

INTEGRATING DEI STRATEGIES INTO TALENT ACQUISITION TO RECRUIT AND  
RETAIN WOMEN OF COLOR IN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

by

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University

October, 2023

## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the perceptions of hiring teams and women of color (WOC) in the Information Technology (IT) industry about diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in talent acquisition practices. While many organizations advocate for DEI, the IT industry shows a notably disproportionate representation of WOC. The research utilized a qualitative approach to incorporate the viewpoints of 12 hiring professionals and 12 WOC from the IT field to uncover recruitment strategies to enhance DEI for WOC in technology positions. Data were collected through virtual interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The study reveals a positive correlation between DEI initiatives and elevated levels of innovation and productivity within organizations. However, challenges like unconscious and conscious biases and the low representation of WOC hinder DEI effectiveness. The study recommends routine DEI evaluations, building relationships with diversity-focused organizations, and starting mentorship programs for WOC. In underscoring the benefits, the study emphasizes the need for organizations to actively reduce bias in their recruitment process. The study concludes that a comprehensive DEI approach is essential for enriching the candidate pool and providing benefits to organizations, their management, and their workforce. It goes beyond the scope of merely hiring DEI specialists, advocating for an organizational strategy that fully integrates DEI objectives.

*Keywords: Diversity, equity, inclusion, talent acquisition, women of color*

### **Dedication**

To God for giving me strength and wisdom when I needed it most; my parents and granny, who made me who I am; and my family, friends, and my coach, who never let me walk alone.

## **Acknowledgments**

I express my deepest gratitude to the following people who helped me along this journey:

### **Family and Friends:**

Your unwavering support and encouragement have been invaluable. Your resilience served as a catalyst for my perseverance, especially when I couldn't see the light at the end of the tunnel.

### **Mentors and Coach:**

Your emotional sustenance and practical guidance carried me through so many hopeless moments. You held me accountable and inspired me to keep going even when I lost faith in myself.

### **Academic Advisors and Professors:**

Thank you for your scholarly guidance, prayers, and consistent encouragement. You helped transform this dissertation into an academic work I am proud to call my own.

### **Study Participants:**

This research would not be complete without your participation. My heartfelt appreciation goes to each of you for contributing to this work.

### **God:**

Thank you for your mercy, grace, and love. Your Word, especially Jeremiah 29:11, was a guiding light during my darkest periods. Thank you for fortifying me when I was on the verge of losing hope.

This work is a testament to the collective love, faith, and support of each of you. Thank you from the bottom of my heart. We did it!

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

### **Introduction**

The underrepresentation of WOC in the Information Technology (IT) sector is a global concern that affects workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Globalization has shifted workplace dynamics, especially related to employee recruitment, as it is no longer confined within borders but has a global reach (Alvarez et al., 2020). This issue is a key concern for stakeholders and researchers. Increasing globalization has sharpened the focus on work dynamics and made equitable talent sourcing crucial (Ash & Boyce, 2018). DEI practices primarily address the underrepresentation of racial and ethnic groups in workplace settings (Ash & Boyce, 2018). The primary focus of DEI practices is addressing the underrepresentation of racial and ethnic groups in workplace settings (Ash & Boyce, 2018). In addition to benefiting the organization, DEI plays a crucial role in societal upliftment by ensuring equal access to economically rewarding occupations. This study explores strategies for integrating DEI into talent acquisition to recruit and retain WOC in the IT sector.

Societally, DEI aims to remove barriers to participation in economically rewarding occupations that create wealth for everyone with no racial or ethnic preference (Alvarez et al., 2020). At the professional level, DEI calls for employers to recruit employees from different backgrounds with varying demographic compositions to fulfill organizations' corporate social responsibility to the community (Ash & Boyce, 2018). Additionally, concerning benefits, research has linked organizational performance, motivation, and innovation to DEI and the diverse views, skills, and competencies available to foster growth in different areas (Ballard et al., 2020). The underrepresentation of people of color in the IT sector contributes to the lack of DEI in the workplace, including limited role models to inspire future generations (Alvarez et al.,

2020). As Ash and Boyce (2018) indicate, the path to achieving organizational goals in IT hinges on understanding how to attract, recruit, and retain talent from marginalized groups and leveraging their distinct sociodemographic attributes. According to Burt et al. (2019a), the current research has inadequately addressed the DEI of WOC in technology, where they remain underrepresented compared to their White counterparts. This study explores strategies for integrating DEI into talent acquisition to recruit and retain WOC in the IT sector.

## **Background**

### **The State of Diversity in IT**

Different settings give different dimensions to workplace DEI (Armstrong et al., 2018). The two common forms of diversity crucial to the proposed study include racial and ethnic underrepresentation of employees in the workplace (Burt et al., 2019a).

Research shows that the IT sector has become a significant source of financial growth, greatly influencing the US and other economies globally (Armstrong et al., 2018). The IT industry has impacted how people interact with and access information, disperse products or services, and address critical societal problems (Alvarez et al., 2020). Because this market is the resource for a rising variety of tasks, stakeholders need to understand the key emerging trends for sustainability (Ash & Boyce, 2018). Cain (2021) noted that leaders must guarantee a steady supply of diverse employees with competitive skills and competencies from diverse backgrounds to achieve workplace diversity goals, such as workplace inclusivity.

### **The Glass Ceiling Effect**

There is a significant deficiency of women and WOC in technology. According to a National Center for Women and information Technology (NCWIT) study, in 2021, 26% of computing roles in the US were held by women. White women held 14% of the computer-focused roles, Black or African-American women comprised 3% of the computing workforce,



and Asian or Pacific Islander women comprised 7%. Hispanic or Latina women made up 2% of the computing workforce. The representation of women in the computing industry has shown little to no growth since 2007, staying around 25% for 14 years (Tedrick, 2020). However, WOC has slowly increased since 2007.

The growth between Black and Latina/Hispanic women remained stagnant (Tedrick, 2020). However, Asian or Pacific Islander women have increased by 3% over the last fourteen years (Tedrick, 2020). The lack of representation of WOC in technology can interfere with an organization's ability to recruit and hire quality women from diverse backgrounds (Tedrick, 2020). During the recruitment process, potential candidates can recognize and comprehend the existence of a glass ceiling. Candidates can observe that they are not reflected in this hierarchy by examining leadership teams. Glass ceilings in an organization are likely to form barriers to the appointment and equal representation of WOC in top leadership positions in an organization based on their race and gender. Glass ceilings are “invisible” barriers or obstacles that women and marginalized groups encounter when trying to develop their careers (Uysal & Ak, 2020). Representation of women and people of color is high at lower organizational levels but decreases at higher levels. Women and people of color are overlooked or surpassed for leadership positions, with men dominating executive and leadership positions (Uysal & Ak, 2020). According to Uysal and Ak (2020), women and people of color encounter glass ceilings because of systemic barriers such as recruitment, retention, and promotion; stereotypes in ideal leadership styles are another barrier. Diversity in an organization has proven to enhance employee productivity. For example, Luanglath et al. (2019) investigated the impact of gender diversity on productivity in a study that surveyed 172 organizations on the Australian Securities Exchange. In their study, Luanglath et al. (2019) found that having diverse management in terms of gender

enhanced organizational productivity and developed a strong positive relationship between the management and employees. Similarly, Delgado-Pina et al. (2020) examined the impacts of gender diversity in Spanish Banks using a sample larger than Luanglath et al. (2019). Analyzing the collected data, Delgado-Pina et al. (2020) established that including women in managerial positions enhanced employee relationships and improved performance in different strata and productivity.

### **The Impact of Diversity on Productivity**

Analyzing responses from 511 participants in the United Arab Emirates, Chaudhry et al. (2021) posted results that mirrored those of Delgado-Pina et al. (2020) and Luanglath et al. (2019), where diversity improved organizational productivity by encouraging employee innovation. The results above indicate a positive relationship between organizational productivity and diversity. According to Luanglath et al. (2019) and Delgado-Pina et al. (2020), incorporating women in managerial positions allowed them to share their knowledge of organizational performance and efficiency with their male counterparts. In addition, Delgado-Pina et al. (2020) showed that women in managerial positions increased their representation and motivated women in subsidiary positions to improve their performance, which positively reflected organizational productivity. Even though Chaudhry et al. (2021) did not study diversity in gender, they found that organizations that encouraged or employed people from different backgrounds improved efficiency. According to Chaudhry et al. (2021), promoting diversity increases performance and innovation. Particularly, Chaudhry et al. (2021) explained that having employees with diverse backgrounds enhanced the sharing of unique ideas and new ways of doing things, which translated to positive organizational productivity.

### **Gap in the Literature**

Despite the demonstrated benefits of DEI in the workplace, a gap exists in the current body of literature. Research has inadequately addressed strategies specifically aimed at promoting and supporting the inclusion of WOC within the IT sector (Ballard et al., 2020; Annabi & Lebovitz, 2018). This underrepresentation continues to persist, particularly for Black women. This study aims to fill the gap by exploring strategies to enhance DEI for WOC in the IT sector. This research contributes valuable insights to the existing literature and provides practical recommendations for organizations seeking to enhance their DEI practices, aiming to foster a more diverse and inclusive IT industry.

### **Biblical Worldview**

Workplace DEI has different dimensions based on the settings of discussion (Armstrong et al., 2018). Although diversity has multiple facets, racial and ethnic underrepresentation stand out as significant concerns in the scope of this study (Burt et al., 2019a).

A diverse, equitable, and inclusive workforce should not be merely a metric for an organization to achieve; instead, DEI should be a top priority and an integral part of the business strategy. An organizational culture enriched by these elements nurtures engagement, productivity, and competitiveness and enhances women's attraction, development, and retention (Mulki & Stone-Sabali, 2021).

In 1 Corinthians 12:12-14, Paul provides a biblical perspective on diversity and inclusion, portraying the Body of Christ as an entity of diverse individuals. These individuals, united in purpose and service, are analogous to the workforce of a successful organization. (*New Living Translation*, 2015). A company cannot survive without its greatest asset, the people. Paul's description reflects the vitality of diversity—driving innovation through different backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, education levels, and skills.

Conversely, bias, conscious or unconscious, can hinder diversity. James taught Christians to observe and challenge conscious and unconscious biases by resisting favoritism, emphasizing not to discriminate because of misguided judgments (*New Living Translation*, 2015, James 2:1-4). God cherishes each creation; therefore, His followers should appreciate and accept each other despite superficial differences. He sent His Only Son to die for them despite their backgrounds (*New Living Translation*, 2015, John 3:16).

Christ, the quintessential leader, urged His followers to love God wholeheartedly and to extend this love to their neighbors (*New Living Translation*, 2015, Matthew 22: 37 – 40). This commandment encourages acceptance and connection, transcending differences and fostering diversity and inclusion. Thus, aligning organizational culture with these biblical principles lays a foundation for an inclusive and diverse environment. Embracing DEI in alignment with biblical teachings promotes a culture of belonging, nurtured through non-discriminatory hiring and advancement practices (Vickers, 2017).

### **Problem Statement**

The rapid growth of opportunities in the IT sector necessitates an increased emphasis on DEI in the workforce (Armstrong et al., 2018). As an illustration, Cain (2021) reported that job openings in the IT sector are expanding at two times the nationwide average in the United States. These opportunities offer higher pay and are more resilient to financial recessions than other sectors. Ash and Boyce (2018) also noted that jobs in the industry have significant growth potential. Employees with unique skills and backgrounds are necessary for organizational success.

Consequently, employment trends in the high-technology sector are vital to the national economy and work expectations (Ballard et al., 2020). Despite the surge in job openings and the

acknowledged importance of a diverse workforce, WOC remains significantly underrepresented (Armstrong et al., 2018; Whitney & Taylor, 2018). For instance, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2020), women only held 7% of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) jobs in 1970. That number doubled to 14% in 1980. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2022), while WOC college students report interest in STEM majors at an equivalent rate as students who are White women, they remain the least represented group in STEM. Women of color accounted for a small number of bachelor's degrees across STEM fields, with only 2.9% awarded to Black women, 3.6% to Latinas, and 4.8% to Asian women in 2014-2015, making Black women less likely to be hired for IT related jobs (The National Center for Education Statistics, 2022).

According to a 2022 study from the National Center for Women and IT (NCWIT), nearly 4.7 million technology jobs will open by 2030 in the United States. An online Fortune magazine article states that regarding race, current statistics indicate that organizations leave nearly 250,000 qualified WOC out of the technology industry (Black, Latina, and American Indian women) (Thier, 2022). According to Thier (2022), WOC are unrepresented in the technology industry, and promoting diversity in the technology industry could open nearly 2.6 million more WOC securing jobs in the technology industry. AnitaB.org (2021) reported that of 141,038 women in technology-related jobs in 2021, 79,163 (56%) were WOC. Engineering and computer science — two of the most lucrative STEM fields — remain heavily male-dominated. Only 21% of engineering majors and 19% of computer science majors are women. However, WOC who may lack a college degree in STEM and are interested in technology careers have gained technical skills through other avenues, such as technical boot camps and non-stem-related jobs that require technical skills. These opportunities provide them with applied

knowledge of their IT skills, making them more qualified than those with only a college degree and no on-the-job technology experience (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2021).

Despite significant underrepresentation, over 300,000 WOC possess the professional experience and technical competency required for technology roles (Thier, 2022). However, a limited search pool in tech companies often overlooks these highly qualified candidates. By implementing a skills-based hiring approach, organizations can overcome the barriers of degree-centric hiring, broaden their talent pool, and incorporate diversity and inclusion more effectively (Fuller et al., 2022).

A diverse workforce brings diverse ideas that can improve organizational performance. Previous researchers have examined diversity and inclusion in the workplace from different settings and perspectives, particularly from a general perspective (Solomon et al., 2018; Whitney & Taylor, 2018). The study results have shown that people of color, particularly women, have been underrepresented in technology compared to their White counterparts. According to Varma (2018), WOC experience gender stereotypes and racism in the IT sector. Lack of diversity in the IT sector will likely affect companies' creativity, innovation, and performance (Alvarez et al., 2020). Alvarez et al. (2020) recommended additional research focused on recruiting and retaining people of color, especially women in the IT sector.

Despite years of affirmative action policies, people of color continue to be underrepresented in the IT sector, with limited research focused on the strategies used to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion of people of color in the IT sector (Alvarez et al., 2020; Annabi & Lebovitz, 2018). In response to this reality, the current literature offers several reasons for the underrepresentation of people of color in the IT sector, coupled with possible suggestions for

improving the condition (Solomon et al., 2018). The existing literature insufficiently addresses hiring managers' and Women of Color (WOC) perceptions on how DEI affects talent acquisition in the IT industry. Therefore, this study aims to explore strategies that could enhance DEI and increase WOC representation in the technology sector (Alvarez et al., 2020; Annabi & Lebovitz, 2018; Solomon et al., 2018; Varma, 2018).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to examine perceptions among IT industry professionals in the United States concerning recruitment and DEI. The study focused on specific strategies to enhance recruitment and candidate selection processes for WOC in technology roles. A total of 24 U.S.-based IT industry participants were included: 12 hiring professionals and 12 WOC.

### **Research Questions**

**RQ1:** why does DEI matter in talent acquisition in the IT sector?

**RQ2:** what recruitment strategies are perceived as most effective by hiring managers in attracting WOC to IT roles?

**RQ3:** what are the common challenges hiring teams encounter when attracting, recruiting, and retaining WOC in the IT sector?

**RQ4:** what are the perceptions regarding the impact of DEI initiatives in improving and sustaining productive work cultures in the IT sector for WOC?

### **Assumptions and Limitations of the Study**

The trustworthiness and credibility of this study hinge on the honesty and transparency of the participants' responses to interview questions. This study, therefore, assumes that all participants will provide sincere and trustworthy answers, recounting their experiences without

undue influence from the investigator. Nevertheless, this study has several limitations that could impact its results and interpretation.

Limitations refer to a study's flaws/weaknesses and challenges beyond the researcher's control (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). However, it is essential to identify study limitations to allow readers and other scholars to consider the study results within the context of the limiting factors. The following limitations relate to the current study.

This is the first formal study to be conducted by the researcher. The researchers' skills may be limited when conducting interviews and data analysis. Another limitation relates to the researcher's novice skills. To address this limitation, the researcher will consult experts in data analysis. Additionally, the researcher may consider training in research methods to boost skills, including structuring questionnaires and analyzing data using statistical software.

The last limitation is researcher bias. In qualitative studies, researcher bias occurs when the researcher fails to acknowledge the personal link to the study or preconceived preconceptions and experiences (Patton, 2014). In this study, research bias could limit the credibility of the findings. Bracketing will be used to mitigate researcher bias, which entails researching personal interests and preconceptions about DEI in the IT sector.

### **Theoretical Foundations of the Study**

Intersectionality theory is deeply grounded in Black feminists' scholarship (Acuff, 2018). Crenshaw (1990) initially coined the term intersectionality. This was after the author started investigating friends and described the lived realities of oppressed individuals, focusing on unique experiences among WOC (Crenshaw, 2018). The intersectionality framework analyzes the overlapping factors that could lead to discrimination or biased actions toward a group of people. For instance, being a woman and a person of color are intersecting identities and must be



considered when analyzing marginalized groups. For instance, Sojourner Truth explores the intersessions of race and gender in her famous speech *Ain't I a Woman?* Presented in the 1851 women's convention in Ohio is one of the earliest references to the intersectionality perspective. Truth made a formal submission during the speech, challenging the perception that being a woman (gender) and Black (race) were mutually exclusive (Crenshaw, 2018). Since then, intersectionality has become synonymous with studies about women and among feminists' legal scholars (Crenshaw, 2018; Keucheniuss & Mügge, 2021). The concept has been integrated into fields such as psychology, interdisciplinary fields, and gender studies (Crenshaw, 2018).

