equity and success in attaining top level positions (Jagsi et al., 2017).

**To Devise and Execute Implicit Bias Training for all of the Tiered levels of Management and Organization Employees.** Institutional diversity, equity, and inclusion mediatorships generally encompasses some form of training, and most recently, the training is more than likely to focus on implicit bias (Kim & Roberson, 2021). There has been heightened probes of the role of unconscious bias, gender and racialized cultural norm, and maintaining gender inequity in industries (Adams, 2021). Gender injustice in the industry is evidenced in areas that have vital outcomes in fashioning a woman’s career and compensation, including acquiring leadership positions and competitive salaries (Adams, 2021). Adams (2021) explained that increased cognizance of gender inequity is the initial step in addressing this phenomenon. Nevertheless, executing successful engagements to attain gender equality has proven to be difficult due to the rooted nature of gender bias in organizations, processes, and cultural beliefs (Adams, 2021). It is recommended that before delivering an implicit bias training, in the development phase the persons overseeing the training should ask the following questions: (1) Do the training programs provide genuine facts about implicit bias? And (2) do the training programs offer the scope of knowledge and skills required for coping with and diminishing implicit bias? (Kim & Roberson, 2021). In an effort to address the issue of implicit bias,
organizational leaders and human resources in collaboration with the diversity and inclusion department should create a transparent and understandable diversity, equity, and inclusion approaches by requiring implicit bias training for all organizational employees from the top down (Adams, 2021).

**Summary of Application to Professional Practice**

The data from the study were analyzed and concluded that African American women are not visible in senior and executive level management positions. Organizations should implement hiring strategies, policies and procedures as a way to close the diversity gap among the top level positions. The outcome of the research study evolved recommendations for topic executives within the organization. The recommendations were developing and executing diversity, equity, and inclusion hiring strategies, designing and implementing professional development programs for leadership preparation, and devising and delivering implicit bias training for all of the tiered levels of management and organization employees. Hopefully, top-executives are receptive to the proposed recommendations that will bring awareness to them, their willingness to change the trajectory of the business, and work toward becoming more diverse, equitable, and inclusive in senior and top level management positions.

**Recommendation for Further Study**

This qualitative research case study project was conducted to examine the absence of African American female executive leaders in the insurance industry within Connecticut and if diversity had an impact on talent management and a competitive advantage. The study has concluded that African American women are significantly absent from executive and top level positions, there is a diversity gap present at management levels higher than entry level, and there is bias in the hiring process. Organizations should design and establish professional career
development programs for African American women or individuals who looking to ascend into the higher tiered positions. Recommendation for further study should expand to examining the representation of African American women with graduate level degrees who aspire to work in upper management, who are currently working in the various tiers of management, the organization’s retention and attrition rates, the barriers for ascension, and the demographics of all management at the different levels compared to African American females within the commercial and investment banking. The industry had to grapple with the slow-changing cultural norms of finance and banking (“Rising Stars in Banking & Finance,” 2020).

Additionally, are there programs designed to develop African American women for leadership positions. An organizational influence requires a major part in creating their blueprint for developing women leadership (Fazal et al., 2020). Women leaders are less likely to obtain proper training, mentoring, and chances for networking as in comparison to their male peers (Fazal et al., 2020). It may be apparent to some people that obstacles materialize for African American women who aspire to climb the corporate ladder, but not apparent to others (Beckwith et al., 2016). A few of the obstacles identified were social, economic, and interpersonal (Beckwith et al., 2016).

This study’s participants were African American females and human resources managers and executive leaders whose gender and ethnicity were non-specific. The areas should expand to include the Tri-State area (Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey), the Northeast, or the east coast of the United States. A fixed or mixed method approach would be a different approach from this current study. In addition, potentially using research questions that are similar to the posed questions for this research project. The purpose of this recommendation for further study
Reflections

During the process of interviewing the participants for this research project and conducting research, it became more apparent to me African American women have been unfairly represented in higher level management positions for a countless number of years continuing through present day. The focus of this research was to examine how there is an absence of African American females in top-executive positions within the insurance industry in Connecticut. However, I recognize that this phenomenon is present not only in the insurance industry but also in the public sector in which I am employed. As an African American woman and I may speak for African American women in general, we must work harder to prove ourselves more than qualified and worthy of working at top level positions. Sometimes that still may not be good enough to break through the barriers. This may prove to be discouraging; however, this phenomenon has encouraged me to continue to strive to make a difference and work to dispel the preconceived notions that African American women are plagued by. “If anyone boasts, “I love God,” and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won’t love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can’t see? The command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You’ve got to love both” (The Message Bible/2016, 1 John 4:20).