The intersectionality theory acknowledges how racial and gender oppression is still experienced (Keucheniuss & Mügge, 2021). Crenshaw (2018) conceptualized intersectionality as a theoretical framework based on the premise that individuals' social categories of race, ethnicity, social status, and gender mutually intersect with individuals' lives to reflect different multiples (Crenshaw, 2018). The interlocking systems of privilege and oppression are due to socio-structural racism and sexism (Crenshaw, 2018; Rodó-de-Zárate & Baylina, 2018). With time, the concept of intersectionality evolved. By the 1980s, intersectionality attention was focused on the dynamics of differences and sameness of anti-discrimination movements (Crenshaw, 2018). This focus revolutionized and created a new perspective of a sense of belongingness to a given group (Crenshaw, 2018).

Crenshaw (2018) identified three forms of intersectionality: 1) structural, 2) political, and 3) representational intersectionality. Structural intersectionality relates to how classism, sexism, and racism intersect and oppress minority women while at the same time molding their lived experiences in different ways (Crenshaw, 2018). Crenshaw (2018) used structural

intersectionality to study sexually abused women. Crenshaw (2018) used intersectionality theory to describe the multi-layered oppressions that minority women encounter in society.

The second form of intersectionality is political intersectionality, highlighting two major conflicting systems segregating WOC and other women into two distinct groups (Crenshaw, 2018). The experiences encountered by WOC differ considerably from those witnessed by White women attributed to race (Rodó-de-Zárate & Baylina, 2018).

Representational intersectionality is the third form of intersectionality theory. Representational intersectionality focuses on advocating for creating an image supporting WOC (Rodó-de-Zárate & Baylina, 2018). Crenshaw (2018) used women's representational intersectionality to undermine racists in representation. In addition, Crenshaw (2018) used this concept to underscore the benefit of representational intersectionalities, such as having marginalized women represented in different fields, such as media and contemporary writings.

### ***Application of Intersectionality Theory to Current Study***

For this proposed study, intersectionality theory serves as the primary foundation for exploring the lived experiences of minority women in the technology sector and how gender and race intersect to form diversity-related barriers. Several studies have established that individual identity, including race and gender, provides insights into different barriers affecting a minority's career growth (Crenshaw, 2018; Rodó-de-Zárate & Baylina, 2018). Scholars have called for additional research in this area to investigate how the intersectionality of gender and race influences minorities' workplace experiences in different fields (Bastos et al., 2018; Rodó-de-Zárate & Baylina, 2018). The concept of multiple identities will be used in this study. Multiple identities underscore multiple identities and systemic discrimination resulting from their identities that block minorities from realizing equal opportunities in the workplace (Crenshaw,

2018). In this regard, intersectionality theory applies to this study because it acknowledges the systemic definition of minorities in the workplace and how gender and race create career growth barriers to workplace diversity. Therefore, this study will use the theory to formulate research questions exploring how gender and race act as diversity barriers for minority women in the technology sector.

### ***Social Cognitive Theory***

Another theory used in this study is social cognitive theory. The social cognitive theory explains how diversity can result in adverse outcomes in a group or organization. Social cognitive theory suggests that people use categorization to simplify and cope with large amounts of information (Bandura, 2011). In this study, Social cognitive theory is used to understand the negative experiences of WOC in the technology sector due to the lack of diversity in the workplace.

### ***Biblical Perspective***

God created people in His Image; therefore, when anyone is excluded or rejected due to their differences, God is rejected (*New International Version*, 2015, Genesis 1:26-27; Galatians 3:28). Inclusivity is a part of God's will for humanity and was reiterated when Jesus explained the importance of the first commandment, that people are to love God with all of their heart, soul, and mind. He stated that the second commandment was just as significant: People should love their neighbors just as they love themselves (*New International Version*, 2015, John 13:34). When people in the hiring process learn to see differences and celebrate them instead of judging them, they will be able to create teams that outperform others in various ways because of the increased diversity of thought.

Suppose IT companies build their values around Galatians 5:22-23. In that case, they will increase DEI by fostering an environment of belonging through showing love, spreading joy, encouraging peace, extending patience, displaying kindness, demonstrating goodness, exhibiting faithfulness, being gentle, and maintaining self-control (*New International Version*, 2015).

### Definition of Terms

The following terms apply to this study:

**Concrete Ceiling:** is the “perceived, impervious barrier that qualified WOC cannot access or are given an opportunity or consideration for advancement” (Thomas & Love, 2014, p. 1).

**Diversity:** the state of having people who are of different races or who have different cultures in a group or organization (Alvarez et al., 2020).

**Glass Ceiling:** an intangible barrier experienced by women and persons of a racial minority, which inhibits the ability of these groups to gain promotion into leadership positions (Morgenroth et al., 2020).

**Women of Color:** a woman who identifies as a race or ethnicity other than White, such as Black, African-American, Hispanic, Latina, Native American, Asian, or Pacific Islander (Tedric, 2020).

### Significance of the Study

The literature review reveals a knowledge gap whereby the current literature has inadequately addressed the DEI of WOC in the IT industry, where they remain underrepresented compared to their White counterparts. This study seeks to address the current gap in the literature by exploring strategies used to promote the DEI of people of color in the IT sector. The study findings will have several practical implications. For instance, the study findings may improve diversity practices in the IT industry by providing stakeholders and managers with valuable

information on barriers and facilitators influencing the recruitment and retention of people of color in the workplace, especially WOC. The results may also promote policy changes by using the study results to implement diversity policies that promote equal opportunities for employees from different racial backgrounds during recruitment, promotion, and retention in the IT sector.

Theoretically, the study will contribute to intersectionality and social learning theory by identifying factors contributing to the underrepresentation of WOC in the IT sector, a field not often explored by researchers. Race and gender are the primary building blocks for the intersectionality theory that seeks to explain the underrepresentation of WOC in the workplace.

### **Summary**

The study confronts the problem that, despite existing research on workplace DEI, the representation of WOC of color in the IT sector has insufficient attention. This study aims to fill this literature gap by delving into strategies that bolster the diversity, equity, and inclusion of women of color in the information technology sector. The findings could offer valuable insights into achieving diversity objectives within the workplace.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Overview

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are pivotal for organizational success (Meyenburg & Selmanovic, 2020). Corporate leaders increasingly emphasize embracing and promoting diversity by attracting employees from different demographic backgrounds (Vickers, 2019). Although several studies have examined DEI in the workplace, minimal research exists on effective strategies for recruiting women of color (WOC) in the technology sector (Meyenburg & Selmanovic, 2020). Several researchers have identified a gap in the literature and recommended additional research focused on recruiting and retaining WOC in STEM fields despite their recent progress in pursuing STEM subjects compared to other races, leading to their underrepresentation in the workplace (Meyenburg & Selmanovic, 2020). The present study addressed this gap, shedding light on strategies to recruit and retain WOC in STEM fields. This qualitative, descriptive study bridges the research gap by exploring talent acquisition strategies that promote DEI for WOC in the IT sector. The objective was to provide actionable strategies and explore WOC's challenges in recruitment practices for IT roles. Chapter 2 reviews the current literature on the DEI of WOC in the IT sector.

### Description of Search Strategy

A systematic literature search strategy retrieved and obtained sources relevant to the current study from the Liberty University online library. The databases search included PubMed, ResearchGate, JSTOR, EBSCO, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, and Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). The keywords or terms used to search the databases included diversity, diversity inclusion, workplace fairness, WOC, IT diversity, addressing diversity, diversity challenges, biblical views on diversity and equity, and biblical views regarding diversity. A

qualitative, descriptive research methodology guided this literature review. The scope was limited to sources published from 2018 onward.

## **Review of Literature**

### **Overview of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

Diversity has become a business imperative over the past three decades. Small and multidimensional business leaders embrace DEI as their sustainable strategy in a highly dynamic environment (Vickers, 2019). Numerous scholars recommend diversity strategies in recruitment to achieve organizational goals (Yang & Carroll, 2018). Understanding DEI is crucial for business leaders aiming to create inclusive work environments that harness diversity for organizational success. This section presents an introductory overview of DEI, laying the foundation for the detailed exploration that follows.

To conceptualize the concepts of DEI in the workplace, having an in-depth understanding of its definitions is critical. Scholars have defined diversity differently (Shore et al., 2018). While several definitions exist, it is paramount to underscore no universally accepted definition for DEI (Whitney & Taylor, 2018). As elucidated by Varma (2018), diversity and its definition are context-based. In this regard, the definition adopted is based on how diversity is applied. The chosen definition for this study is from Vickers (2019), who describes diversity as the acknowledgment and integration of various demographic backgrounds.

Shore et al. (2018) linked diversity leadership directly to the success of diversity practices, describing it as how people and groups interact in the workplace amid demographic differences.

Understanding DEI requires a look at its historical roots, dating back to the early 1990s (Jonsen et al., 2021). This was the time in history when race and gender played a vital role in

shaping US economic and social ideologies (Syed & Ozbilgin, 2019). Consequently, such widespread differences in perceptions towards diversity in political, social, and economic sectors manifested in different behaviors designed to challenge White people's superiority (Syed & Ozbilgin). Despite these challenges, while diverse views were accepted and tolerated by leaders from diverse backgrounds, people of color have remained underrepresented in key economic aspects (Jonsen et al., 2021). Discrimination against WOC has persisted in critical economic, political, and social decisions, including recruitment and retention (Syed & Ozbilgin).

Several instances in history have affected WOC's recruitment and retention. One of the historical instances in World War II played an important role in heightening the need for production workers and the desire for favorable recruitment policies to recruit African Americans in different sectors (Syed & Ozbilgin, 2019). However, after being recruited by some production companies, some challenges related to racism, discrimination, and stereotypes against African Americans (Nkomo et al., 2019). Since then, the need to manage the informal workplace devoid of racism, discrimination, and stereotypes has become an issue of concern among stakeholders (Syed & Ozbilgin). This led to civil rights movements emerging and championing the rights of Black people (Nkomo et al.).

The movement advocated for equity in recruitment procedures (Nkomo et al., 2019). In addition, the Civil Rights Movement called for an end to discriminative workplace policies that which inequality favored the White people. Since then, the concept of diversity has continued to evolve, integrating several other policies (Syed & Ozbilgin, 2019). Among them are equity and inclusion. In order to survive in the global market, organizational leaders are emboldened to practice DEI in their workplace. DEI has evolved significantly over time. Stakeholders now view DEI as essential for organizational success (Sequeria et al., 2019).



## **Benefits of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

### ***Enhanced Innovation and Creativity***

Innovation and creativity are significant factors linked to diversity in the IT sector. In a quantitative study to investigate the impact of cultural diversity on the innovative performance of multinational companies (MNCs) using a sample of 161 strategic alliances established by 31 MNC subsidiaries, Elia et al. (2019) found that the impact of cultural diversity became positive when there was alliance in exchange of ideas from different cultural exploration activities in the organization. Effective problem-solving often involves working with others (Elia et al., 2019). Botella et al. (2019) affirmed these findings by examining gender diversity in STEM fields. They identified that technological companies with less gender diversity suffered from reduced innovation due to the limited scope of ideas. A gender-diverse workforce, they concluded, could stimulate innovation (Botella et al., 2019). Similarly, Bogers et al. (2018) found that employee knowledge diversity correlated positively with increased innovation and organizational openness.

Several studies on diversity, innovation, and creativity have shown that diversity contributes to innovation and improved performance in technology sector organizations. For example, in a quantitative study of 358 SMEs over 18 months, Verreynne et al. (2019) investigated innovation diversity and uncertainty in small and medium-sized tourism firms. Verreynne et al. (2019) added that organizations with diverse workforces could better mitigate the negative effects of business uncertainty, thereby enhancing creativity and productivity. Moreover, Williams (2019) synthesized data from 258 peer-reviewed articles, concluding that large technology companies often lack diversity, which hampers creativity and innovation. This has led stakeholders to push for improved workforce diversity (Williams, 2019). Concerning the importance of innovation and creativity regarding diversity in the technology sector, the studies

reviewed thus far present evidence suggesting that most organizations that embrace diversity experienced more innovation and creativity in their service provision and improved performance.

### ***Promotes Company Image***

Positive employer branding in the IT sector is closely associated with workplace diversity. Tanwar and Kumar (2019) conducted a retrospective study investigating the employer brand, person-organization fit, and employer of choice regarding diversity status in the United States. The findings revealed that organizations with a positive attitude towards diversity had positive employer brands such as person-organization fit. The creative workforce attracted technology companies with diversity in workplace equity for both genders (Tanwar & Kumar, 2019). The above findings were also replicated in a quantitative study exploring the employer brand and its impact on the intention to join various organizations in the IT sector in India (Sharma & Prasad, 2018). A sample of 54 final-year placement coordinators studying in central state universities of India was used. Data collection was done through semi-structured interviews. After analyzing the results, scholars reported that organizations' diversity in terms of gender diversity, development opportunities, and reputation in improved workplace equity, acceptance, and belongingness led to the increased positive brand to potential creative and innovative talents (Sharma & Prasad, 2018)

Comparable findings to those reported by Sharma and Prasad (2018) were noted in another quantitative study of 619 participants on the role of employer brand equity in recruitment in the US (Banerjee et al., 2020). The study findings demonstrated that a solid corporate brand positively contributed to employer brand dimensions, such as the organization's diversity regarding culture and gender equity in the workplace, which fully mediated the association between employer brand and intention to apply (Banerjee et al., 2020). Tokes (2020)

corroborated this by recruiting 200 employees from two banks in the Trincomalee District on the employer brand of software and IT companies. Results indicated a significant correlation between employer branding, diversity value, and employee retention in IT companies (Tokes, 2020).

### ***Diverse Talent Pool***

Further research has also linked diversity in the IT sector to a broader talent pool to select talented and innovative employees. For example, in a study examining gender diversity in the US construction industry leaders, Hickey and Cui (2020) found that certain industry subsets, represented by publicly promoted diversity, showed promising higher integration levels. However, some organizations lacked gender diversity in leadership culture and mission statements, which created a significant challenge in attracting a talented workforce (Hickey & Cui, 2020). Pena et al. (2018) extended these findings in their quantitative study of 68 peer-reviewed articles on diversity by reporting that college programs have represented diversity in STEM subjects. However, the trend in diversity in terms of gender has dropped at professional levels in the technology industry. Lack of workplace diversity limits organizations' opportunities to attract and retain talented employees from diverse backgrounds (Pena et al., 2018). On the other hand, diversity and inclusion attracted a more talented and innovative workforce for companies that embraced talent diversity, increasing employer brand and enhancing productivity (Pena et al.).

The results reported by Penal et al. (2018) were replicated by Tamunomiebi and John-Eke (2020) on workplace diversity and reported that workforce diversity enhanced the existence of a large talent pool used for creativity and innovation in organizations. This diverse workforce enhanced productivity and excellent business performance (Tamunomiebi & John-Eke, 2020).

Similar results to the findings reported by Tamunomiebi and John-Eke (2020) were also reported by Cohendet et al. (2021), who reported that diversity in organizations creates a broader and more diverse talent trajectory in which creativity and innovation are enhanced for increased productivity (Cohendet et al., 2021). Similar to Tamunomiebi and John-Eke (2020) and Cohendet et al. (2021), Gibbs et al. (2019) examined demographic diversity in teams and management strategies. They found that organizations' use of diversity and inclusion strategies attracted more talent and promoted diversity to signal the specific dimensions of diversity were relevant to organizations (Gibbs et al., 2019). Given the studies' findings, the researchers seem to concur that diversity in organizations attracts a more talented workforce because of their brand and reputations, particularly the IT organizations.

These studies consistently suggest that organizations that integrate diversity into their culture and mission statements tend to attract a more talented and innovative workforce. Gibbs et al. (2019) extended this understanding and recommended additional research on including WOC in STEM fields. They emphasized the need for studies focusing on diverse target populations better to comprehend the impact of diversity on talent attraction (Gibbs et al., 2019).

### **Women of Color (WOC) in The IT Industry**

Racial and gender equity persist as divisive elements in the modern workplace. Varma (2018) identified diversity as a catalyst for corporate success. However, a gender and racial imbalance exists in most organizations, notably lacking equitable representation of WOC in various roles (Solomon et al., 2018). Vickers (2019) emphasized that the IT sector underrepresents WOC, often relegating them to lower-level roles due to discriminatory recruitment policies. The underrepresentation of WOC in such a sector discriminates against affirmative action principles (Pritchard et al., 2019). Recently, investors have become

increasingly aware of company recruitment practices and how such practices promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) (Murray & Loyd, 2021).

Several studies have provided an overview of WOC's representation in IT. From a general perspective, research conducted by the Pew research center in 2020 revealed that women are generally underrepresented in the IT sector, which continues to be dominated by other races and genders (Lala et al., 2020). The researcher found that White women make up nearly 34% of the workforce orce (Lala et al., 2020). Comparable results were reported in studies by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020), indicating that WOC were underrepresented in the technology sector. The survey found that WOC comprise only around 8% of women in the technology sector (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). Such results are increasingly worrying, given the benefits linked to severity, inclusion, and equity in the workplace. Meyenburg and Selmanovic (2020) warned that such underrepresentation risks negative company images, reduced profits, and legal challenges.

As of 2019, women represented 29% of the workforce in technology, a slight increase from 26% in 2018 (Meyenburg & Selmanovic, 2020). Despite this progress, Mitchell et al. (2019) reported that WOC remain underrepresented, attributing the gap to racial and gender issues. Further research has also noted that it could take nearly 12 years before WOC realizes equal representation in the technology sector.