Personal & Professional Growth

My personal growth is through being more confident in my ability to do things and time management. My prayer life has become stronger as I stopped relying solely on myself but involved God in all that I did. Becoming more patient and optimistic about the things that were
not in my control. When things did not go as planned throughout this journey I still persevered. I am a person who does not like to ask people for anything until I have exhausted all measures. This journey has taught me to be even more patient than I already was, and how to put aside my emotions to ask people for help when needed. I do not like asking individuals more than once for anything, but this process has humbled me and taught me that I needed to be still, be persistent in the things that were required to do to meet my goal to complete this doctoral journey.

Doing this research project has opened my eyes to see that this phenomenon is not unique to just the public sector but as well as the private sector. In the public sector Affirmative Action goals and diverse interview panels are used to help diversify positions. However, African Americans especially women are still underrepresented in senior and executive level positions. Unlike the public sector, corporations do not use affirmative action goals to hire and promote individuals to higher level positions, but this phenomenon is very much prevalent in corporate especially the insurance industry. As a black woman with a graduate level degree and many years of experience, I am still working in what may be considered mid-level management in state government. I have been bypassed for higher level positions while others who do not look like me, and do not have the level of education or experience are being promoted.

I will advocate for myself and not let my destiny be determined or defined by those making the decisions. Networking and joining organizations that are specific to black women will allow me to step out of my comfort zone. My dissertation and schooling enabled me to get accepted into a minority fellowship program for individuals desiring to teach as an adjunct professor at a particular college that has an underrepresentation of adjunct professors who look like the population that attend the school. As a result of participating in the program I am now an adjunct professor at this institution. I am there to be a champion for the students, inspire them,
and make a difference in their educational journey because they see someone who looks like them.

**Biblical Perspective**

The Bible is the sole purpose of Jesus's ministry. Jesus was born, lived, was crucified, died, was buried, and rose from the dead for all to be equal in God’s eyes. In the time of Jesus Jews were seen to be a more elite upper class in the social and religious realms. Gentiles, Samaritans, and other sects in His time were lower-class individuals. Jesus’ whole ministry was to heal, deliver, save and set people of all races, genders, and income levels free in all areas of their lives. He came to show people that everyone matters to God. Jesus’ life and his ministry were a demonstration of fair treatment in biblical times.

Diversity encompasses different religions, faith, beliefs, race, ethnicity, gender and national origins. These dissimilarities can cause acrimony among employees in the workplace. Discrimination can be perceived as discriminating against individuals because of their race, ethnicity, gender, name, appearance, religion, faith, beliefs, and other reasons (Stainback & Irvin, 2012). The effects of discriminatory practices are noticeable in the underrepresentation of African American women in top tiered positions. This can lead to presumptions about a group based on assumptions and stereotypes. Additionally, it can contribute to alienation, influence morale, productivity, and relationships (Stainback & Irvin, 2012). Leaders should encourage engagement and interaction among the employees. Diversity among employees can bring value and different ideas to the organization. It can also be beneficial to everyone within the organization because it can build and strengthen relationships (Mencl & Lester, 2014). “And we know [with great confidence] that God [who is deeply concerned about us] causes all things to work together [as a plan] for good for those who love God, to those who are called according to
His plan and purpose” (The Amplified Version, 2016/ Romans 28:8). All Christians have a purpose and by God’s common grace, Christians can value people that are not like them and appreciate their work. His grace enables Christians and non-believers to learn from each other and work together (Keller & Alsdorf, 2016).

In 1 Samuel 16 God directs Samuel to Bethlehem, so God can choose a king from among Jesse’s sons. Samuel assumed that based on Eliab’s appearance he was the one that God was going to choose. Just as Samuel assumed that the most attractive and tallest of Jesse’s sons would be chosen by God, so too, in the workplace employers judge applicants’ suitability for jobs based on biases, stereotypes, and misconceptions about applicants related to race, ethnicity, and gender. Employers make decisions based upon preconceived notions often triggered by applicants’ outward appearances. 1 Samuel 16 reminds us to be mindful of such biases. God judges individuals by looking at their hearts and other characteristics not immediately visible to an observer, so too should people endeavor to do so at all levels of an organization. As it concerns the topic of this study, some of the biblical truths include messages such as “But God told Samuel Looks aren’t everything. Don’t be impressed with his looks and stature. I’ve already eliminated him. God judges’ persons differently than humans do. Men and women look at the face; God looks into the heart” (The Message Bible, 2016/1 Samuel 16:7).

Mentorship, sponsorship, and coaching are tasks that should be conducted with a grateful and willing heart. These tasks shall not be embarked up reluctantly and with malevolence in the heart. “So let each one give as he purposes his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver” (The New King James Version, 2016/2 Corinthians 9:7). “Rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man” (English Standard Version, 2016/Ephesians 6:7). The plan that God has is for all to be ready to minister and serve others as
well as be served. Our responsibility as children of the Most-High, is to plant seeds with the
tasks that we carry out and do the will of the Lord and he will provide all that is essential for us
(Keller & Alsdorf, 2016).

“Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old, and they will
not turn from it” (New International Version, 2016/Proverbs 22:6). God is giving guidance to
coach and mentor others so they build up their talents and skills that may be used to administer
services to others. On many occasions people are of the belief that if they train a person to
perform tasks that are almost identical to their duties, the person will ultimately succeed them.
Typically Christians will do things on their own and, assume responsibility, leaving God out by
not going to Him in prayer prior to making decisions that will influence business operations. The
Lord longs for Christians to be discerning about being business astute regarding the development
of employees and strategic planning to ensure that it aligns with the organization’s mission
statement, purpose, vision, the objectives, and goals. This process requires prayer for guidance
and discernment on how to address the challenges of attracting and retaining top talent,
promoting diversity, cultivating employees, how to remain competitive, and other business-
related matters.

The Bible clearly provides numerous scriptures about teaching, coaching, mentoring, and
preparing individuals for more responsibilities. “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens [and
scripture that references teaching, learning, and reflection is “The wise will hear and increase
their learning. And the person of understanding will acquire wise counsel and the skill [to steer
his course wisely and lead other to the truth], 6 To understand a proverb and a figure [of speech]
or enigma with its interpretation, And the words of the wise and their riddles [that require reflection]” (*The Amplified Version*, 2016/Proverbs 1:5-6).

The top-executives, human resources, and staff development should collaborate with each other to establish and implement a program to professionally develop the employees. The Lord understands that this process could possibly pose a challenge. However, everyone has to learn to have patience, faith, and depend on Him to guide them, because the process should not be entered into half-heartedly and decisions should not be made without seeking prayer counsel. “Without counsel, plans go awry, but in the multitude of counselors they are established” (*The New King James Version*, 2016/Proverbs 15:22).

Christians are appointed as stewards over more than just possessions, but over ensuring that individuals are provided the tools necessary to succeed. If Christians do not ensure that persons are being trained, coached, mentored, cultivated, and prepared to be of service, they are being disobedient to the word of God. Employees are more apt to become dissatisfied with their job resulting in poor performance, employee turnover, low morale, and other negative impacts. Dissatisfaction may occur because they are not being provided the opportunity to develop their skills or the work that is being performed no longer satisfies them (Keller & Alsdorf, 2016). What Christians often forget is that the work that is done is not for man, but for the Lord. Christians allow self and pride to get in the way of what they are commanded to do.

According to Keller and Alsdorf (2016), the desire to have recognition will lead to discord, competition, and ill-will toward one another. “Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up” (*The English Standard Version*, 2016/Romans 15:2). Building a relationship between the coach, mentor, sponsor, and employee would provide an opportunity to accentuate the hidden talents and skills of the employees that are being mentored, sponsored, or
coached so they are able to perform the work of the Lord. In an effort to bring the talents out in
the employee and be an effective coach, mentor, and/or sponsor, the coach, mentor, and/or
sponsor must be meek, respectful, encouraging, have patience, consistent, optimistic, a willing
servant, and more. Jesus had a relationship with his disciples and a willingness to coach them.
He taught them how to minister to people when He fed the five thousand. In addition, Jesus
taught His disciples to pray which is known as the Lord’s Prayer. He was very much involved
with his disciples by working side by side with them and providing them with hands-on training.
Jesus was committed to preparing the disciples for ministry, so they were able to serve and
minister to others.

Christians have the same responsibility at work if they are in a position to coach, mentor,
and/or sponsor individuals for professional development and advancement. Although the work
that is performed is centered on the worldview, Christians have the responsibility to perform the
tasks according to God’s will and His way (Keller & Alsdorf, 2016). Christians also have the
responsibility to promote God’s plan, that all were created to serve and be served (Keller &
Alsdorf, 2016). The work that is done is an offering to the Lord. “Every man and woman in
Israel whose heart moved them freely to bring something for the work that God through Moses
had commanded them to make, brought it, a voluntary offering for God” (The Message Bible,
2016/Exodus 35:29).