Further research has shown the widespread underrepresentation of WOC in the technology sector. In particular, Lala et al. (2020) reported that 49% of WOC in STEM-related jobs report discrimination during recruitment and hiring. Sixty-five percent noted that they were three times less likely to be recruited or considered for job openings, given the preference for White women (Lala et al., 2020). Comparable results were reported in a different survey by Jung

et al. (2019). In their survey, Jung et al. (2019) found that African Americans and Hispanic Americans with computer science or engineering majors were less likely to be recruited into technology roles than their White counterparts. Comparable results were also reported by Jonsen et al. (2021). Their findings indicated that nearly 39.5% of WOC considered gender and mental bias as the fundamental reason for not being recruited or offered promotion opportunities. The researchers also reported that 66.7% of WOC reported a lack of clear career paths in their current organizations, given the racial and gender stereotypes against them. Also, a 2019 study demonstrated that equally qualified women were 30% less likely to be considered for an interview for a role than a male counterpart (González et al., 2019). Further research needs to be done to determine how many of those women are of color, but the study supported a gender bias in technical recruiting.

McKinsey and Company projected that in 2028, gender and racial diversity could contribute around 28 trillion USD to the global economy. The projections are based on gender diversity benefits organizations, including promoting creativity and innovations. However, WOC remain underrepresented in the technology sector despite the promise of improved performance, informed decision-making, promoting a positive company image, increasing profitability, and reducing culture conflicts.

The US department of labor and statistics reported that WOC were vastly underrepresented in the technology sector compared to their White counterparts. Although nearly ten million WOC are employed in the US labor, only 11% are employed in the technology sector. The under-representation of WOC in the technology sector has become a significant concern among policymakers, corporate leaders, and other stakeholders. As per Jonsen et al. (2021), only 11.7% of all women employed with computing skills are WOC. Given the above

studies, the findings indicate that the representation of WOC in the IT sector remains low despite a considerable increase among WOC working in the US labor market.

### **Gender Stereotype and Underrepresentation of Women in IT**

WOC have increasingly faced challenges influencing their recruitment and retention in technology. One of the factors contributing to their underrepresentation in the technology sector is gender (Jonsen et al., 2021). Several researchers have conducted studies to explore the influence of gender stereotypes on the recruitment and retention of WOC in different sectors, including the IT space. As an illustration, Armstrong et al. (2018) conducted a qualitative study with seven WOC working in the US technology sector. The study explored the barriers to diversity regarding recruitment and retention of WOC in the IT sector (Armstrong et al., 2018). Participants took part in virtual interviews. After analyzing data, Armstrong et al. (2018) found that gender stereotypes characterizing WOC as inferior and unable to execute specific tasks were the major basis for the lack of DEI in the technology sector. The findings were replicated in a study conducted by Jung et al. (2019) in the US. In this study, 215 WOC working in different IT companies were interviewed regarding their perceptions of DEI in their current organizations. After analyzing data, the findings indicated that negative perceptions challenging the ability of Black women to perform certain tasks contributed to the lack of DEI in the technology sector, given that the majority were discriminated against during the recruitment and selection process (Jung et al., 2019).

These studies indicate that gender stereotypes are a key factor contributing to the lack of DEI in the technology sector (Armstrong et al., 2018; Jung et al., 2019). While Jonsen et al. (2021) extended Jung et al.'s (2019) findings, they recommended further research on strategies to promote DEI in the technology sector using a more diverse sample size, given that their

studies only focused on women from a general perspective. This becomes a significant gap in the literature that the current research seeks to address using up-to-date articles.

Over the years, the number of women in the technology industry has remained consistently low. As of 2018, despite accounting for 47% of all employed adults, only 25% have or work in computing or IT roles (Tedrick, 2020). Furthermore, the National Center for Women and IT (NCWIT) reported in 2015 that of the 25% of women working in the technological sector, Black and Hispanic women are 3% and 1%, respectively (White, 2021). However, in 2019, the NCWIT reported that since 2007, the representation of WOC in technology has remained stagnant at 25% (Tedrick, 2020).

Among the reasons women are underrepresented in the technology industry is gender stereotyping. Alfred et al. (2018) defined gender stereotypes as a generalized preconception about the characteristics and roles played by male or female persons. In a broader definition, it is differentiation in roles and activities regarding gender. Liberatore and Wagner (2020) reiterated that the male dominance in the IT sector and the notion that the field is masculine pushed many out of the profession. According to Liberatore and Wagner (2020), women lacked the technical confidence to compete effectively and fit in the IT world.

Further research has demonstrated that WOC are less engaged in the IT industry because the sector is male-oriented. In earlier studies, Liberatore and Wagner (2020) asserted that the STEM field has been predominantly male for decades, and women who have attempted in the field have experienced discrimination. To explain these sentiments, Mackinnon and O'Connell (2020) investigated the perception of stereotypes directed at women in STEM work. A qualitative sample of 300 female participants showed that women who ventured into the technology and STEM world described as masculine were considered bossy, demanding, and



overly emotional, overshadowing their kinder and motherly side of a woman. Mackinnon and O'Connell (2020) explained that being perceived as bossy and emotionless because IT influences their identity and confidence in the community. Due to stereotyping, many women, especially in the minority group, became reluctant to make a career in IT or reveal their position in the technology field for fear of being discriminated against. Mackinnon and O'Connell (2020) built upon the works of Martin (2018) and Ellemers (2018) that due to gender stereotypes, organizations have failed to achieve diversity and set a ceiling on how women ought to behave, discouraging their involvement with IT.

Gender stereotype has widened the talent gap in the IT sector. Ellemers (2018), in a systematic review of the literature, established that gender stereotyping affected the potential and productivity of women, predominantly minority women in the IT sector. According to Ellemers (2018), women are evaluated negatively in resumes and reference letters, and experience increased negative reviews. Mitchell and Martin (2018) asserted that women, especially those from underrepresented groups, were evaluated differently from their male counterparts.

Corroborating these findings, Bendels et al. (2018), in an extensive review of 54 published journals, revealed that gender identity and racial affiliation negatively influenced women's approval of publications and authorship. This negative perception undermined the success of WOC in IT, contributing heavily to increased underrepresentation. Like Bendels et al. (2018), Gorbacheva et al. (2018) established that despite programs being implemented, increased gender stereotypes in IT have negatively impacted diversity. Lack of diversity in the IT field has resulted in an imbalance in the career due to the small number of women employed in the IT field.

### ***Racism and Underrepresentation of Women of Color in IT***

Structural racism is another critical factor contributing to the lack of DEI in the technology sector. Annabi and Lebovitz (2018) conducted a qualitative study to investigate perceptions of WOC towards the influence of racism in talent sourcing in the technology sector. Most participants noted that structural racism significantly impaired attracting and recruiting competitive talents, given that the existing recruitment policies are skewed toward White women (Annabi & Lebovitz, 2018). Annabi and Lebovitz's (2018) findings were also corroborated in a study by Alvarez et al. (2020). In their qualitative study of 312 WOC working in the technology sector on the barriers to achieving DEI in the workplace, Alvarez et al. (2020) found that racism limited its achievement. People from certain races were preferred for specific jobs (Alvarez et al., 2020). Both studies demonstrate that racism is a major factor that negatively influences companies' ability to attract diverse talents (Annabi & Lebovitz, 2018; Alvarez et al., 2020). The implication is that the recruitment process demonstrates an unconscious negative bias towards WOC.

As women are steadily advancing their careers in IT, structural racism has halted the advancement of WOC in science and IT (Wingfield, 2020). Wingfield (2020) revealed that despite being ambitious and hardworking, increased cases of racism and sexism hinder their advancement. Cary and Parker (2018) surveyed how racism affected the representation and career advancement of WOC in STEM jobs. According to Cary and Parker (2018), due to racism, many WOC failed to secure employment opportunities in IT organizations. Corneille et al. (2019) observed that despite articles and publications on the importance of diversity in the workplace, many organizations were still unwilling to hire WOC.

Corneille et al. (2019) and Cary and Parker (2018) agreed that many WOC had limited access to quality education and training besides limited work opportunities. Coming from low-income neighborhoods, Rideau (2021) contended that WOC lacked access to quality education and training compared to their White counterparts. However, despite the limited access to education and training programs focused on technical careers, WOC found alternative ways to position themselves as qualified applicants through affordable technical programs and gaining technical experience in non-technical roles. However, their transferable skills and qualifications are overlooked due to a lack of traditional experience and education. Cary and Parker (2018) noted that perceived poor or low educational levels impacted WOC's advancement in IT and other science careers.

Many WOC are perceived as lacking the technical skills necessary to compete or perform effectively in the IT and STEM industries. Calaza et al. (2021) state that the effects of racism on WOC representation in science established that many women were viewed as incompetent and unreliable. According to Calava et al. (2021), being viewed as incompetent due to their skin affected the ability of these women to perform or even climb the leadership ladder. Corroborating with the findings of Calava et al. (2021), Kong et al. (2020) asserted that being discriminated against due to skin color negatively impacted the representation of Latina women in science editorial boards and other science-based fields and sectors. The effect of gender and racism on women's career advancement has also been studied by McGee (2018). Conducting qualitative research on how individual advancement in IT is influenced by gender and racism, McGee (2018) found that many women failed to advance in their careers just because they were female. According to McGee (2018), bias due to gender coupled with being a person of color

compounded why many women failed to advance their careers in IT and underrepresentation in leadership positions.

### ***Lack of Support and Underrepresentation of Women of Color***

Besides gender stereotypes and structural racism, lack of support and mentorship has influenced the representation of women in IT. For instance, Wingfield (2020) reported that Black and Latina women are more ambitious and hardworking than their White counterparts; however, they failed to advance in their careers, especially in the IT field. According to Wingfield (2020), the limited number of qualified women in IT limits the support young women in the IT sector receive. Similar findings were reported by Alfred et al. (2018). They noted that due to discrimination, gender stereotypes, and racism, only a few minority women made it to the top and offered the necessary support to STEM female students.

Similar to Wingfield (2020), Alfred et al. (2018), when reviewing the literature on WOC support systems, discussed that mentoring programs specifically for WOC enhanced their participation in STEM and allowed them to fight for representation in STEM boards. Similar findings were reported by Liu et al. (2019). Despite the leaky pipeline of female professionals, the number of women graduating with STEM degrees has increased because of well-developed mentoring programs such as career-related and role-model mentoring programs.

Similar to Wingfield (2020), Washington and Roberts (2019) asserted that many WOC have the ambition, confidence, desire, and determination to succeed. However, despite the hard work, many WOC, compared to their White counterparts, lack structured support or lack people who would support them in their developmental journey, especially in tackling the representation of challenges. Smith (2018) established that despite their efforts to overcome racial and stereotyping challenges, the need for a mentor was imperative. However, as many WOC did not

fancy White mentors, the limited number of WOC in mentorship programs negatively affected their desire for a mentor from their minority groups. In other findings, Hyrynsalmi (2019) reiterated that the lack of such programs hindered the developmental process despite the significance of mentoring programs in advancing women's career advancement. Hyrynsalmi (2019) argued that women in STEM fields attributed their ability and success in changing careers to limited mentors and support staff. With their ambition, determination, and confidence to succeed, Hyrynsalmi (2019) explained that availing mentors to WOC would increase the number of women climbing the stairs of leadership in the IT sector.

Female mentors have increased the number of women in the IT sector and STEM courses. According to McHugh (2018), even though careers in IT have been associated with men, women have shown interest in joining the field. However, McHugh (2018) noted a lack of interest in IT for many women, especially WOC. Many WOC have attributed their failure to enroll in STEM courses and STEM-related careers to a lack of role models and mentors. Thomas et al. (2018) also asserted that the limited number of WOC in IT is due to a lack of mentors and role models. In a more recent study, Kricorian et al. (2020), in a systematic literature review, established that a lack of mentoring and role models discouraged WOC from enrolling in STEM and seeking employment in stem fields. Analyzing the findings of McHugh (2018), Thomas et al. (2018), and Kricorian et al. (2020), the availability of role models and mentors encouraged WOC to take careers in STEM fields. In addition, the scholars reported that mentors and role models helped WOC make technological decisions, tackle under-representation issues, and increase their chances of success in the IT sector.

### ***Institutional Bias and Underrepresentation of Women of Color***

Many WOC are underrepresented in IT due to institutional bias. Liu et al. (2019) stated that many WOC were underrepresented due to increased cases of bias and racism. According to Liu et al. (2019), while White people were favored because of their color, many WOC were discriminated against because of their skin tone. Notably, light-skinned WOC were favored over dark-skinned ones, reducing the number of women advancing to leadership positions. Similar results were posted by Mitchell and Martin (2018), who studied the role of institutional gender bias on WOC. Analyzing teacher ratings and scores in student evaluation tests, Mitchell and Martin (2018) found that male teachers scored more points in teaching evaluations than female teachers. This discrimination hampered the success and chances of women attaining leadership positions. Similarly, Mitchell and Martin (2018) observed that students of color were reported to score poorly on evaluation tests compared to their White counterparts.

Institutional bias against WOC has tainted their image with the corporate, which has hindered their progress and overall development. As discussed in the subsection on support and underrepresentation, it is arguable that cases of institutional discrimination are high because there are no people in leadership positions fighting for WOC. For instance, Washington and Roberts (2019) and Wingfield (2020) established that the many challenges and barriers faced by WOC, including bias cases, could be solved if they were well represented at the top. Therefore, based on this argument, Payton and Berki (2019) asserted that institutional discrimination and its adverse impacts on women could be addressed if WOC finds mentors and support from people who understand them. Consequently, addressing the negative impacts of institutional racism motivated the underrepresented population to improve their performance. Concurring with Payton and Berki's (2019) results, Kong et al. (2020) asserted that addressing the issue of gender

bias positively influenced the representation of WOC. In other words, a work environment encouraging teamwork and diversity presented minority groups to improve their chances of getting a representative.

Overall, in the preceding discussion, the researcher has discussed some factors contributing to the underrepresentation of women, especially WOC. The discussion shows that increased institutional bias, lack of support, and racism contribute to poor performance and representation of WOC. According to Kong and colleagues, to increase the number of WOC in leadership positions, organizations needed to invest in education and training that would encourage female representation, adopt policies that would encourage and promote workplace policies, adopt federal policies on discrimination besides developing own laws to address institutional bias, especially those directed towards employees of color.

### **Diversity management Challenges in organizations**

#### ***Language and Communication Barriers***

Organizations have faced various challenges while embracing diversity in their workplace. One of the major challenges of diversity management is communication and language barriers. Several studies have investigated communication and language barriers as diversity management challenges facing organizations. In particular, Yanaprasart and Ludi (2018) noted that international universities face communication challenges in constructing and transmitting knowledge. According to Yanaprasart and Ludi (2018), multilingual academic and scientific programs face communication barriers in creating an inclusive environment in academic settings to cope with international mobility and language diversity.

Piller and Zhang (2020) also reported similar findings to those of Yanaprasart and Ludi (2018) that diversity was linked to language and communication obstacles, particularly during a

crisis or an emergency such as COVID-19, where professionals from different cultural and language backgrounds convened to find a solution for a specific problem that is currently facing the world (Piller & Zhang, 2020). For example, multilingual crisis communication emerged due to various ideas from diverse health experts from different medical organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic. The above studies demonstrate that diversity is faced with communication setbacks due to language disparity among individuals in a diverse workforce.

Comparable results to Piller and Zhang (2020) were reported by Lu et al. (2018) in a quantitative study of 48 culturally diverse teams in China. In addition, Lu et al. (2018) investigated culturally diverse teams and creativity. In their findings, Lu et al. (2018) reported that perceived intercultural diversity was negatively related to intercultural communication openness. The challenge of intercultural communication was because of language and cultural differences among individuals in a diverse organization's workforce. Such limitations in communication led to miscommunication of relevant ideas and opinions, which contributed to derailed performance in organizations (Lu et al., 2018). Morrison-Smith and Ruiz (2020) also conducted a quantitative study of 255 peer-reviewed articles on challenges and barriers to virtual teams' collaboration in the United States. Given the findings, Morrison-Smith and Ruiz (2020) concluded that virtual teams faced geographical, temporal, perceived, and communication barriers due to language and cultural diversity among team members (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). In addition, cultural and language disparities led to miscommunication in the team, which negatively affected the work collaboration in the team (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020).

Other researchers have also presented empirical evidence on the relationship between communication barriers and organizational diversity management. For example, in a survey of 90 nurses from private and public hospitals in Romania, Cioplan (2020) examined



communication barriers between medical teams in Romania. One of the barriers that emerged from data analysis was language and cultural diversity among medical team members, which made communication between team members and patients difficult because of differences in language and cultural diversity (Cioplan, 2020). However, although Cioplan (2020) extended earlier findings on the association between diversity and communication barriers, the researcher did not adopt a diverse sample size to generalize their findings. In addition, the study was limited to one demographic group and investigated diversity and communication barriers from a general perspective (Cioplan, 2020). In this regard, Cioplan (2020) advocated for additional studies using different target populations and large sample sizes with unique characteristics, such as gender, to understand the unique effects of communication barriers on organizational diversity. The present research addresses this gap.

### ***Acceptance and Respect challenges***

Previous research has also linked acceptance and respect to organizational diversity management challenges. For example, in a study investigating the prospects and challenges of workplace diversity in modern-day organizations in the United States, Cletus et al. (2018) reported that diversity promotes critical thinking, problem-solving, and employee professional skills. Additionally, diversity enables organizations to attract talent and improve corporate image and productivity (Cletus et al., 2018). However, Cletus et al. (2018) noted that diversity is faced with challenges such as hostility, disrespect, and discrimination that people with diverse backgrounds encounter in their workplaces (Cletus et al., 2018). Purnell and Fenkl (2019) extended these findings in their quantitative study of 26 nurses on transcultural diversity and healthcare in the United States. In their results, Purnell and Fenkl (2019) reported that people deserve respect and acceptance within their cultural framework and as individuals in

organizations. Similar results to Purnell and Fenkl (2019) were also reported by Isaac et al. (2019). However, they noted that acceptance and respect for diversity and change among employees in the organization were challenging.