If Christians are not careful and obedient and make unwise choices about not teaching
others, they have the potential of being removed as stewards. The book of Hosea talks about how
people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. “Because you have rejected knowledge, I also
reject you as my priests; because you have ignored the law of your God, I also will ignore your
God’s main purpose is to develop His children and prepare them to go out and serve others. Service is more than just in the church/building. People can be served in the community, providing customer service, care, teaching, delivering, and many other career paths and vocations. God did not say that only Christians can serve. He said all of his children who are Christians, non-Christians, of different faiths and beliefs, spiritual, and non-believers can also serve. Everyone can learn from one another (Keller & Alsdorf, 2016).

Coaching, mentorship, and sponsorship are all ministries that are the responsibility of top-executives and human resources to ensure that it takes place. In order to have a successful program, Christians must follow and incorporate the word of God, with an open and constant dialogue with the Lord (prayer) and the employee, have a good relationship with the Lord as well as develop and establish a positive rapport with the employee, and identify and know the developmental plan. “Write the vision and engrave it plainly on [clay] tablets so that the one who reads it will run. For the vision is yet for the appointed [future] time, it hurries toward the goal [of fulfillment]; it will not fail. Even though it delays, wait [patiently] for it, because it will certainly come; it will not delay” (The Amplified Version, 2016/ Habakkuk 2:2-3).

The final step in coaching, mentorship, and sponsorship is opportunity, reflection, feedback, follow-through and plan of action. If organization’s top-executives and human resources develop and implement coaching, mentoring, and sponsoring as it relates to the business field, based on the word of God, they will develop successful individuals to continue in God’s plan and delight in a more intimate relationship with Him. “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness’” (The New International Version, 2016/ Matthew 25:21).
Summary of Reflections

In conducting this research, I have grown personally and professionally. My personal growth has taught me to pray fervently and without ceasing. Although I have a prayer life it was not where it should have been. I had to decrease myself and increase God in everything that I did. My time management has improved immensely because of having deadlines to meet to move on and complete this amazing doctoral journey. Asking individuals more than once, was not a part of my make up. However, during the phase of soliciting participants for the project, I had to repeatedly contact certain ones to return the documentation and schedule the interviews. I recognized that I needed them to fulfill the requirements of my dissertation. It was definitely a humbling experience.

In my professional growth conducting the research and interviewing the participants has made me more aware that this phenomenon is more widespread than I could ever imagine. I will continue to seek higher level positions and not let my destiny be defined by others. It is important to network and join organizations that are specific to black women, this is definitely out of my comfort zone, but I realize it is imperative. There are so many scriptures that speak to God treating everyone fairly, taking the time to cultivate individuals, and diversity. I have to be discerning and remain prayerful and intentional about what God has ordained me to do.

Summary of Section 3

The presentation of the findings detailed the participants’ point of views on the reasons why they believe African American women are unfairly represented in executive level positions within the insurance industry in Connecticut. They believe that there is bias in the hiring process, it is due to conscious and unconscious biases, this is a white male dominated industry, there is a systemic issue, and other provided reasons. There were 17 participants were both male and
female who had worked for or are currently working in the insurance industry in Connecticut in the various tiers of management. For instance at the entry level, mid-level, senior level, and executive level.

The main focus of this study was the African American females who had formerly held a managerial position or currently holds a managerial position. They represented 10 of the 17 participants at the entry level to the senior level. Other participants of this research project were three human resources female managers of whom two were African American and one Caucasian. The remaining participants were at the executive level. There were two females, one African American and one Caucasian, one African American male, and one Latino male. After analyzing the data, in addition to the anticipated themes, five themes were discovered. The themes are

1. There's not a fair representation of African American women in leadership in the insurance industry;

2. There is bias in the hiring process;

3. There is equity in job opportunities, however African American women are not being promoted into leadership positions;

4. A greater level of exposure through mentorship and sponsorship may lead to promotional opportunities; and

5. The insurance industry is committed to diversity, it creates innovation, and increases profits, but there is still a long way to go.

Overall, gleaned from the study's findings and current literature and research conducted on the unfair representation of African American females in top tiered positions, the reason for the unfair representation, why this group of women are not being extended promotional
opportunities, the possible factors that may help to elevate her career, and the significance and relevance of diversity are consistent with other studies.

The supporting material consisted of the application to professional practice which detailed how top-executives must change their mindset and acclimate to change. In addition these leaders must put into practice tactics to focus on and reduce the diversity gap within the various tiers of management positions. The obstacles that plague African American women on their quest to ascend to higher level positions can impact the organization's attraction and retention of top quality individuals and the success and the overall performance in the industry.

The findings of this research project are important to the professional practice of business applicable to the advancement organizations disregard when they neglect to develop top quality talent, ingenuity, and intelligence due to biases and perceptions instead of qualifications. With the intention of attempting to address the unfair representation of African American women in top tiered positions and close the diversity gap both organizational leaders and human resources will need to develop programs such as professional development, mentorship, sponsorship, and coaching (Gray et al., 2019), effectuate succession plans (Perrenoud, 2020); implement target recruitment, design and execute plans for hiring, promotional opportunities, and establish diverse interview panels. In an effort to assist organizations with closing the diversity gap and making African American women more visible in executive level positions, there are a few recommendations developed from this study, including: (a) develop and implement a diversity, equity, and inclusion hiring strategies; (b) design and implement professional development programs for leadership preparation; and (c) devise and execute implicit bias training for all of the tiered levels of management and organizational employees.
The recommendations for further studies in academia should expand to analyzing the representation of African American women with graduate degrees who aspire to work in upper management, who are currently working in the different levels of management, the retention and attrition rates, the barriers to elevating, the demographics of all of management at the various tiers compared to African American women within the commercial and investment banking. The suggested geographical locations should include the Tri-state area, the Northeast, or the east coast of the United States. Quantitative or flexible research are different approaches that can be used. Additionally, research questions should be crafted that are similar to the questions addressed in this study to see if the same outcome is reached.

From a Christian worldview, God does not judge people based on the outward appearance, but he looks at the heart. Unlike organizational leaders and hiring managers who prejudge African American women based on stereotypes, biases, and perceptions instead of looking at their qualifications, skills, knowledge, and abilities. Jesus also took the time to cultivate and guide His disciples. Organizations should emulate the Christlike behaviors and adopt a Christian world view by treating everyone fairly, providing the same opportunities and not judge individuals based on their race and gender.

**Summary and Study Conclusions**

This qualitative case study approach was applied to conduct the study whereupon comprehensive research into the viewpoints of 10 African American female managers at the various tiers of management, three human resources managers, and four executive leaders they were studied for examination and interpretation in relation to the themes, which corroborated there is an underrepresentation of female African American executive leaders and reasons attributing to this phenomenon. The research study brought to light that African American
females encounter obstacles within the industry impedes their furtherance into top leadership positions within the insurance industry. Becoming cognizant of the personal accounts of all of the participants, particularly the African American females, the results of the study depict an urgency for organizational leadership to close the diversity gap and increase the representation of female African Americans into top leadership positions.

The codes that were identified to describe African American women are unfairly represented in insurance industry leadership roles are (a) usually white male dominated, (b) no significant progress made, and (c) individuals not being developed or recruited which helped to establish the first theme and to answer research question 1. The codes that were identified to describe bias present in the hiring practices within the insurance industry are (a) bias and unconscious bias with the hiring manager, (b) perceptions of the roles for black women, (c) not looking at candidates equitably, (d) no shift in culture, (e) hiring who they are familiar with, and (f) good old boy network these codes aided in establishing the second theme and to answer research questions 1a and 1b. The codes that were identified to describe that African American woman are not being promoted even though there is equity in opportunities are (1) access to opportunities get smaller, (2) fair and equitable from a posting perspective, (3) no programs designed to promote, (4) need to delve into talents, (5) hold the hiring managers accountable, and (6) the pool is not there which helped to establish the second theme and answer research questions 2 and 2a. The codes that were identified to describe that there is a greater level of exposure through mentorship and sponsorship which may lead to promotional opportunities for African American women in the insurance industry are (a) building relationships, (b) greater level of exposure, and (c) having a mentor which aided in establishing the fourth theme and to answer research question 3a. The codes that were identified to describe that the insurance
industry has made some progress, are committed to diversity which creates innovation and increases profits. However, there is still a long way to go, including (1) finding innovative and creative ideas, (2) aligning with the community, (3) creating retention issues, (4) epicenter of everything, (5) employees envisioning options, and (6) affecting the bottom line which helped to develop theme five and to answer the research questions 3 and 4.

The findings of this study are crucial to the business practices relevant to the career development organizations neglect when they fail to enhance top quality talent, innovativeness, and wisdom because of biases and perceptions rather than their qualifications. In the attempt to address the unfair representation of African American women in top level positions and close the diversity gap both organizational leaders and human resources will need to develop programs such as professional development, mentorship, sponsorship, and coaching, succession planning, establish diverse interview panels, and design and implement diverse, equity, and inclusion hiring strategies. With the object of helping organizations close the diversity gap and increase the representation of African American females in top level positions, three recommendations were developed from this study:

1. Develop and implement a diversity, equity, and inclusion hiring strategies;

2. Design and implement professional development programs for leadership preparation;

and

3. Devise and execute implicit bias training for all of the tiered levels of management and organizational employees.
References


https://doi.org/10.1017/jmo.2017.4


https://eds.p.ebscohost.com/eds/Citations/FullTextLinkClick?sid=33a09432-30a6-4991-8bb6-0bf61587ddef@redis&vid=0&id=pdfFullText


https://www.liberty.edu/library/search-results/?type=all&q=african+americans+and+workplace+discrimination


https://est05.esalestrack.com/eSalesTrack/Content/Content.ashx?file=82ab307e-6674b11-8862-552d39c822b4.pdf


https://doi.org/10.1177/0019793916668880


https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2015.1072100


https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=2900&context=dissertations


https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12135


Seo, G., Huang, W., & Han, S. C. (2017). Conceptual review of underrepresentation of women in senior leadership positions from a perspective of gendered social status in the


The World Bank. (2019). *Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments (%).*

https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS


https://www.carriermanagement.com/features/2020/03/31/204940.htm


https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840604038180
Appendices
Appendix A: Informed Consent- Research Participant

Title of Study
Diversity as an Influence on Talent Management and Competitive Advantage: The Absence of Female African American Executive Leadership in the Insurance Industry

Principal Investigator
Lateisha T. Rainey
Liberty University, School of Business

Purpose of Study
You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be an African American female manager, Human Resources manager (race and gender not applicable), and an Executive leader (race and gender not applicable) within the insurance industry in Connecticut. The identified persons are qualified to participate in this research as their philosophy, views, and experiences are suitable to answer the posed research questions. Demographics such as age and socioeconomic background are not attributes to be considered of participants. Please note that being a participant of this research study is on a voluntary basis. Please review the following information thoroughly. If you have any questions or require additional information, please feel free to ask the researcher.

The purpose of this case study is to provide additional knowledge by exploring the degree to which the influence diversity has on the representation of African American women in executive leadership positions. It is also to gain an understanding as to why this particular demographic group are underrepresented and marginalized in top leadership roles. This research is to also study the impact that diversity may have on the insurance industry’s talent management and competitive advantage.


**Study Procedures**

This case study will entail participants completing an on-line questionnaire and being interviewed by the researcher through a technological platform or in person if circumstances permit.

The time needed to complete the on-line questionnaire is approximately 10 minutes. The interviews may require 30 minutes to 1 hour.

The interview will be conducted using technology to record via audio and/or visually applicable only if using video conferencing if consent is given by the participant. The recordings obtained will be used solely for the objectives of this study and stored on a secured, two authentication password protected laptop computer.

**Risks**

There is limited risk involved for the study participants. However, the participant will be asked to reflect upon situations where they experienced marginalization and/or diversity gaps in leadership, and this may present risk of bias and risk harm. To minimize the risk of bias, the researcher will word the interview questions to ensure they are unbiased. To alleviate potential emotional or physical weariness, the researcher will present to the participant the opportunity to take a break during the course of interview session or, if necessary, offer the participant the opportunity to bypass a posed interview question.

Research participants may refuse to answer any or all questions and may discontinue their participation at any time during the study.

**Benefits**

There may be no direct advantage to research participants for their participation in this study. However, the potential advantages include the addition to the essence of knowledge by
exploring the reasons behind the absence of African American women in executive leadership positions and measures to implement change and increase representation.

Confidentiality

Your answers to this research project will be nameless. Please do not make notions or any distinctive markings on the questionnaire provided to you, as the questionnaire will not ask any personal identifiers. The researcher will make every effort to maintain your confidentiality including the following:

- The investigator will not disclose names or any identifiable information.
- The investigator will secure the participant’s information by implementing code numbers to protect the names of the participant.
- The investigator is responsible for storing digital files, transcripts, and notes to protect the specific location for storing digital files, as it is necessary to protect information with a password.
- All collected data, including field notes and questionnaires will be secured in subfolders.
- Audio and video recording devices will be secured by lock and key in a cabinet where only the researcher will have access.

Compensation

Research participants will not be compensated for this research study.

Contact Information

If you have any questions regarding this study, questions regarding your rights as a participant of this case study, or you encounter ramifications as the result of your participation in this study, you may contact the researcher, whose contact information is provided on page one of this form. If you would like to speak with someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged
to contact the Liberty University Institutional Review Board located at 1971 University Blvd.,
Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

**Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this research project is completely on a voluntary basis. The decisions to participate within this research project is solely yours. If you decide to become a participant in the research, it will be requested of you to sign the consent documentation. If after you have signed the consent documentation, and decide not to further your participation, you are able to discontinue your participation in this qualitative research project at any time and without just cause. Your discontinuance from this case study will not impact your relationship with the researcher nor your career. As a requirement of the discontinuance process, you will be asked to provide written notification of the intent to discontinue participation. If you discontinue participation from this study prior to the completion of data collection, any data collected will be used for the study if appropriate. If it is deemed the data are not suitable for the study, the researcher will return any data to you or destroy the data.