Acceptance and respect as a challenge to diversity management were also presented in research by Weech-Maldonado et al. (2018). They investigated hospital cultural competency as a systematic intervention for leadership diversity demonstration. In their findings, Weech-Maldonado et al. (2018) established that performance improvement was more significant in diversity leadership and strategic human resource management (Weech-Maldonado et al., 2018). The researcher also noted a significant improvement in individual-level competencies for diversity attitudes and implicit bias for blacks among the intervention hospital organizations (Wee-Maldonado et al., 2018). Hospitals with high individual competencies for diversity experienced improved performance (Wee-Maldonado et al., 2018). In a qualitative study of 58 teachers, Maican et al. (2019) investigated academic staff personality and technology acceptance for communication and collaboration applications. In their findings, Maican et al. (2019) reported that acceptance of a diversified communication medium for teaching enhanced work engagement through collaboration within a diverse workforce (Maican et al. 2019). However, a lack of acceptance of diversity led to poor work engagement among teachers in learning institutions (Maican et al., 2019).

Several authors corroborated the findings by Maican et al. (2019) on diversity acceptance and respect among individuals in the workforce. For instance, Nkomo et al. (2019) conceptualized diversity at a critical juncture in the United States. The investigators noted that diversity acceptance and respect for individuals with diverse cultural and professional backgrounds was a significant challenge in embracing diversity in organizations (Nkomo et al.,

2019). The researcher recommended future studies to provide more opportunities to pursue new knowledge regarding accepting diversity in organizations (Nkomo et al., 2019). While Nkomo et al. (2019) extended the earlier findings on the relationship between acceptance, respect, and diversity management challenges in organizations, the scholars did not use diverse geographical scopes and sample sizes to generalize the findings.

The research was limited to one demographic group and examined organizational diversity and acceptance. In this regard, Nkomo et al. (2019) suggested additional studies on diversity challenges using diverse target populations and geographical locations to generalize the findings. Thus far, the studies reviewed indicate that acceptance and respect are obstacles against diversity management in organizations.

### ***The challenge of Gender Equity in the workplace***

Gender equity is another key challenge facing organizations that have been linked to diversity management organizations. For example, in a study of diversity management and the role in gender equity using 36 peer-reviewed articles, Koellen (2021) linked the gender dimension to diversity management challenges. Gender equity depends on individual differences of the executives and attitudes towards opposite genders (Kemper et al., 2018). Specific dimensions of diversity, such as gender diversity, were a challenge in organizations because of the lack of acceptance of certain gender stereotypes in the workplace among individuals in the workforce. The construct of gender discrimination led to gender inequality in organizations, making it challenging to manage a diverse workforce (Koellen, 2021). Kemper et al. (2018) reported comparable findings to Koellen (2021) in a qualitative study of 20 executives of Scandinavian subsidiaries in Japan. After data analysis, Kemper et al. (2018) reported that the Scandinavian executives responded to the significant differences in gender equity between Japan

and Scandinavia with change strategies such as resistance and rigid to change, compromise, and moderate change.

Similar to Koellen (2021) and Kemper et al. (2018), Baez et al. (2018) also examined gender diversity, corporate governance, and firm behavior in a quantitative study of 118 companies listed at the STOXX® Global 3000 Travel and Leisure. The study findings revealed that women focused only on various organizational tasks, such as marketing and human resources management. The bias in task allocation considered additional evidence of the gender gap, was also an opportunity to link the modern organization to a new management style of managing gender diversity in the workplace (Baez et al., 2018). Abaker et al. (2019) extended earlier results by Baez et al. (2018) in a quantitative study of 11 private sector organizations on diversity management listed on the Saudi stock market. Abaker et al. (2019) established that retention, pay with benefits, and health insurance policies significantly affected diversity management in the Saudi private sector. In addition, the lack of gender equity in the Saudi Market contributed to low performance. (Abaker et al., 2019). A diverse workforce might serve a diverse market with different gender disparities better.

Whereas Abaker et al. (2019) extended earlier findings on diversity management and gender equity in organizations, the authors did not use a diversified sample size to generalize the research findings because one set of target populations might not provide transferable results. Additionally, the investigators used one geographical location regarding diversity management and gender equity in organizations. In this regard, Abaker et al. (2019) suggested further research using large and diverse sample sizes from different geographical locations to understand the effects of gender equity on diversity management in organizations. This study will address the gap in the literature.

### ***Generational Gap***

The generational gap has been linked to diversity management challenges. In a study by Schroth (2019), the investigators examined Generation Z (Gen Z) members in the workplace and diversity. They found that employers need to be prepared for the arrival of the Gen Z workforce, who share many traits with the millennial generation. They also bring new behavior patterns, which may be a challenge in a diversified workforce (Schroth, 2019). According to Schroth (2019), every generation has doubts concerning the younger generation's culture and technologies. Therefore, understanding their behavior and needs in a workplace may lead to better integration of new employees and mutual success in organizations (Schroth, 2019). Comparable findings to the result reported by Schroth (2019) were noted by Heyns and Kerr (2018), who examined generational differences in workplace motivation and diversity using a sample of 164 employees. In their results, Heyns and Kerr (2018) revealed that different generations respond differently to motivational factors in the workplace. In addition, employees from other generations had difficulties adapting to changes in the workplace and the work culture that younger generations exhibited (Heyns & Kerr, 2018).

The study findings of Heyns and Kerr (2018) were corroborated by Woods (2018) in a quantitative study of 42 different nationalities to examine the dynamics and relationships that brought migrants to Brazilian towns. The study results indicated that younger generation cohorts preferred living in towns to cosmopolitan areas because of technological changes, which enhanced diversity in their behaviors compared to other generations' cohorts (Woods, 2018). These studies suggest that the generational gap challenges organizational diversity management, especially when dealing with workplace Gen Z cohorts. Given the findings, limited research in the current literature examines the challenges of diversity management in organizations (Woods,

2018). The proposed study seeks to address this gap in the literature by examining the challenges faced by the management of organizations in implementing diversity management strategies.

## **Addressing Diversity Challenges**

### ***Top Management Involvement***

Diversity in organizations has several challenges. Integrating opinions, values, and beliefs from a diverse population is a major issue facing organizations (Chaudhry et al., 2021). Successful management of diversity challenges positions organizations in a better place to attract highly qualified talents from diverse backgrounds and their retention (Chaudhry et al., 2021). Some key diversity challenges in organizations include communication issues, decision-making due to diverse opinions, cultural conflicts, inequitable conclusions, and discrimination (Dai et al., 2019).

Organizations' leaders must ensure that they implement appropriate strategies to help employees from diverse backgrounds address diversity challenges (Montgomery et al., 2018). For instance, top leadership must be involved in diversity programs (Delgado-Piña et al., 2020). Top management support is one of the consistent findings throughout the literature used to address diversity challenges. In their qualitative study of 215 participants, Dahanayake et al. (2019) found that leaders played an important role in shaping organizational climate.

While shaping organizational climate, leadership support could support effective organizational diversity management (Delgado-Piña et al., 2020). Fassiotto et al. (2020) also reported that leadership acknowledging the existence of diversity could influence employees' views and perceptions of DEI. In addition, leaders could participate in different practices, such as mentoring employees to handle diverse opinions and views (Fassiotto et al., 2020; Mitchell et al., 2019).

### ***Dispelling Stereotypes and Misconceptions***

Another key strategy for addressing diversity challenges is for organizations to allow employees to work together and dispel preconceived stereotypes about a certain group of people (Enders et al., 2021). For instance, open conversations can be promoted throughout the organizations to freely talk about their culture, views, and beliefs (Gassam & Salter, 2020). Such forums play an important role in helping people dispel misconceptions about a specific group of people (Gassam & Salter, 2020).

Similar to Gassam and Salter's (2020). Grissom (2018), in their qualitative study, also found that diversity practice is effective when people are given a chance to talk about them freely. Talking about diversities and providing opportunities for people to understand others, including their cultural, religious, and ethnic foundation, is essential in addressing the previously held misconceptions (Grissom, 2018). Gill et al. (2018) corroborated the findings in their qualitative study of 215 participants. In their study, Gill et al. (2019) reported that diversity management practices in organizations could be enhanced when people openly acknowledge the existence of diversity in terms of race and gender.

Comparable results to Gassam and Salter's (2020) and Gill et al. (2019) were also reported by Goldberg et al. (2019), whose study findings provided preliminary results regarding the benefits of interracial talks. Frequent interracial meetings, including teamwork, help employees to work together and better understand their colleagues (Goldberg et al., 2019). Employees can understand others and compare to previously held stereotypes in such instances. Acknowledging the existence of diversity in organizations is a fast step toward implementing diversity in organizations (Goldberg et al., 2019; Goy et al., 2019). The implication is that employees are likely to participate in diversity practices if they feel that the leadership has

openly endorsed it. They must acknowledge and accept gender and racial diversity (Houser, 2019).

### ***Diversity Training Programs***

Diversity training is also a critical strategy to address DEI management challenges. In their qualitative study of 197 WOC in the US, Houser (2019) reported that diversity training programs were effective in helping employees in organizations correctly understand the need to respect race and gender. In addition, the researchers found that diversity training programs were also effective in helping employees alleviate negatively held misconceptions about a particular group of people (Houser, 2019). As a result, organizations can adopt multicultural training programs to increase knowledge about diversity and its benefits (Shifna, 2021). Providing employees with information regarding the benefits and dangers of diversity on performance can also motivate them to overcome cultural or racial conflicts and embrace each other (Jonsen et al., 2021).

### ***Integrating DEI in Organizational Culture***

Organizational cultures are another key strategy that can address organizational challenges. Organizational culture refers to shared values, beliefs, and customs among a group of people in an organization. After interviewing 57 executives in technology companies, Karakhan et al. (2021) found that integrating diversity concepts in organizational culture played an essential role in achieving DEI in the workplace. Jung et al. (2019) also reported that entrenching diversity principles in organizations' visions and missions, the processes used to accomplish organizational goals was another strategy for achieving equity, diversity, and inclusion. Organizational culture dictates how people interact in organizations, and their values are critical to their success (Kundu & Mor, 2019; Kutch & Kutch, 2022). Therefore, organizational leaders



should integrate the diversity concept into their organizational culture to ensure it is part of the shared beliefs and values (Lala et al., 2020; Lamichhane, 2021). This will help avoid communication issues and stereotypes, given that organizations uphold them within their culture (Literat & Brough, 2019; McGee, 2018; Meyenburg & Selmanovic, 2020).

## **Increasing Women of Color in IT**

### ***Addressing Unconscious Bias***

One of the strategies for improving the representation of WOC in a top leadership position is addressing unconscious bias. Brannon et al. (2018) defined unconscious bias as social stereotypes related to specific groups of people formed by other individuals created by their conscious awareness. Burt et al. (2019) noted a need to address unconscious bias to attract talents from different backgrounds, especially WOC. This includes implicit bias, which refers to a pre-reflective attribution of particular qualities to members of some social outgroup. As reported in a qualitative study with 12 managers from the technology sector, holding unconscious beliefs could threaten diversity and equity practices in organizations (Burrell & Nobles, 2018). Given their findings, Burrell and Nobles (2018) recommended that managers in organizations institute mechanisms to address unconscious bias related to negative beliefs and stereotypes toward a given group of people. Burt et al. (2019) also underscored the need to address unconscious bias in organizations by openly acknowledging differences in view, behavior, culture, and values. Organizations would provide reasonable accommodations to employees, attracting a highly talented workforce, especially WOC.

In their qualitative research, Noon (2018) confirmed that individuals often rely on preconceived assumptions or stereotypes when identifying others. These biases likely stem from unique mental constructs formed through learned behaviors, past exposures, or memorized

experiences (Williamson & Foley, 2018). These studies demonstrate that unconscious bias relates to preconceived stereotypes people cognitively construct regarding a certain group based on their identities, values, or beliefs. Such preconceived values are likely to be detrimental to diversity practices and the ability of a firm to attract WOC into their workplaces when they feel an implicit bias toward them (Burt et al., 2019; Noon, 2018; Williamson & Foley, 2018).

Several studies have linked implicit bias to discriminatory practices in an organization. For instance, Duma et al. (2019) conducted a qualitative study to investigate the effect of implicit bias on organizational equity practices. After the analysis, the researchers found that the negative mental cognition of people's identity, beliefs, and values was unhealthy to the organization's desire to attract qualified talents from minority groups such as WOC (Duma et al., 2019). Therefore, to attract qualified talent in IT, organizations must address employees' unconscious bias toward WOC, including being considered inferior or incapable (Duma et al., 2019; Noon, 2018).

Oberai and Anand (2018) replicated the above findings in their qualitative studies to understand the effect of implicit bias on recruitment practices. After conducting the study, Oberai and Anand (2018) found that implicit bias in the recruitment team had negatively influenced recruitment practices. Suppose the recruitment team has unconscious racial and gender stereotypes towards a specific group. In that case, they are less likely to recruit them (Burt et al., 2019a). Oberai and Anand (2018) also reported that addressing unconscious bias in the workplace was critical in creating a conducive environment by promoting equity and inclusion by attracting talents from different backgrounds.

Oberai and Anand (2018) and Burt et al. (2019) also recommended that organizational leaders be conscious of major decisions linked to the organizations' unconscious minds. This is

critical because it helps leaders identify and correct implicit instances instantly (Duma et al., 2019). Leaders can also use their awareness to encourage other employees to dispel misconceptions about certain groups of people, such as WOC (Duma et al., 2019; Shore et al., 2018).

### ***Groupthink and its Impact on Hiring Women of Color in IT***

In talent acquisition, it is imperative to recognize and address groupthink, as this phenomenon can hinder the attainment of diversity, particularly when it comes to increasing the representation of WOC in the IT sector. Groupthink is a psychological occurrence where individuals gravitate towards a consensus, even if it is not the best decision, to maintain harmony and coherence (Seidemann & Weißmüller, 2022). When groupthink takes hold of recruitment teams, they may unintentionally lean towards candidates who mirror the existing workforce composition, thus obstructing diversity initiatives.

Tarki (2019) emphasized in the Harvard Business Review the prevalence of groupthink among recruitment teams and how it may reduce diversity in hiring outcomes. This is alarming because such conformity could, without intent, perpetuate existing demographics and overlook qualified candidates from diverse backgrounds, including WOC. It is vital to acknowledge that the biases giving rise to groupthink may operate at a conscious and unconscious level, necessitating scrutiny of group dynamics within recruitment teams (Tarki, 2019).

In order to counter groupthink within the talent acquisition process, a fundamental approach is ensuring diversity within recruitment teams. When teams are composed of individuals with varied backgrounds and perspectives, they are less prone to groupthink, as they naturally bring different viewpoints to the table (Seidemann & Weißmüller, 2022). Moreover, it is imperative to establish practices that foster critical thinking, promote an environment

conducive to open feedback, and mandate periodic reviews of recruitment decisions for potential biases. Another essential component in mitigating groupthink is educating talent acquisition teams regarding its harmful effects on diversity. Such training should highlight how groupthink can hinder the inclusion of diverse talent, particularly WOC, in the IT sector. It is equally important for organizational leadership to take a proactive stance in emphasizing diversity as an organizational objective and ensuring that recruitment teams are committed to achieving this goal.

By taking decisive steps to curb groupthink, organizations within the IT sector can establish more inclusive recruitment practices. This is not only ethically commendable but is also likely to benefit organizational performance and innovation. Therefore, addressing groupthink is a critical measure in the journey toward augmenting the representation of WOC within the IT sector.

### ***Use of Technology in Hiring***

The use of technology in hiring is another strategy that can increase the number of WOC recruited in the technology sector. In their systematic review of 12 articles, Sequeria et al. (2018) found that significant technological advancements in recruitment and hiring processes have shaped how organizations recruit and hire employees. In particular, Sequeria et al. (2018) found that technological progress, including online tracking systems, was critical in allowing employees to track their applications while giving everyone an equal chance to apply. In their qualitative study, Burt et al. (2019b) also reported that technology in hiring employees increased the representation of WOC in other sectors. In addition, given that the system was less manipulated, employers have a better chance of attracting individuals from different backgrounds, including WOC (Burt et al., 2019; Spector et al., 2019).

Despite its significance in DEI, some issues related to technology in hiring practices exist. Present research indicates that although technology presents opportunities to both applicants and organizations, some applicants are disadvantaged in the hiring process, given how the application systems are designed (Cain, 2021; Puhan et al., 2019). For instance, in their qualitative study, Daugherty et al. (2019) reported that online recruitment systems are based on artificial intelligence to identify applicants' behavioral or psychological characteristics based on their resumes. Daugherty et al. (2019) noted that while technology could revolutionize recruitment practices toward diversity, there were still some instances where it could be skewed to favor a certain group of people. However, Cain (2021) refuted the above findings by underscoring that technology has allowed organizations to use social media for advertising and attracting candidates from different backgrounds. While Cain and Trauth (2017) refuted the above findings, they reported that some organizations would compromise the online recruitment system to favor a certain group. At the same time, little research has been conducted to understand how technology could increase women's representation in the corporate technology sector to increase DEI in the workplace (Cain, 2021; Solomon et al., 2018).