**Consent**

I have carefully read and understand the provided communication and have had the opportunity to pose questions. I understand that my participation is strictly voluntary and that I am free to discontinue my participation at any time with written notification. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to be a participant in this case study.

Participant’s Signature ___________________________ Date ______________
Investigator’s Signature ___________________________ Date ______________
Appendix B: Recruitment Letter

Date

Dear Invitee:

As a doctoral candidate in the School of Business at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Business Administration degree with a cognate in Human Resource Management. The title of my research project is Diversity as an Influence on Talent Management and Competitive Advantage: The Absence of Female African American Executive Leadership in the Insurance Industry and the purpose of my s. I am writing to invite you to participate in research for my dissertation.

You are eligible to participate if you are 18 years old or older and are 1. an African American female who has previously held a managerial position or is currently a manager in the insurance industry in Connecticut, 2. A human resources manager past or present in the insurance industry in Connecticut (race and gender not applicable), or 3. An executive leader past or present (race and gender not applicable) in the insurance industry in Connecticut. Individuals in the identified groups are qualified to participate in this research as their experience, views, and philosophy are suitable to answer the posed research questions.

Participants, if inclined, will be asked to complete an on-line questionnaire sent electronically by the researcher. At the time of completion of the questionnaire the participant requested to contact the researcher to schedule an interview. The questionnaire may take up to 10 minutes to complete. The interview should take 30 minutes to 1 hour to complete.

Participants will be provided with informed consent information before participating in this research project. Participant names and other information that is identifying will be asked for as part of this research, however the information will be kept confidential. Participating in this
research project is completely on a volunteer basis, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

If you elect to consent permission, please contact me via telephone at xxx-xxx-xxxx and/or via email at xxxxxxxx@liberty.edu for additional information. An informed consent form is attached to this letter and will be provided to you prior to scheduling an interview. The consent form contains more information about my study. Please sign the consent form and return it to me before or at the time of the scheduled interview.

Sincerely,
Lateisha Rainey
Doctoral Student at Liberty University
Telephone Number: xxx-xxx-xxxx
Email Address: xxxxxxx@liberty.edu
Appendix C: Interview Guide-African American Females

Date
Start Time of Interview
End Time of Interview
Name of Interviewer
Interviewee
Title of Interviewee

Brief Description of the Research Project

Women specifically African American women are absent from top level management positions in the insurance industry. This research project is going to study the impact that diversity may have on the insurance industry within Connecticut which could potentially impact talent management, organizational competitive advantage, and organizational performance. This case study can possibly identify barriers that may inhibit African American women from advancing to higher level management positions.

Part A- Participant Verification and Criteria

1. Please verify the following information as a provision of the interview protocol:
   a. Have you completed and submitted the consent documentation?
   b. Do you have any questions before the interview begins? Have I sufficiently answered your question(s)?
   c. Do you understand the purpose of this research study?

2. Please verify that you meet the criteria to participate in this study by answering the following:
   a. Are you at least 18 years or older?
b. Do you identify as African American or Black?

c. Are you currently working, or have you worked in the insurance industry in Connecticut as an African American women in management?

d. Do you agree to share your views as it relates to your experience with marginalization, diversity, and diversity gaps in a truthful and detailed manner?

**Part B-Interview Questions**

1. Do you believe there is an underrepresentation of African American women in managerial and leadership roles within the organization? Please explain.

2. What do you believe are the reasons for the underrepresentation of African American women in these roles?

3. Do you believe there is equity in job opportunities?

4. Do you feel the organization promotes diversity? If so, how?

5. Do you feel that your employer values diversity, equity, and inclusion? Please explain.

6. In what ways do you believe the organization can eliminate or reduce the diversity gap or, more specifically the representation of African American women in leadership positions?

7. Are you made aware of professional growth and promotional opportunities? If so, please explain.

8. Are you or have you been encouraged to apply for higher level managerial/leadership positions? If so, how are you encouraged? What positions have applied for and what was the outcome? Please explain.

9. What attributes, additional skills and abilities do you feel are needed to attain a top leadership position and to be successful in that role?
10. Do you believe that diversity can impact talent management, competitive advantage, and overall organizational success? Please explain.