### ***Diverse Recruitment Teams and Targeted Recruitment Strategies***

Previous literature has identified a target recruitment strategy as a major approach organizations use to attract employees from different backgrounds (Murray & Loyd, 2021; Nizami, 2019; Pritchard et al., 2019). Channaoui et al. (2020) noted that targeted recruitment strategies, such as diversity recruiters from ethnic minority groups, could support organizations' efforts to facilitate diversity within their recruitment practices. However, there are some criticisms regarding using targeted recruitment strategies, given that the minority recruiter could intentionally show bias and recruit individuals with the same backgrounds or experiences

(Chakraborty, 2019). In addition, such practices could lead to overrepresenting individuals from specific minorities, leading to questions regarding diversity practices within the organization. However, several strategies have linked target recruitment strategies to equal representation of minorities in the workplace (Chaudhry et al., 2021). While target recruitment strategies promise organizations the likelihood of promoting diversity, few studies have been conducted to explore how targeted recruitment strategies can encourage the recruitment and retention of WOC in the technology sector (Chakraborty, 2019; Murphy et al., 2021). The present research addresses this gap.

### **Biblical Foundations of the Study**

DEI is fundamental to understanding God's will for humanity. The Bible is a playbook for organizations to integrate DEI into the workplace and in leadership.

The Bible tells readers in the first chapter of Genesis, "God created human beings in His own image. In the image of God He created them; male and female He created them" (*New Living Translation*, 2015, Genesis 1:27). The verse mentions "female" demonstrating that women are a reflection of God and highlighting the diversity and unity in His kingdom. Humans are all created equally in God's image and are not discriminated against in His eyes.

The concept of diversity and the human race is further replicated in Genesis 1:28, which states, "be fruitful, increase in number and fill the earth and subdue it." This scripture presents a compelling call for the scattered race to fill and subdue the earth regardless of origin.

In addition, the concept of diversity is quoted in Genesis 9:19 when Noah names his three sons: "from them came the people who were scattered over the earth." The scattering references the duo nature of cultural and racial diversity. Other scriptures have also shown that universality is another way of conceptualizing the essence of diversity. For instance, Joel declared that God

would pour His Spirit on all people in the last days. This implies that the Holy Spirit does not respect race or gender. However, God considers them all as one, as depicted in Joel 2:28-29, when God declares that all genders will immerse in His Spirit. Peter's sermon supports the same text on the day of Pentecost. On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came on people, and they spoke different tongues. The apostles were able to preach in other languages yet united in Christ.

Peter summarizes the universality of Christianity and the need to embrace diversity in Acts 2:8-12, which states, "and yet we hear them speaking in our own native languages! 'Both Jews and converts to Judaism....' And we all hear these people speaking in our own languages about the wonderful things God has done!' They stood there amazed and perplexed. 'What can this mean?'" (*New International Version*, 2015). Peter emphasized that Joel already prophesized this when he stated in Joel 2:28-29, "Then after doing all those things, I will pour out my Spirit upon all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy...even on servants—men and women alike." This indicates that the perception of universality among Christians should help them embrace diversity in people based on gender and race.

God promises that He values men and women impartially. The Bible is a guide on how people should live their lives, and this should include their professional lives. If organizations viewed their workforce as the Body of Christ, they would understand that they need diverse people to accomplish their organizational goals. 1 Corinthians 12:12-14 states, "The human body has many parts, but many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit. Yes, the body has many different parts, not just one part" (*New Living Translation*, 2015). Paul is stating that diversity and inclusion should not be an organizational checkbox but an essential element of functionality.

The body parts represent different people, and although they look different, act differently, and work differently, they are needed to accomplish a common goal. A company needs diverse people, including WOC, to survive, grow, and succeed.

### ***Humility and Power in Leadership***

In complementing the concept of diversity, it is imperative to understand the role of humility and power in leadership, as depicted in the Bible. Jesus Christ exemplified servant leadership, a model that can profoundly influence an organization's values and environment. Philippians 2:3-7 teaches the importance of humility, advising leaders to value others above themselves, reflecting Christ who, despite His divinity, assumed the nature of a servant. Conversely, the Bible cautions against the misuse of power. Matthew 20:25-26 indicates that, unlike worldly rulers who exert dominance, true greatness in leadership involves serving others.

In an organizational context, leaders who embrace humility are more likely to value contributions from a diverse workforce. This approach encourages an inclusive culture, enabling individuals, including WOC, to thrive and contribute meaningfully. Consequently, adopting servant leadership grounded in humility is essential for fostering genuine DEI.

### **Summary**

Scholars have tried to understand why people of color are still isolated from the technology industry despite a decade of exponential technology growth and development in the United States (Annabi & Lebovitz, 2018; Alfred et al., 2018). According to LA Times writers Dean and Bhuiyan (2020), in as much as billions of investments have been made in the technology industry and the pride of agility, the sector has failed to enhance diversity. Of several proposed reasons for the lack of diversity in the technology industry, it has been concluded that people of color are generally not being hired into technology fields (Alvarez et al., 2020).



Chakravorti (2020) noted that relationships with top organizational leaders could influence employees' chances of employment. Besides the need for referrals and personal relationships, Dean and Bhuiyan (2020) asserted that many people of color were also leaving the IT sector at an unprecedented rate for reasons such as inequalities, poor pay, and unfair market policies (Chakravorti, 2020). This qualitative, descriptive study explored managers' descriptions of strategies to promote the DEI of WOC in the IT sector. Chapter 3 presents the research methods used to collect and analyze data for the current study in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHOD

### Overview

This qualitative, descriptive study explored strategies for implementing talent acquisition and candidate selection processes to promote Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) of Women of Color (WOC) in technology. The study focused on hiring teams in the Information Technology (IT) industry in the United States.

### Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

**RQ1:** why does DEI matter in talent acquisition in the IT sector?

**RQ2:** what recruitment strategies are perceived as most effective by hiring managers in attracting WOC to IT roles?

**RQ3:** what are the common challenges hiring teams encounter when attracting, recruiting, and retaining WOC in the IT sector?

**RQ4:** what are the perceptions regarding the impact of DEI initiatives in improving and sustaining productive work cultures in the IT sector for WOC?

### Research Design

A qualitative, methodological approach was chosen for this study. Qualitative research was suitable for exploring and describing participants' perceptions and experiences. Open-ended data collection methods allowed participants to express themselves in their own words (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). One key feature of qualitative research is its grounding in the social, organizational, and individual contexts influencing participants' perspectives. This context-specific nature enables unanticipated insights to emerge (Yin, 2016) and allows for exploring phenomena deeply tied to their contexts (Lune & Berg, 2016). The methodology was also

particularly apt for addressing literature gaps related to inadequately described phenomena (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Quantitative methods were considered but ultimately not selected. While quantitative research can provide generalizable results from numerical data (Rahi, 2017), it limits the in-depth exploration of contextual influences (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In contrast, the grounding of qualitative findings in the perspectives that were drawn would have prevented researchers from confidently generalizing and requires them to assess transferability on a case-by-case basis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). However, the decontextualization necessary to represent data numerically and facilitate generalization makes contextual influences challenging to explore in quantitative research.

This study addressed a literature gap by providing strategies for implementing talent acquisition and candidate selection processes to enhance the DEI of WOC in technology. Qualitative research's open-ended, exploratory nature made it the most appropriate approach for exploring perceptions. The research questions call for descriptions of participants' perceptions, and qualitative research is the most appropriate approach for exploring and describing perceptions. Given the strong influence of social, organizational, and individual contexts on the studied phenomena, maintaining context in the data was a priority.

The study employed a qualitative, descriptive research design, which falls outside the five traditional qualitative designs (ethnography, grounded theory, case study, phenomenology, and narrative inquiry) (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Given the focus of this study on participants' perceptions, a phenomenological design was considered. However, phenomenological research focuses on the structure of the internal, subjective component of participants' lived experiences rather than on participants' opinions and perceptions of real-world phenomena (Moustakas,

1994), so a phenomenological design was not selected. A grounded theory design was initially considered. However, grounded theory primarily aims to build new theories (Charmaz, 2014). In this study, existing frameworks like intersectionality and social learning theory provided adequate structure for organizing and evaluating the findings in relation to prior literature. Therefore, a grounded theory design was not adopted.

Data were collected via semi-structured interviews from a purposeful sample of participants knowledgeable about the subject matter. Descriptive research is well-suited for understanding participants' views and experiences of real-world issues (Sandelowski, 2010). Given that this study aimed to describe participants' perceptions of DEI and the strategies and challenges associated with its implementation, a qualitative, descriptive design was the chosen approach.

### **Participants**

The study population consisted of hiring team members in the U.S. IT industry. The target population from which the sample was drawn were those hiring team members who were active in public LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter groups related to the U.S. IT industry. A purposeful sampling strategy was employed, as this nonrandom strategy focused recruitment efforts on individuals likely to have the knowledge needed to provide relevant information (Palinkas et al., 2015).

The specific sampling procedure used was criterion sampling, targeting individuals who met predetermined inclusion criteria designed to increase the likelihood of gathering relevant data (Palinkas et al., 2015). These inclusion criteria were: (a) being a current hiring team member (either a recruiter or a hiring manager), (b) working in the U.S. IT industry, and (c) having at least one year of experience in their current role. Conversely, the exclusion criteria were: (a) not

being a current hiring team member, (b) not working in the U.S. IT industry, and (c) having less than one year of experience in the current role.

Following approval from Liberty University's IRB, recruitment was conducted by posting digital recruitment flyers (Appendix A) on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter groups relevant to hiring team members in the U.S. IT industry. These flyers included key information such as the study's purpose, inclusion criteria, researcher contact information, and an invitation to participate. A secure Google Form was also used for potential participants to confirm their eligibility and interest. This measure ensured participants' privacy and confidentiality.

When participants contacted the researcher, a 10-minute preliminary phone call was scheduled. During the call, participants were required to confirm their adherence to the inclusion criteria verbally. An informed consent form (Appendix B) was emailed to them upon confirmation. Once the consent form was signed and returned, participants were given an alphanumeric identifier to preserve their anonymity. Interviews were scheduled at their convenience.

The study successfully recruited and interviewed 12 hiring team members from the U.S. IT industry, including recruiters, hiring managers, and 12 WOC. This sample size aligns with the recommended range for qualitative studies, as Creswell and Creswell (2017) outlined, which suggests between 5 and 25 participants. Recruitment leveraged purposeful and criterion sampling methods, targeting individuals who met specific inclusion criteria. The sample achieved data saturation, as evidenced by no new themes or codes emerging in analyzing each group's final two consecutive interviews (Fusch & Ness, 2015). When needed, the recruitment strategy was adaptable, including expanding to additional social media platforms and employing snowball sampling techniques (Palinkas et al., 2015).

## Study Procedures

Data were collected through individual, semi-structured interviews using a researcher-developed interview guide. Each interview took approximately one hour to complete. The interviews were conducted via Zoom to accommodate participants' schedules and to adhere to social distancing guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants to ensure data accuracy and facilitate analysis. Before initiating the Zoom call, participants were advised during a preliminary phone call to choose a private and minimally distracting location. The terms of informed consent, which included consent for audio-recording, were reviewed at the start of each call, and participants had the opportunity to ask questions or express concerns.

The interview questions were posed in the sequence they appeared in the guide, with follow-up questions introduced as necessary. Upon completion of the interview questions, participants were invited to share any additional thoughts before the audio recording was terminated.

After the interview, a member-checking procedure was implemented to ensure data accuracy. Participants received an email containing a preliminary summary of the codes and themes identified from their respective interviews, as Yin (2016) and Shenton (2004) supported them. They were asked to review and either confirm or suggest modifications to these preliminary findings, which took approximately 15 minutes. This member-checking technique helped verify the precision of the researcher's interpretations and minimized researcher bias.

### **Instrumentation and Measurement**

The data collection instrument for this study was a one-to-one, semi-structured interview guide (Appendix C). This interview format involved asking participants open-ended questions, allowing for more than simple 'yes' or 'no' answers (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). The format also provided the researcher with the flexibility to ask for clarification or additional information through follow-up questions (Newcomer et al., 2015). Semi-structured interviewing was chosen as the most appropriate data collection method given its compatibility with qualitative descriptive research (Sandelowski, 2010).

To improve the study's reliability and validity, the interview guide was developed based on a comprehensive literature review, thereby enhancing the dependability and trustworthiness of the data (Shenton, 2004). Additionally, demographic information was gathered to assess the potential transferability of the study's findings. It began with six close-ended demographic questions regarding gender, race or ethnicity, educational level, role on the hiring team, years in current position, and participation in hiring processes. Reporting these data aided in assessing the transferability of the findings (Shenton). The guide also included eight open-ended questions aimed at addressing the research questions. Interviews typically took about one hour to complete.

### **Data Analysis**

The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed using Zoom's automated transcription feature. These transcripts were then verified and de-identified by removing any personally identifiable information. The verified transcripts were imported into NVivo 12, a qualitative data analysis software for analysis. While NVivo did not automate the analysis, it helped maintain the integrity of the coding system and documented the researcher's actions (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2011).

The data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's inductive, thematic procedure (2006). This inductive approach allowed for identifying patterns in the data rather than fitting them into predefined categories. This method was chosen to address gaps in the existing literature and to allow for the emergence of unanticipated themes. The analysis consisted of six steps: 1) familiarization with the data through reading and rereading, 2) coding the data, 3) grouping codes into themes, 4) reviewing themes against the original data, 5) naming the themes, and 6) presenting the findings.

### **Ethical Procedures**

Before starting participant recruitment, Liberty University's IRB granted approval, ensuring the ethical treatment of human subjects involved. All participants gave informed consent, which outlined the study's aims and the voluntary nature of their participation. This included their right to decline participation, withdraw at any time, or opt out of answering particular questions with no negative consequences.

While there was no direct benefit to participants, risks were minimal and aligned with everyday activities. Confidentiality was maintained by replacing participants' names with alphanumeric codes (P1, P2, etc.) in all research materials. Audio recordings were stored on a password-protected flash drive, which only the researcher can access. This flash drive will be kept in a secure, locked filing cabinet until its destruction after the required retention period. Only de-identified transcripts have been, or will be, publicly presented or quoted.

### **Delimitations, Assumptions, and Limitations**

The study was specifically focused on the U.S. Information Technology industry, limiting its generalizability to other sectors. Furthermore, the participant pool was exclusively sourced



from targeted social media groups, which may not provide a comprehensive representation of the broader community within the industry.

This research operated under certain assumptions. It assumed that the semi-structured interview format is effective in obtaining authentic and valid insights. Additionally, the study relied on the accuracy of self-reported data from participants, operating under the assumption that respondents are providing honest and self-aware answers.

Finally, the study has limitations that must be acknowledged. It incorporated a relatively small sample size of 24 participants, which may affect the robustness and generalizability of the findings. The use of purposeful criterion sampling introduced the potential for biases, which may impact the study's credibility and transferability. Therefore, the results should be interpreted within this specified framework.

### **Summary**

The study employed a qualitative, descriptive approach to explore perspectives of hiring team members in the U.S. IT sector and women of color. The participant pool consisted of 12 hiring professionals and 12 women of color, all active in relevant social media communities. After receiving IRB approval, recruitment was conducted through digital flyers disseminated in these specific online groups, using a selective sampling strategy. Data collection consisted of semi-structured Zoom interviews, guided by a rigorously developed interview protocol. These interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and verified. Data analysis was performed using NVivo 12 software, applying both inductive and thematic methods. To ensure validity, member checking was utilized, and confidentiality was strictly maintained. Chapter 4 presents the detailed findings generated from this methodological approach.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

### **Overview**

This qualitative, methodological study explored talent acquisition and hiring strategies to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) of women of color (WOC) in the IT industry in the United States. The following sections define the demographic attributes of the study's participants, lay out the key findings organized according to the research questions, and provide a findings summary.

### **Participants**

A total of 24 participants were included in this study. Twelve participants were WOC working in the IT industry, and the remaining 12 were members of hiring teams in the IT industry. Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the WOC participants.

**Table 1***WOC Participant Demographics*

Participant	Gender	Race	Age range	Education	Salary range
WOC1	Female	Asian	25–34	Master’s	\$100,000–\$200,000
WOC2	Female	Hispanic	35–44	Master’s	\$50,000–\$100,000
WOC3	Female	Asian	25–34	Bachelor’s	\$100,000–\$200,000
WOC4	Female	Black	Over 50	Master’s	More than \$200,000
WOC5	Female	Mixed	25–34	Master’s	\$100,000–\$200,000
WOC6	Female	Asian	35–44	Master’s	\$50,000–\$100,000
WOC7	Female	Hispanic	25–34	Bachelor's	\$100,000–\$200,000
WOC8	Female	Black	35–44	Master’s	\$50,000–\$100,000
WOC9	Female	Asian	Over 50	Master’s	More than \$200,000
WOC10	Female	Hispanic	25–34	Master’s	\$100,000–\$200,000
WOC11	Female	Mixed	25–34	Master’s	\$50,000–\$100,000
WOC12	Female	Black	35–44	Bachelor's	\$100,000–\$200,000

Table 2 indicates the demographic characteristics of the hiring team member participants.

**Table 2***Hiring Team Member Participant Demographics*

Participant	Gender	Race	Age range	Education	Job title
HT1	Male	White	35-44	Master's	Recruiter
HT2	Female	Asian	25-34	Bachelor's	Hiring Manager
HT3	Male	Hispanic	Over 50	Master's	Recruiter
HT4	Female	White	Over 50	Bachelor's	Hiring Manager
HT5	Female	Black	25-34	Bachelor's	Recruiter
HT6	Male	Black	25-34	Bachelor's	Recruiter
HT7	Male	Mixed	35-44	Master's	Hiring Manager
HT8	Female	Hispanic	35-44	Bachelor's	Recruiter
HT9	Male	Asian	46-50	Bachelor's	Hiring Manager
HT10	Female	Black	25-34	Master's	Recruiter
HT11	Female	Native American	25-34	Master's	Hiring Manager
HT12	Male	Black	25-34	Bachelor's	Recruiter

**Results****Theme Development**

This study employed Braun and Clarke's (2006) inductive thematic method to analyze verbatim transcripts of interviews using NVivo 12 software. The analysis unfolded across six structured steps: (1) data familiarization, (2) data coding, (3) theme identification, (4) theme review, (5) theme naming, and (6) report generation.

***Step 1: Familiarization with the Data***

Each of the 24 interview transcripts was rigorously read multiple times in full in the reading pane of NVivo. In reading and rereading the data, a holistic sense of its contents was gained to identify patterns. Handwritten notes were made at this stage regarding repeated words,

phrases, and ideas that appeared in the participants' responses. These notes were the basis for code formation during the following analysis step.

### ***Step 2: Coding the Data***

Analyzing the data via coding required a two-tier approach. Initially, the data were segmented into discrete elements termed 'meaning units.' This involved breaking down participants' transcribed responses into phrases or sets of phrases, each capturing a unique idea relevant to the research question. These segmented phrases or sets of phrases were then labeled as 'meaning units.'

For example, take the comment from Hiring Team Participant 1 (HT1): "Diversity and inclusion initiatives have a profound effect on creating a welcoming environment that fosters innovation." This statement is significant in addressing Research Question 1 (RQ1), which examines the importance of DEI initiatives. It is relevant to HT1's assertion that DEI initiatives are essential because they enhance innovation by fostering a welcoming environment. Across all 24 transcripts, a total of 157 meaning units were identified.

Each meaning unit was attributed a preliminary code in the subsequent phase. For example, considering the substance of HT1's statement, which suggested that DEI initiatives are essential owing to their role in amplifying innovation within an organization, this particular meaning unit was associated with a code labeled 'enhanced innovation.'

When different meaning units conveyed similar messages, they were grouped under a shared code. This enabled the inductive clustering of participants' responses based on emergent thematic patterns. To illustrate, WOC Participant 5 (WOC5) remarked, "DEI initiatives can lead to an influx of diverse perspectives, which catalyzes innovation." Similar to HT1's statement, this reflects the premise that DEI initiatives are significant due to their contribution to

innovation. Consequently, WOC5's statement was coupled with the same 'enhanced innovation' code as HT1's.

Ultimately, the 157 meaning units were allocated across 14 distinct codes. Table 3 contains a breakdown of these codes and the number of meaning units grouped under each.

**Table 3**

*Initial Codes*

Initial code	Number of times the code was identified in the data	
	Hiring Teams	WOC
Address unconscious bias	8	9
Biases are barriers	7	10
Highlighting successes of WOC	1	3
Increase WOC representation	2	2
Increased innovation	7	5
Increased productivity	7	3
Increased sense of belonging and community	6	8
Mentorship programs	4	6
Partner with DEI organizations	8	6
Psychological safety		2
Respected employees contribute more	6	4
Showcase commitment to DEI	8	8
Supportive work environment	5	10
Underrepresentation is a barrier	6	6

***Defining the Codes***

**Code 1: Address Unconscious Bias.** The code *Address Unconscious Bias* emphasizes recognizing and addressing unconscious biases in talent acquisition, particularly for WOC.

Unconscious biases can impact hiring decisions and limit opportunities for diverse candidates.

To mitigate these biases, organizations can implement strategies such as bias training for hiring

teams, inclusive job descriptions, and diverse interview panels. Participants discussed approaches such as training hiring teams to ensure job descriptions are read inclusively. HT2 elucidated, “We have found success by incorporating bias training in our teams and working to create more inclusive job descriptions. We also ensure that our interview panels are diverse.”

**Code 2: Biases are Barriers.** The code *Biases are Barriers* identifies the challenges associated with overcoming systemic biases that impact WOC in the workplace. Participants shared their experiences identifying these biases and implementing strategies to mitigate them. HT12 stated:

We need to be proactive in identifying and challenge the biases that can serve as barriers for WOC in our company and the tech industry in general. These biases can deter WOC from pursuing or advancing in technical roles. It is an ongoing process for us, but we are prioritizing it.

**Code 3: Highlighting Successes of WOC.** The code *Highlighting Successes of WOC* reflects the importance of recognizing and celebrating the successes of WOC within an organization. Participants shared how this motivates others, increases morale, and fosters a more inclusive workplace. HT4 stated, “Spotlighting the achievements of women of color at our company events and in our internal and external communications allows us to celebrate their accomplishments and, in turn, showcase our success and improvements.”

**Code 4: Increase WOC Representation.** The code *Increase WOC Representation* describes the various strategies companies can implement to increase the representation of WOC in their workplace. These strategies may include outreach programs, partnerships with organizations that support WOC in tech, and targeted recruitment efforts. HT8 mentioned, “We have had success in building relationships with universities and organizations that support women of color in tech. This helps to create a pipeline of diverse talent.”

HT10 noted:

We started a targeted recruitment campaign to attract more women of color. We also ensured we used inclusive language in our job postings and involved our hiring teams by making sure our interview panels were diverse because we want them to see a future here, and that includes opportunities for growth and development.

**Code 5: Increased Innovation.** The code *Increased Innovation* was used to characterize the shared experiences and insights into how diversity promotes organizational innovation. This code captures the idea that diversity within an organization can drive innovation by bringing together various perspectives and experiences. A diverse workforce can lead to creative problem-solving and the generation of new ideas as individuals from different backgrounds approach challenges in unique ways. HT11 stated, “The different backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives that our diverse employees bring to the table have been a significant driver of innovation in our company.”

WOC2 believed, “When there are diverse perspectives, people, knowledge, and experiences at the table, it can lead to better problem-solving and innovation.”

**Code 6: Increased Productivity.** *Increased Productivity* illustrates the relationship between inclusiveness and productivity and is defined as experiences where inclusivity and



support were perceived to increase productivity. Employees who feel valued, included, and supported are more likely to be motivated, committed, and productive. An inclusive environment where everyone's voice is heard can lead to higher team morale and better performance. Participants mentioned that feelings of inclusivity, support, and value contribute to enhanced motivation, commitment, and overall productivity. For instance, HT5 shared, "When we create an inclusive environment where everyone's voice is heard and valued, we see a significant increase in team morale and productivity. People tend to perform better when they feel that they belong and that their contributions matter."

**Code 7: Increased Sense of Belonging and Community.** The code *Increased Sense of Belonging and Community* highlights the importance of creating a work environment where employees feel a sense of belonging and are part of a community. Initiatives promoting inclusivity, such as team activities and celebrating cultural diversity, enhance this sense of belonging, thereby contributing to a more productive work environment. WOC4 noted, "It's important to create a sense of belonging. This can be fostered by inclusive team activities and openly celebrating cultural diversity."

**Code 8: Mentorship Programs.** The code *Mentorship Programs* highlights the importance of providing mentorship opportunities for WOC in the workplace. Mentorship programs can provide guidance, support, and networking opportunities, which can help attract and retain WOC. WOC2 exclaimed, "I love seeing companies that offer mentorship opportunities or buddy programs specifically for women of color because that means I have a true chance of growing with a company."

HT4 explained, “Implementing mentorship programs specifically designed for women of color can provide guidance, support, and networking opportunities, fostering an environment that encourages their active participation and advancement.”

**Code 9: Partnership with DEI Organizations.** *Partnership with DEI Organizations* emphasizes the benefits of collaborating with organizations focused on DEI. Strategic partnerships with these organizations can provide access to diverse talent pools and help companies attract and retain WOC. HT1 mentioned, “Partnering with organizations serving women and people of color in technology has diversified our talent pools significantly and improved our overall hiring rate of WOC in the last year.”

**Code 10: Psychological Safety.** *Psychological Safety* creates an environment where employees feel safe to be themselves and voice their ideas and concerns. Participants noted the importance of psychological safety in fostering a healthy and productive work environment. WOC3 declared:

Diversity and inclusion initiatives can help reduce micro-aggressions and implicit biases in the workplace, which have a huge impact on WOC's psychological safety and productivity. I want to feel like I can speak up, make suggestions, and raise concerns without fear of retribution.

**Code 11: Respected Employees Contribute More.** The code *Respected Employees Contribute More* demonstrates the importance of respecting all employees, irrespective of their background or identity, and how this enhances their contributions to the workplace. As indicated by one WOC3 participant, “I would like to add that companies should seek to understand and respect our unique experiences and challenges if they want to foster an inclusive workplace.”

WOC9 reflected, “I would like to remind companies that diversity and inclusion is not just about numbers. It is about creating a culture where everyone feels valued and respected no matter who they are or where they came from.”

**Code 12: Showcase Commitment to DEI.** The code *Showcase Commitment to DEI* emphasizes the need for transparent communication about the commitment to DEI. Participants shared that highlighting and executing a commitment DEI has attracted them to an organization, improved the workplace culture, and increased employee morale. HT4 noted, “We found that openly talking about DEI and our never-ending commitment to fostering it has not only attracted more candidates while being the top reason they applied to us but it has helped improve our organizational culture as well.”

**Code 13: Supportive Work Environment.** The code *Supportive Work Environment* defines the components of a supportive work environment, including various aspects such as open communication, regular feedback, understanding, and empathy. HT6 stated:

A supportive work environment involves more than just good benefits and fun perks. It's about access to opportunities, addressing discrimination and harassment, open communication, and fostering an inclusive culture. DEI initiatives have helped us build this kind of supportive environment.

**Code 14: Underrepresentation is a Barrier.** The code *Underrepresentation is a Barrier* provides insight into how underrepresentation can act as a barrier to achieving an inclusive work environment for WOC. Participants discussed challenges such as lack of mentors, feelings of isolation, and perceptions of exclusion. An example from HT1, “The underrepresentation of women of color in our team not only affects the sense of belonging for those who are here, but it makes it challenging to attract and retain more.”

### ***Step 3: Identifying Emerging Themes***

Emerging themes were discerned by amalgamating codes that shared a relationship. For instance, the codes 'enhanced innovation' and 'boosted productivity' were synthesized into an initial theme, as both articulated reasons for the importance of DEI initiatives. Similarly, 'barriers due to biases' and 'barriers due to underrepresentation' converged into another initial theme, illustrating the obstacles in attracting, recruiting, and retaining WOC. Table 4 delineates how the foundational codes coalesced into initial themes.

**Table 4**

*Grouping of Related Codes to Form Preliminary Themes*

<b>Preliminary theme</b> Initial code grouped to form theme	<i>n</i> of times theme was identified in data from:	
	Hiring Teams	Women of Color
<b>Why DEI matter</b>	13	7
Increased innovation		
Increased productivity		
<b>Strategies to attract, recruit, and retain WOC</b>	32	37
Address unconscious bias		
Highlighting successes of WOC		
Increase WOC representation		
Mentorship programs		
Partner with DEI organizations		
Showcase commitment to DEI		
Supportive work environment		
<b>Challenges to attracting, recruiting, and retaining WOC</b>	13	15
Biases are barriers		
Underrepresentation is a barrier		
<b>DEI initiative impacts on productive work culture</b>	12	13
Increased sense of belonging and community		

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Psychological safety

Respected employees contribute more

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#### ***Step 4: Refining the Themes***

Refining the themes involved ascertaining their accuracy in reflecting the data and ensuring clarity in presentation. This entailed cross-referencing the themes against the original dataset and verifying their alignment with participants' responses. Further, ensuring that the themes were distinct and non-overlapping was crucial. Themes could be merged or particular codes reassigned to create more meaningful categories. Additionally, each theme was scrutinized for internal coherence; in cases where a theme lacked unity, it was subdivided into more focused themes.

#### ***Step 5: Assigning Descriptive Names to Themes***

Assigning descriptive names to the themes involved examining each theme for its relevance to the research questions. The data associated with each theme was analyzed to discern its underlying message in relation to the research question. The initial theme labels were then substituted with more descriptive and purposeful names that concisely captured the essence of the themes as answers to the research questions.

**Table 5***Finalized Naming of Preliminary Themes*

Preliminary Theme: Why DEI Matter
Theme 1: DEI Promote Innovation Theme 2: DEI Promote Productivity
Preliminary Theme 2: Strategies To Attract, Recruit, and Retain WOC
Theme 3: Showcasing Commitment to DEI Theme 4: Partnering with DEI-focused organizations Theme 5: Addressing Unconscious Bias Theme 6: Creating a Supportive, Inclusive Workplace Culture
Preliminary Theme 3: Challenges to Attracting, Recruiting, and Retaining WOC
Theme 7: The Challenges of Biases Theme 8: The Challenges of Underrepresentation
Preliminary Theme 4: DEI Initiative Impacts on Productive Work Culture
Theme 9: Fostering a Sense of Belonging and Community for WOC Theme 10: Cultivating Environments Where WOC Feel Valued and Respected

***Step 6: Crafting the Report***

This final step encompassed the creation of this chapter, offering a comprehensive presentation of the findings. In the subsequent section, findings are elucidated in greater depth, supported by direct quotations from the dataset to substantiate all observations.

**Research Question Themes****Research Question One: Importance of DEI**

The first research question (RQ1) sought to understand why DEI matters in talent acquisition, particularly within the technology industry.

Two primary themes emerged from the data to address this question. All 12 members of the Hiring Teams (HT) and 7 Women of Color (WOC) concurred that DEI not only fosters innovation but also enhances productivity in IT organizations. These sentiments were overwhelmingly positive, with no participants offering data contradicting this view. Divergent

data came from some WOC participants, who felt that DEI's primary contributions were to collaboration or creating a sense of belonging and psychological safety for WOC.

### ***Theme 1: DEI Promotes Innovation***

Seven HT participants and five WOC participants expressed the perception that DEI contributed to innovation in IT organizations. HT11 posited that DEI initiatives “significantly enhance the richness of ideas and perspectives within the organization,” acting as a catalyst for innovation. Similarly, HT5 suggested that DEI initiatives cultivate a work environment where WOC can thrive, stating that this culture “ultimately leads to more innovation and productivity.”

Furthermore, WOC participants provided similar insights. WOC2 emphasized that diversity of perspectives naturally enhances innovation, asserting that “when you have diverse perspectives and experiences at the table, it can lead to better problem-solving and innovation.” WOC6 supported WOC2's viewpoint: “By creating an environment that values diverse backgrounds and experiences, we can foster innovation and creativity..”

**Subtheme 1: Welcoming Culture.** HT1 articulated that DEI initiatives were pivotal in creating a welcoming workplace environment, noting, “Diversity and inclusion initiatives have a profound effect on creating a welcoming environment that fosters innovation [and] creativity.”

The five WOC participants who agreed with HT participants—that DEI fostered innovation—illuminated why helping WOC feel welcome translated into enhanced organizational creativity. Specifically, WOC1 suggested that when employees felt respected, they were more willing to offer their best ideas and collaborate effectively, ultimately fostering an environment of acceptance and openness necessary for creativity and innovation. We can also see from the data that a welcoming culture and emphasizing value positively affected productivity.

### ***Theme 2: DEI Promotes Productivity***

Seven HT participants and three WOC participants indicated that DEI contributed to greater productivity in IT organizations. HT12 said that DEI emphasized that DEI created "a more productive work culture for everyone, including women of color." Similarly, HT9 linked an inclusive culture to productivity: "DEI initiatives improve team dynamics by creating a culture where everyone feels they belong." HT10 added that when WOC felt respected, it "improved team morale and productivity." This was echoed by WOC10, who suggested that an inclusive workplace led to "higher job satisfaction and productivity."

WOC3 stated that DEI initiatives had "A huge impact on women of color's productivity," while WOC4 believed DEI enhanced "collaboration, innovation, and overall productivity." In summary, the participants expressed the perception that DEI and DEI initiatives mattered because they increased innovation and productivity in information technology organizations.

### **Research Question Two: Strategies for Attracting, Recruiting, and Retaining Women of Color**

The second research question asked, "What talent acquisition strategies can effectively attract, recruit, and retain WOC in the IT sector?" Four themes and three subthemes emerged to address this question. Both HT and WOC participants contributed, recommending seven key strategies. At least four participants supported each recommendation. The strategies, listed by the number of participants endorsing them, included: (a) showcasing commitment to DEI (recommended by 15 participants); (b) partnering with DEI-focused organizations to recruit WOC (14 participants); addressing unconscious bias in hiring and promotion practices (14 participants); creating a supportive and inclusive workplace (12 participants); implementing mentorship programs for WOC (eight participants); highlighting successes of WOC (four participants), and; increasing WOC representation (four participants).



### ***Theme 3: Showcasing Commitment to DEI***

Eight HT and seven WOC participants underscored the importance of IT organizations visibly demonstrating their commitment to DEI to attract, recruit, and retain WOC. HT9 mentioned that “showcasing our company's diversity in external communications helps attract diverse candidates.” HT3 emphasized transparency about DEI goals, stating, “Being transparent about our DEI efforts and goals, both internally and externally, attracts a more diverse candidate pool.” HT6 and HT7 pointed to the effectiveness of openly discussing and promoting DEI initiatives. Specifically, HT6 mentioned the value of “actively promoting our commitment to diversity in job postings and on our company website.” At the same time, HT7 found that “open dialogue about our commitment to diversity attracts a wider range of candidates.” WOC participants agreed. WOC1 observed that organizations committed to DEI “tend to attract more women of color.” WOC4 stressed that this showcasing should be proactive, saying, “Organizations that proactively showcase their commitment are more successful in engaging WOC in the tech industry.” Lastly, WOC10 spoke of “highlighting” DEI commitment in job postings to “attract more diverse candidates.”

### ***Theme 4: Partnering with DEI-focused Organizations***

Eight HT and six WOC participants emphasized the value of effectively partnering with DEI-focused organizations to recruit WOC into IT fields. HT1 mentioned successful collaborations with universities supporting WOC in tech, stating, “Partnering with organizations and universities focused on women of color in tech has yielded skilled and passionate candidates.” HT11 added, “Partnerships with organizations specifically supporting women of color in tech have been successful.” HT4 cited diversity-focused job fairs as an effective strategy, saying, “Collaborating with organizations promoting diversity and attending diversity job fairs

have been effective.” WOC participants advocated for proactive efforts. WOC1 advised, “Organizations should proactively attend job fairs or collaborate with diversity-supporting organizations.” WOC5 suggested an active presence in WOC-rich communities and educational institutions: “An active community presence can attract diverse talent.” WOC6 emphasized purposeful outreach, recommending, “Organizations should seek WOC through career fairs at historically black colleges or partnerships with tech organizations focused on WOC.”