11. How does the lack of professional growth and promotional opportunities affect you in your career path?

12. What are the ways that you believe the organization can increase the representation of African American women in leadership and retain its current talent?
Appendix D: Interview Guide-Human Resources

Date
Start Time of Interview
End Time of Interview
Name of Interviewer
Interviewee
Title of Interviewee

Brief Description of the Research Project

Women specifically African American women are absent from top level management positions in the insurance industry. This research project is going to study the impact that diversity may have on the insurance industry within Connecticut which could potentially impact talent management, organizational competitive advantage, and organizational performance. This case study can possibly identify barriers that may inhibit African American women from advancing to higher level management positions.

Part A- Participant Verification and Criteria

1. Please verify the following information as a provision of the interview protocol:

   a. Have you completed and submitted the consent documentation?

   b. Do you have any questions before the interview begins? Have I sufficiently answered your question(s)?

   c. Do you understand the purpose of this research study?

2. Please verify that you meet the criteria to participate in this study by answering the following:

   a. Are you at least 18 years or older?

   b. Are you currently working, or have you worked in the insurance industry in Connecticut as a human resource manager?
c. Do you agree to share your views as it relates to your experience with marginalization, diversity, and diversity gaps in a truthful and detailed manner?

**Part B- Interview Questions**

1. Do you believe there is a fair representation of African American women in managerial and leadership positions? If so, please explain. If not, please explain.

2. What are the reasons for the inequity?

3. Is the organization committed to diversity? Please explain.

4. Is there equity in job opportunities?

5. Given there is a potential diversity gap in managerial and executive leadership roles, can you identify ways in which the organization can reduce the gap and increase the presence of African American women in these roles? Please explain.

6. Does diversity impact talent management, recruitment, and retention?

7. Does the presence of a diversity gap in managerial and leadership roles create issues within the organization? If so, please identify the issues.

8. Are there policies, plans, and procedures in place for succession, recruitment, selection, and hiring practices? Please explain the policies, plans, procedures, and practices.

9. Are programs established, available, and offered to employees for professional growth and development? If so, please explain?

10. How are individuals prepared to assume leadership roles? Please explain.

11. As an HR professional please explain the values and benefits of diversity in an organization.
Appendix E: Interview Guide-Executive Leadership

Date
Start Time of Interview
End Time of Interview
Name of Interviewer
Interviewee
Title of Interviewee
Brief Description of the Research Project

Women specifically African American women are absent from top level management positions in the insurance industry. This research project is going to study the impact that diversity may have on the insurance industry within Connecticut which could potentially impact talent management, organizational competitive advantage, and organizational performance. This case study can possibly identify barriers that may inhibit African American women from advancing to higher level management positions.

Part A- Participant Verification and Criteria

1. Please verify the following information as a provision of the interview protocol:
   a. Have you completed and submitted the consent documentation?
   b. Do you have any questions before the interview begins? Have I sufficiently answered your question(s)?
   c. Do you understand the purpose of this research study?

2. Please verify that you meet the criteria to participate in this study by answering the following:
   a. Are you at least 18 years or older?
b. Are you currently working, or have you worked in the insurance industry in Connecticut in executive leadership?

c. Do you agree to share your views as it relates to your experience with marginalization, diversity, and diversity gaps in a truthful and detailed manner?

**Part B- Interview Questions**

1. Do you believe there is a fair representation of African American women in managerial and leadership positions? If so, please explain. If not, please explain.

2. Can you identify the reasons for the inequity in leadership positions?

3. Do you believe there is equity in the managerial/leadership positions?

4. Are you committed to promoting diversity? What is the level of commitment? Please explain.

5. Does a diversity gap in the leadership roles within your organization create issues? If so, would you please identify the issues?

6. Does diversity impact the organizations competitive advantage, affect relationships, and overall company performance? If so, please explain.

7. As an organization do you invest resources to promote and encourage diversity within the company? Please explain.

8. Does the organizational leadership value and understand the benefits of having diversity, equity, and inclusion within its leadership and workforce? Please explain.
Appendix F: Questionnaire-African American Female

1. What is your level of education?

2. How long have you been a manager?

3. What is your level of management classified as (e.g., entry, mid, senior, and executive)?
   How many management positions have you held and what were those levels?
Appendix G: Human Resources Questionnaire

1. What is your gender?

2. What is your race/ethnicity?

3. What is your job classification? What level of management is your job?

4. How long have you worked in human resources?

5. What is your education level?

6. What are your job responsibilities as the human resources representative?
Appendix H: Executive leadership Questionnaire

1. What is your gender?

2. What is your race/ethnicity?

3. What is your level of education?

4. How long have you been in executive management?

5. How many managerial, leadership, executive level positions have you held within the insurance industry? Please identify the positions and levels (e.g., entry, mid, senior, and executive).
## Appendix I: Field Notes Template

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Identifier:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date of Interview:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Location:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>