### ***Theme 5: Addressing Unconscious Bias***

Seven HT and seven WOC participants advised IT organizations to actively address unconscious bias in hiring and promotion. HT11 highlighted the importance of neutral language in job postings: “Job postings should be gender-neutral and welcoming.” HT2 discussed bias training and diversifying interview panels: “We incorporate bias training and work to create more inclusive job descriptions. Diverse interview panels are also used.” HT9 added, “Bias training is provided to hiring teams to ensure fairness.” WOC participants concurred on the need for unbiased hiring. WOC1 stated, “Addressing unconscious biases in hiring and promotions is crucial.” WOC11 recommended inclusive job descriptions: “Job requirements should be inclusive and bias-free.” WOC3 and WOC12 advocated for widespread bias training: “Training all employees, especially hiring staff, can raise awareness of unconscious bias and promote equitable evaluations.”

### ***Theme 6: Creating a Supportive, Inclusive Workplace Culture***

Five HT and seven WOC participants advised IT organizations to cultivate a supportive, inclusive workplace culture to attract, retain, and advance WOC. HT3 highlighted the importance of resources for career development and equal promotion opportunities to retain WOC. HT5 echoed that their “workplace culture is supportive and inclusive, which aids in retention.” HT9

defined an inclusive and supportive workplace as one where all employees feel valued: “They should actively work to create a culture where everyone feels valued and included.” The recommendation of creating an inclusive and supportive workplace culture was one of the most strongly attested by WOC participants, along with addressing unconscious bias. WOC1 agreed with HT5 that an inclusive culture promotes retention for WOC: “Creating a more inclusive work culture, where everyone feels valued and respected, will help retain WOC in IT roles.” WOC11 added that an inclusive culture where WOC job candidates can see other WOC thriving will help to attract those WOC candidates to apply for jobs with the company: “Creating a supportive and inclusive company culture can help attract WOC. If they see that other WOC are thriving at the company, they're more likely to apply.” WOC8 added that support should extend beyond professional development and include mental health support for the specific challenges that WOC face in workplaces where they are minorities:

I want to emphasize the importance of mental health support. The stress and isolation from being one of the only people of color in a workplace can be detrimental to our mental health. Companies need to make sure they are providing adequate support.

**Subtheme 1: Implementing Mentorship Programs.** Three HT and five WOC participants stressed the importance of mentorship programs in attracting, recruiting, and retaining WOC in IT. HT4 emphasized, “Offering tailored mentorship programs and career development opportunities can help engage and retain WOC once they are hired.” HT7 concurred, stating IT companies should “Provide mentorship and development programs specifically for WOC.” On the same note, WOC participants agreed. WOC2 said, “Companies that provide career mentorship and sponsorship opportunities specifically targeting WOC can be

very effective. When I see that I can grow with a company through mentorship opportunities, I am motivated to apply." WOC4 added that such programs don't just attract but also retain:

Implementing mentorship programs specifically designed for WOC can provide guidance, support, and networking opportunities, fostering an environment that encourages their active participation and advancement. These strategies attract talented WOC and create a positive reputation as an inclusive organization, which can further enhance recruitment efforts and support long-term retention.

**Subtheme 2: Highlighting Successes of WOC Employees.** One HT and three WOC participants recommended highlighting the successes of WOC employees. HT4 recommended "Showcasing the achievements of WOC within the company." WOC12 explained why this strategy was effective for recruiting WOC: "Showcasing the success stories of current employees of color can be a powerful recruitment tool. It shows potential candidates that they can succeed at the company." WOC4 agreed with WOC12 that showcasing the successes of current WOC employees signaled to WOC candidates that the company valued DEI: "By openly advocating for diversity and celebrating the accomplishments of WOC within the company, organizations can send a strong message that they value and prioritize the growth and success of underrepresented groups."

**Subtheme 3: Increasing WOC Representation.** Two HT participants and two WOC participants recommended increasing WOC representation. HT11 recommended "Ensuring representation [of WOC] at all levels" of the company. HT8 suggested that such representation could be realized by offering WOC "clear career pathways," stating, "Organizations can improve by ensuring diversity in leadership roles and providing clear career pathways for WOC. This can help attract and retain diverse talent." Echoing this sentiment, WOC11 emphasized the need for

WOC to be represented in entry-level roles and leadership: "I'd like to emphasize the importance of representation at all levels of the organization, not just entry-level positions. Seeing WOC in leadership positions can inspire others to pursue careers in tech." WOC2 concurred, adding, "Organizations should actively promote qualified WOC to leadership roles to provide visible role models and show that there isn't a glass ceiling at their organization." In summary, participants recommended a seven-pronged approach to attract, recruit, and retain WOC in IT: Commitment to DEI, partnerships with DEI-focused organizations, combating unconscious bias, fostering an inclusive culture, implementing mentorship programs, celebrating WOC achievements, and elevating WOC representation across organizational levels.

### **Research Question Three: Challenges in Attracting, Recruiting, and Retaining Women of Color**

RQ3 posed the question: What are the prevalent challenges in attracting, recruiting, and retaining WOC in the IT sector? Two primary themes emerged in response to RQ3. All 12 HT and WOC participants identified two main challenges: conscious or unconscious bias and the systemic underrepresentation of WOC at various organizational levels. This latter challenge leaves WOC without peer and mentor support of the same race and gender within their workplaces.

#### ***Theme 7: The Challenges of Biases***

Seven HT participants pinpointed bias as a significant obstacle to attracting, recruiting, and retaining WOC in IT organizations. HT10 described the primary hurdle as unconscious bias in hiring, stating, "One major challenge is overcoming unconscious bias in the hiring process. This can unintentionally create barriers for women of color and deter them from applying for certain roles." HT12 highlighted that these biases are often inherent and inadvertent, "The

primary challenge is overcoming the inherent biases in the recruitment process, which can inadvertently limit opportunities for women of color." Similarly, HT5 emphasized that unconscious biases within hiring pose a challenge, "One challenge is breaking down the unconscious biases that exist within the hiring process. This can unintentionally create barriers and discourage WOC from applying."

Ten WOC participants also indicated bias as a challenge to attracting, recruiting, and retaining WOC. WOC1 referred to biases and stereotypes as affecting recruiters' perceptions of WOCs' capabilities: "As a woman of color, I have found that stereotypes and biases are the most prominent barriers during the recruitment process. Sometimes, recruiters might have preconceived notions about our capabilities, which could lead to missed opportunities." WOC2, differing from HT participants, mentioned both conscious and unconscious biases, "One of the main barriers that WOC face is bias, both conscious and unconscious. This can result in being overlooked during the recruitment process or underestimated in our abilities." WOC6 concurred, "Bias, both unconscious and conscious, play a role, leading to WOC being overlooked for opportunities." Lastly, WOC4 articulated the experience of being stereotyped:

The barrier I've faced the most is being viewed through the lens of stereotypes. This limits the opportunities we're given and has led to me and other WOC being overlooked or underestimated, making it challenging to secure a role in IT.

### ***Theme 8: The Challenges of Underrepresentation***

Six HT participants identified underrepresentation of WOC in IT organizations as a challenge. HT1 determined the lack of mentors as a result of this underrepresentation, stating, "The primary challenge is the underrepresentation of WOC in the industry. This scarcity often leads to a lack of mentors and role models, which might dissuade potential candidates from

pursuing opportunities.” HT8 echoed this sentiment, observing, “One challenge is the lack of representation of women of color in tech, which can make it harder to attract and retain them. They may not see themselves reflected in the company or industry.” HT6 identified underrepresentation as a hurdle in attracting WOC, noting, “Attracting women of color can be challenging due to societal barriers and the lack of representation in the IT sector.”

Similarly, six WOC participants also articulated the underrepresentation of WOC as a challenge. WOC2 related this to a struggle for WOC to see themselves in specific roles or organizations, stating, “The paucity of representation in the industry can engender a sense of isolation, complicating the ability for WOC to envision occupying certain roles or ascending within organizations.” WOC3 highlighted the lack of diverse representation on interview panels as a barrier in recruitment, stating, “Another common barrier is the lack of representation in interview panels. This can lead to unconscious biases and stereotypes influencing the recruitment process. These factors can lead to WOC being overlooked or underestimated during the recruitment process.” WOC10 provided data to corroborate WOC3's observation, “The lack of diversity in the interview panel can be a significant barrier. It can lead to unconscious bias and a feeling of not belonging.” Thus, the participants cited two common challenges to attracting, recruiting, and retaining WOC in IT organizations, including biases (whether conscious or unconscious) and underrepresentation in those organizations of WOC.

#### **Research Question Four: Hiring Team Perceptions of the Impact of D&I Initiatives**

RQ4 asked: What are the perspectives of departmental staff on the impact of DEI initiatives in enhancing and sustaining productive work environments in the IT sector for WOC? Two main themes emerged to address this research question.

The data from all 12 HT and 12 WOC participants were analyzed. These participants suggested that DEI initiatives are critical in fostering productive work cultures specifically for WOC. They cited an increased sense of belonging and community among WOC as one key benefit. In addition, participants indicated that such cultures were more productive for WOC because employees who felt valued and respected were more committed and contributed more effectively.

***Theme 9: Fostering a Sense of Belonging and Community for WOC***

Six HT and eight WOC participants indicated that DEI initiatives improve and sustain productive work cultures by giving WOC a sense of belonging and community. HT1 said, “Diversity and inclusion initiatives have a profound effect on creating a welcoming environment.” HT12 explained the connection between a work environment that celebrates diversity and productive work culture, saying, “DEI initiatives can create an environment that celebrates differences and encourages open dialogue. This can lead to a more productive work culture for everyone, including WOC.” HT3 described DEI initiatives as making all employees feel valued: “DEI initiatives within talent acquisition create an environment where everyone feels valued and included.” HT11 stated that DEI initiatives can “create a more fulfilling work culture for WOC.” WOC participants agreed. WOC1 mentioned an increased sense of belonging: “I believe that diversity and inclusion initiatives can play a significant role in creating a sense of belonging for WOC like me in the IT industry.” WOC8 also highlighted an increased sense of belonging: “Diversity and inclusion initiatives can make a real impact by challenging the status quo and promoting an environment where everyone feels they belong.” WOC9 described DEI initiatives as helping WOC to feel welcomed, valued, and respected: “DEI initiatives in talent acquisition can help normalize diversity in the workplace, making it more comfortable and



welcoming for WOC. If we see that diversity is valued and respected, it makes us feel we can be ourselves.”

### ***Theme 10: Cultivating Environments Where WOC Feel Valued and Respected***

Six HT and four WOC participants expressed that DEI initiatives amplify and sustain productive work cultures by ensuring WOC feel valued and respected, thus encouraging greater contribution. HT10 said of DEI initiatives, “They can help WOC feel appreciated and respected, leading to improved morale and productivity.” HT5 said of DEI, “It fosters a culture where WOC can thrive, which ultimately leads to more productivity.” HT9 said that through DEI initiatives, “Women of color can feel valued for their unique contributions.” WOC participants agreed. WOC1 said, “When employees feel valued and respected, they are more likely to contribute their best ideas.” WOC4 said that when DEI initiatives were conducted effectively, “By fostering an inclusive environment, employees from diverse backgrounds feel valued, respected, and empowered to contribute their unique perspectives.” Speaking for WOC, WOC7 stated, “If we know we're valued for our unique perspectives and experiences, we're more likely to stay in the company and contribute our best work.”

### **Summary**

The data for this qualitative, methodological study provided valuable insights into strategies to embed DEI in talent acquisition to attract, select, and retain WOC in IT. Through data analysis, ten key themes emerged to address the four research questions used to guide this study. Four research questions (RQs) were formulated to guide the study.

RQ1 sought to understand the importance of DEI in talent acquisition and the technology industry. Two themes emerged to address this question: (Theme 1) DEI fosters innovation, and (Theme 2) DEI boosts organizational productivity.

RQ2 explored talent acquisition strategies to attract, recruit, and retain WOC in IT. In response, four primary themes and three subthemes were identified. Verified by multiple participants, these strategies are (Theme 3) demonstrating commitment to DEI, recommended by 15 participants; (Theme 4) collaborating with DEI-centric organizations for recruiting WOC, endorsed by 14 participants; (Theme 5) mitigating unconscious bias in hiring, supported by 14 participants; and (Theme 6) building an inclusive and supportive workplace, backed by 12 participants. Subthemes include (1) implementing mentorship programs for WOC, (2) celebrating WOC's achievements, and (3) enhancing WOC representation.

However, the study also identified challenges that were used to address RQ3: What are the common challenges encountered when attracting, recruiting, and retaining WOC in the IT sector? Two themes were used to address this question: the challenges of biases and underrepresentation. All 24 participants, both HT and WOC, contributed data. The participants indicated that there were two common challenges encountered when attracting, recruiting, and retaining WOC in the IT sector. The first challenge was bias, whether conscious or unconscious. The second challenge was the underrepresentation of WOC at all organizational levels. This challenge left other WOC without same-race, same-gender mentors and peers with whom to network for support.

Overcoming these challenges requires proactive measures such as challenging biases, increasing representation through targeted recruitment efforts, and creating opportunities for growth and development for WOC.

For RQ4, which examined departmental perspectives on the impact of DEI initiatives, two key themes were identified: (Theme 9) DEI initiatives foster a sense of community and belonging for WOC, and (Theme 10) DEI initiatives help cultivate environments where WOC

feel valued and respected. All participants indicated that these initiatives positively impacted productive work cultures for WOC by enhancing their sense of belonging and encouraging more significant contributions from those who felt valued and respected.

Overall, these findings provide practical recommendations for organizations aiming to promote DEI and improve the representation and inclusion of WOC in the technology industry. By implementing these strategies and addressing the identified challenges, organizations can create an inclusive work culture that attracts, recruits and retains talented WOC. This leads to enhanced innovation and productivity and fosters a more equitable and diverse IT sector. Chapter 5 includes discussion, interpretation, and recommendations based on these findings.

## CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH METHOD

The issue this study addressed is the ongoing concern about diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in the information technology (IT) sector, particularly among women of color (WOC) (Armstrong et al., 2018; Whitney & Taylor, 2018). This qualitative, methodological study explored perceptions of hiring managers and WOC in the IT industry regarding hiring strategies that may benefit talent acquisition and the candidate selection process to promote DEI of WOC in IT jobs. The target population included participants from hiring teams from the IT industry in the United States. The study's target population consisted of professionals from IT hiring teams in the United States, and the sample comprised 24 participants. This included twelve recruiters and hiring managers and twelve WOC actively engaged in the U.S. IT industry. Data collection employed a semi-structured, one-to-one interview guide.

Research findings demonstrated that by making WOC feel more welcome and included, DEI contributed to innovation and productivity in IT organizations by making WOC feel welcomed and included. However, some WOC participants perceived DEI as primarily contributing to collaboration or providing WOC with a sense of belonging or psychological safety. Moreover, the results highlighted organizations' need to actively implement diverse strategies to attract, recruit, and retain WOC. Recommendations from participants included showing a firm commitment to DEI, collaborating with organizations focused on DEI to recruit WOC, addressing unconscious bias in hiring and promotion, fostering an inclusive workplace, and setting up mentorship programs for WOC. They also emphasized highlighting the accomplishments of WOC and enhancing their organizational representation.

Participants reported biases and underrepresentation as challenges to inclusion. The participants indicated two common challenges when attracting, recruiting, and retaining WOC in

the IT sector. These challenges included bias, underrepresentation of WOC at all organizational levels, and a challenge that left other WOC without same-race, same-gender mentors and peers to network for support. Data analysis showed that DEI initiatives could increase productive work culture through increased belongingness and respect for WOC. The participants indicated that DEI initiatives increased productive work cultures for WOC by increasing their sense of belonging and community. Such productive work cultures were increased for WOC because employees who felt valued and respected contributed more. This chapter proceeds to discuss the interpretation of these findings, as well as limitations, recommendations, implications, and the conclusion of the study.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

The discussion and interpretation of findings were based on the research questions and their respective themes, as described below.

#### **Research Question One**

RQ1 posed the question: Why does DEI matter in talent acquisition and the technology sector?

#### ***The Impact of DEI on Innovation and Productivity***

The research findings demonstrated that DEI contributed to innovation and productivity in IT organizations by making WOC feel welcomed and included. However, some WOC participants perceived DEI as contributing primarily to collaboration or providing WOC with a sense of belonging or psychological safety. Results imply that diversity and inclusivity promote collaboration, innovation, and enhanced productivity in IT firms. Consistent with current findings, previous research demonstrated that DEI calls for employers to recruit employees from

different backgrounds with varying demographic compositions to fulfill organizations' corporate social responsibility for the community (Ash & Boyce, 2018).

DEI leads to innovation and productivity by enhancing collaboration among employees from diverse backgrounds. Previous research concurs with these findings by linking organizational performance, motivation, and innovation to DEI and the diverse views, skills, and competencies available to foster growth in different areas (Ballard et al., 2020). The underrepresentation of people of color in the IT sector contributes to the lack of DEI in the workplace, including limited role models to inspire future generations (Alvarez et al., 2020). In alignment with the current results, Ash and Boyce (2018) stated that reaching organizational goals in IT requires understanding how to attract, recruit, and retain talent from marginalized groups and utilizing their unique sociodemographic characteristics. Other studies have concurred with the current results by demonstrating that a lack of diversity in the IT sector will likely affect companies' creativity, innovation, and performance (Alvarez et al., 2020).

The research findings are consistent with the previous literature regarding the effect of diversity, equality, and inclusivity in organizations. For instance, Bogers et al. (2018) reported that the knowledge diversity of employees was positively linked to increased firm openness and innovation. If employees have different experiences, it can lead to innovative ideas (Bogers et al., 2018). However, Elia et al. (2019) found that the impact of cultural diversity became positive when there was an alliance in the exchange of ideas from different cultural exploration activities in the organization irrespective of employees' race and gender. The findings contribute to previous literature by establishing that diversity and inclusivity promote collaboration, innovation, and productivity in IT firms.

## Research Question Two

RQ2 was: What talent acquisition strategies can be utilized to attract, recruit, and retain WOC in IT?

### *Strategies and Initiatives for Enhancing DEI for WOC*

The study results revealed that organizations must proactively implement various strategies to attract, recruit, and retain WOC. The participants recommended showcasing commitment to DEI, partnering with DEI-focused organizations to recruit WOC, addressing unconscious bias in hiring and promotion practices, creating a supportive and inclusive workplace, implementing mentorship programs for WOC, highlighting the successes of WOC, and increasing WOC representation. Research results imply that creating a supportive and inclusive working environment and implementing mentorship programs leads to increased diversity and representation of WOC.

Similar findings have been reported in other studies. Washington and Roberts (2019) reported that many WOC have the ambition, confidence, desire, and determination to succeed. Therefore, they need support through mentorship. However, despite working hard, WOC lacked structured support and people who would support them in their developmental journey, compared to their White counterparts, especially in tackling the representation of challenges such as biases or underrepresentation. In alignment with the current findings, Smith (2018) established that despite their efforts to overcome racial and stereotyping challenges in their professions, the need for a mentor was imperative. Though many WOC did not fancy White mentors, the limited number of WOC in mentorship programs negatively affected their desire to have a mentor from their minority groups (Hyrynsalmi, 2019). Hyrynsalmi (2019) reiterated that the lack of such programs hindered the developmental process despite the significance of mentoring programs in

advancing women's career advancement. In this regard, Hyrynsalmi (2019) argued that women in STEM fields attributed their ability and success in changing careers to limited mentors and support staff.

Organizations' leaders must implement appropriate strategies to help employees from diverse backgrounds address diversity challenges (Montgomery et al., 2018). For instance, top leadership must be involved in diversity programs. Meanwhile, by shaping organizational climate, leadership support could support effective organizational diversity management (Delgado-Piña et al., 2020). On the contrary, Fassiotto et al. (2020) refuted current study findings by reporting that leadership acknowledging the existence of diversity could influence employees' views and perceptions of DEI. Leaders could participate in different practices, such as mentoring employees to handle diverse opinions and views (Fassiotto et al., 2020; Mitchell et al., 2019). The current research findings add to the related research by revealing that creating a supportive and inclusive working environment and implementing mentorship programs can lead to increased diversity and representation of WOC.

### **Research Question Three**

RQ3 asked: What are the common challenges encountered when attracting, recruiting, and retaining WOC in the IT sector?

#### ***Challenges and Barriers: Biases and Underrepresentation***

Participants reported biases and underrepresentation as challenges to inclusion. The participants indicated two common challenges when attracting, recruiting, and retaining WOC in the IT sector. These challenges included bias, underrepresentation of WOC at all organizational levels, and a challenge that left other WOC without same-race, same-gender mentors and peers to network for support. The results imply that the underrepresentation of WOC and bias left



WOC without same-race and same-gender mentors for support, thus hindering diversity. The findings concur with past research, which indicates that the two common challenges to diversity include racial and ethnic underrepresentation of employees in the workplace (Burt et al., 2019a).

The results provide a critical understanding of the challenges to diversity and inclusivity of WOC in the information and technology sector. In contrast to current findings, Armstrong et al. (2018) found that gender stereotypes characterizing WOC as inferior and unable to execute specific tasks were the major basis for the lack of DEI in the technology sector. However, previous study findings indicated that negative perceptions challenging the ability of Black women to perform specific tasks contributed to the lack of DEI in the technology sector, given that the majority were discriminated against during the recruitment and selection process (Jung et al., 2019). Study results contribute to current study results by demonstrating that the underrepresentation of WOC and bias left WOC without same-race and same-gender mentors for support, thus hindering diversity.

#### **Research Question Four**

RQ4 examined: What are the perceptions of departmental personnel regarding the impact of DEI initiatives in improving and sustaining productive work cultures in the IT sector for WOC? The theme used to address this question was:

#### ***Fostering Belonging and Cultivated Spaces Where WOC Feel Valued and Respected***

The data analysis revealed that DEI initiatives could increase productive work culture through increased belongingness and respect for WOC. The participants indicated that DEI initiatives increased productive work cultures for WOC by increasing their sense of belonging and community. Such productive work cultures were increased for WOC because employees who felt valued and respected contributed more to the organization. The research findings imply

that DEI of WOC increased productive work cultures by increasing their sense of belonging and community. The results were also reported in other studies. Previous research indicated that organizations with a positive attitude toward diversity had positive employer brands such as person-organization fit for enhanced workplace culture (Tanwar & Kumar, 2019).

The creative workforce attracted technology companies with diversity in workplace equity for both genders (Tanwar & Kumar, 2019). Similar to the study results, other scholars reported that organizations' gender diversity, development opportunities, and reputation in improved workplace equity, acceptance, and belongingness led to the increased positive brand to potential creative and innovative talents (Sharma & Prasad, 2018). In contrast to the current findings, prior research indicated that diversity training is a critical way to address the challenges linked to DEI management (Houser, 2019). The current results are inconsistent with other researchers who indicated that diversity training programs are effective in helping employees in organizations have an enhanced understanding of the need to respect race and gender, such as WOC (Tanwar & Kumar, 2019). In summary, the findings from this research contribute to the body of knowledge highlighting the essential role of DEI in talent acquisition. It demonstrates how DEI initiatives can improve work cultures for WOC by fostering their sense of belonging and community within IT organizations.

### **Intersecting Findings with Biblical Foundations**

In integrating the biblical foundations laid out in Chapter 2 with the study's findings, it becomes evident that the principles of DEI align with scripture. The principle of being made in the "image of God" from Genesis 1:27 highlights the inherent worth and dignity of all people, irrespective of race, gender, or background (*New Living Translation, 2015*). This verse sets the tone for the non-discriminatory treatment of all, aligning with the study's advocacy for

equitable hiring practices for WOC in the IT industry. Further, the study's findings are supported by 1 Corinthians 12:12-14, which recaps the idea of functional diversity within unity, likening it to a body with various parts. Each part, or in this case, each member of the organization, brings a unique set of skills and perspectives. The study's data validates this, demonstrating that diverse teams, inclusive of WOC, yield better problem-solving abilities and foster a sense of community. Similarly, Peter's sermon in Acts 2:8-12 and Joel's prophecy in Joel 2:28-29 further emphasize the biblical advocacy for DEI by emphasizing the universality of Christianity and the inclusive nature of the Holy Spirit. This supports the study's findings that an inclusive work environment benefits not just WOC, but the organization as a whole. In summary, the biblical foundations confirms the study's findings, demonstrating that DEI is not merely a societal or organizational ideal but is, in fact, a divine order.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study encountered several limitations that warrant discussion. The first limitation is that this was the first formal study to be conducted by the researcher. As a result, the researchers' skills may be limited when conducting interviews and data analysis. Another limitation relates to the researcher's novice skills. To address this limitation, the researcher consulted experts in data analysis. Additionally, the researcher considered training in research methods to boost skills, including structuring questionnaires and analyzing data using statistical software.

Another limitation was researcher bias. In qualitative studies, researcher bias occurs when the researcher fails to acknowledge the personal link to the study or preconceived preconceptions and experiences (Patton, 2014). In this study, research bias limited the credibility of the findings. However, bracketing was used to mitigate researcher bias, which entailed researching personal interests and preconceptions about DEI in the IT sector.

Finally, the study's scope also presented limitations. The sample comprised hiring team members from the U.S. IT industry, specifically those active on public LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter groups. This geographical limitation poses questions about the transferability and generalizability of the study findings. Additionally, purposive sampling was used, a technique susceptible to researcher bias, which could further undermine the reliability of the research findings.

## **Recommendations**

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Research bias presented a limitation in the credibility of this study's findings. Although bracketing was employed to address this issue, the researcher suggests that future studies should involve research experts to minimize bias further.

Given the study's geographical focus on hiring teams in the U.S. IT industry, it is recommended that future research extend to other sectors or international IT firms to enhance the transferability and generalizability of results. The study utilized purposive sampling, a technique susceptible to researcher bias and, thus, unreliable findings. Future studies should consider employing random sampling methods to mitigate this issue.

Lastly, as the findings indicated that DEI positively impacts innovation and productivity by creating an inclusive environment for WOC, future research should delve deeper into this relationship.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

Organizations are advised to institute mentorship programs to bolster DEI, as such programs have been shown to advance career development for women (Hyrynsalmi, 2019). Managers can use these findings to develop policies and guidelines to build awareness programs

to inform employees of the need for cultural diversity for enhanced innovation and productivity. Fostering teamwork and collaboration promotes diversity and inclusion among employees regardless of their gender or racial affiliations. Recruitment teams can use the findings to promote the selection and retention of WOC in organizations to improve diversity.

## **Implications**

### **Implications for Policy and Positive Social Change**

The study findings have several practical implications. The findings may improve diversity practices in the IT industry by providing stakeholders and managers with valuable information on barriers and facilitators influencing the recruitment and retention of people of color in the workplace, especially WOC. Managers in technology sectors may use the findings to implement mentorship programs to promote DEI in organizations. Mentorship programs provide awareness and information on the importance of cultural diversity in the workplace, thus enhancing WOC's inclusivity in the IT industry. Organizations in the IT industry may also promote policy changes. They may use the study results to implement diversity policies that promote equal opportunities for employees from different racial backgrounds during recruitment, promotion, and retention in the IT sector.

Theoretically, these findings contribute to intersectionality and social learning theory by identifying factors contributing to the underrepresentation of WOC in the IT sector, a field not often explored by researchers. Race and gender were the primary building blocks for the intersectionality theory that seeks to explain the underrepresentation of WOC in the workplace. Research findings contribute to the theory by identifying various strategies for improving diversity, including implementing mentorship programs and leadership in the IT sector. For instance, female mentors have increased the number of women in the IT sector and STEM

courses, thus increasing DEI. McHugh (2018) noted a lack of interest in IT for many women, especially WOC. Many WOC have attributed their failure to enroll in STEM courses and STEM-related careers to a lack of role models and mentors. The findings may help IT firm managers create mentorship and awareness programs to provide information regarding the diversity and inclusivity of WOC in the IT sector.

Understanding common barriers to diversity, equity, and inclusivity would help policymakers implement policies to promote diversity and equity, including mentorship programs to minimize bias and underrepresentation of WOC. Such DEI initiatives can increase productive work culture in organizations because employees feel a sense of belongingness and value.

### **Theoretical Implications**

Intersectionality theory served as the primary foundation for exploring the lived experiences of minority women in the technology sector and how gender and race intersect to form diversity-related barriers. Multiple identities underscored multiple identities and systemic discrimination resulting from their identities that block minorities from realizing equal opportunities in the workplace (Crenshaw, 2018). In this regard, intersectionality theory applied to this study because it acknowledges the systemic definition of minorities in the workplace and how gender and race create career growth barriers to workplace diversity. Therefore, this study used the theory to formulate research questions exploring how gender and race are diversity barriers for minority women in technology.

The study findings add to the theory by establishing bias and underrepresentation of WOC at all organizational levels as key challenges that left other WOC without same-race, same-gender mentors and peers with whom to network for support. Intersectionality theorists

state how gender and race intersect to form diversity-related barriers. Results contributed to this theory by revealing that DEI initiatives increased productive work cultures for WOC by increasing their sense of belonging and community as female gender in the IT sector. Such productive work cultures were increased for WOC because employees who felt valued and respected contributed more to the organization. The implication is that the findings concurred with the theory regarding the challenges and barriers, such as the lack of diversity and equity for the female gender in the IT sector, leaving WOC without same-race mentors and role models.

### **Conclusion**

DEI remained a critical issue of concern, especially among WOC. The study explores perceptions of hiring managers and WOC in the IT industry regarding hiring strategies that may benefit talent acquisition and the candidate selection process to promote DEI of WOC in technology jobs. Research findings provide key insights into the barriers to DEI of WOC in the IT sector. Enhanced DEI makes WOC feel welcomed and included, thus contributing to innovation and productivity in IT organizations. Diversity, equity, and inclusivity also contribute primarily to collaboration or providing WOC with a sense of belonging or psychological safety. Organizations must proactively implement various strategies to attract, recruit, and retain WOC.

Therefore, there is a need for commitment to DEI, partnering with DEI-focused organizations to recruit WOC, addressing unconscious bias in hiring and promotion practices, creating a supportive and inclusive workplace, implementing WOC mentorship programs, highlighting WOC successes, and increasing WOC representation. Challenges such as bias and underrepresentation of WOC at all organizational levels left other WOC without same-race, same-gender mentors and peers to network for support. As a result, DEI initiatives through mentorship programs can increase productive work culture, increasing belongingness and respect

for WOC. WOC can have improved work cultures, thus feeling valued, respected, and represented. Managers in technology sectors may use the findings to implement mentorship programs to promote DEI in organizations. More research should be conducted on how implementing mentorship programs would help improve DEI in workplaces. The findings inform future researchers concerning gender and racial diversity in the IT sector.

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## APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT FLYER

## Research Participants Needed

### **INTEGRATING DEI STRATEGIES INTO TALENT ACQUISITION TO RECRUIT AND RETAIN WOMEN OF COLOR IN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

This qualitative, descriptive study aims to explore strategies to implement in talent acquisition and the candidate selection process to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion of women of color in technology. Participants will be asked to participate in a series of virtual interviews, which will be approximately one hour and Participate in a 30-to-60-minute virtual interview.

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Benefits to society include a better understanding the strategies to implement in talent acquisition and the candidate selection process to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion of women of color in technology.

If you would like to participate, contact the researcher at the phone number or email address provided below.

A consent document will be given to you one week before the interview/focus group.

Mia Trahan, a doctoral candidate at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

## APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

**Title of the Project:** INTEGRATING DEI STRATEGIES INTO TALENT ACQUISITION TO RECRUIT AND RETAIN WOMEN OF COLOR IN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

**Principal Investigator:** Mia Trahan, Ph.D. Student, Liberty University

### Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a recruiting officer or a woman of color nurse aged 18 years working in technology sector. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

### What is the study about, and why is it being done?

This qualitative, descriptive study aims to explore strategies to implement in talent acquisition and the candidate selection process to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion of women of color in technology.

### What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in a series of virtual interviews for approximately one hour.
2. Participate in the member-checking process of your transcripts.

### How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from participating in this study.

Benefits to society include a better understanding of strategies to implement in talent acquisition and the candidate selection process to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion of women of color in technology.

### What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. Being in this type of study involves some risk of minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as fatigue, stress, or becoming upset. Being in this study would not risk your safety or well-being.

### How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

In this study, participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation. Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted from personal computer's hard disk and shredded hard copies. Interviews/focus groups will be recorded and transcribed using phone and other internal audio recording devices in Skype. Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings. There are limitations to confidentiality in this study because confidentiality cannot be guaranteed when participants accidentally reveal indemnifying information during the interviews.

#### **Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty university or your current healthcare facility.

#### **What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

#### **Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?**

The researcher conducting this study is Mia Trahan. You may ask any questions you have now.

#### **Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

*Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.*

#### **Your Consent**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

*I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.*

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

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Printed Subject Name

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Signature & Date



## APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

**Demographic Questionnaire**

*Please tick where appropriate*

How do you describe yourself?

- Male
- Female
- Other (with a blank entry field for the participant to self-identify)
- Prefer not to answer

What is your age?

- Under 15
- 16-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- Over 50
- Prefer not to say

What is your ethnic background?

- White / Caucasian
- Asian - Eastern
- Asian - Indian
- Hispanic
- African-American
- Native-American
- Mixed race

What is the highest level of education you have achieved?

- Master's degree or above
- Bachelor's degree
- Highschool
- Other (with a blank entry field for the participant to self-identify)
- I prefer not to say

What is your employment status?

- Full-time
- Part-time
- Contract/ Temporary
- Unemployed
- Unable to work
- Other (with a blank entry field for the participant to self-identify)
- I prefer not to say

What is the level of your annual household income?

- Less than \$25,000
- \$25,000 - \$50,000
- \$50,000 - \$100,000
- \$100,000 - \$200,000
- More than \$200,000
- I prefer not to say

### **Interview Questions for Hiring Teams**

**I am interested in learning more about how the IT industry is recruiting individuals from diverse backgrounds.**

1. What impact can talent acquisition diversity and inclusion initiatives have on improving and sustaining productive work cultures in the information technology industry for women of color?
2. What challenges have you encountered when attracting, recruiting, and retaining women of color in the information technology sector?
3. What strategies in hiring have you found to be effective in attracting, engaging, and hiring women of color for technical roles?
4. What can organizations do better to increase the representation of women of color in information technology?

### **Interview questions For Women of Color**

1. What impact can talent acquisition diversity and inclusion initiatives have on improving and sustaining productive work cultures in the information technology industry for women of color?
2. What barriers do women of color encounter during the recruitment and selection process for technical roles?
3. What strategies and skill sets do you believe are necessary for women of color to succeed in the information technology industry?
4. What strategies have you found to be effective in attracting, engaging, and hiring women of color in the technology industry?
5. What can organizations do better to increase the representation of women of color in information technology?