

Transforming BIPOC Talent Acquisition: An Integrated Pipeline Development Framework for Senior Leadership Advancement

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Abstract

Purpose: Business leaders lack the necessary resources to develop systematic BIPOC talent acquisition and pipeline systems and are burdened with ineffective strategies to increase the number of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) employees in senior-level positions—defined here as executive and upper-management roles with direct decision-making authority over organizational strategy, resources, and talent, including C-suite, vice president-level, and enterprise-level director positions. These gaps can negatively impact organizational financial performance and limit BIPOC professionals' access to senior-level leadership. **Design/Methodology/Approach:** Grounded in a composite conceptual framework integrating Sue's (2001) Multidimensional Cultural Competency (MDCC) framework, Akbar and Parker's (2021) Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Theory, and Kotter's (1996) eight-step Change Management model, this qualitative pragmatic inquiry was designed to identify and explore effective strategies that business leaders use to increase BIPOC representation in senior-level positions through systematic talent acquisition and pipeline development approaches. Pipeline development, as used in this study, refers to a coordinated, proactive organizational system integrating talent sourcing, recruitment, assessment, development, and retention functions to create sustainable advancement pathways for BIPOC professionals, in contrast to episodic or reactive diversity hiring. Purposive sampling was used to select nine business leaders in North America who had identified intentional sourcing, recruiting, and pipeline development as critical components and implemented effective strategies to increase BIPOC representation in senior-level positions. Data were collected through semistructured interviews and publicly available documents—both current and archival. **Findings:** Thematic analysis

identified five interconnected subthemes within the dataset: 1) sourcing, recruiting, and pipeline development for diverse talent, 2) identifying and attracting BIPOC candidates, 3) inclusive skills and competency assessment methodologies, 4) compensation and pay equity, and 5) measurements, metrics, and accountability. Findings reveal that these five components function as an interdependent organizational system in which each element enables and amplifies the others, collectively transforming fragmented diversity efforts into integrated, sustainable advancement ecosystems. **Originality/Value:** This article addresses a critical gap in the literature by offering an empirically grounded framework for BIPOC talent pipeline development. The integrated framework distinguishes successful talent acquisition systems from traditional diversity hiring approaches by creating coordinated advancement ecosystems that link diverse talent sourcing, equitable assessment, compensation equity, and data-driven accountability to support senior leadership advancement among BIPOC professionals. The findings provide actionable recommendations for business leaders committed to increasing BIPOC representation while driving sustainable organizational performance improvements. A key recommendation is for business leaders to transform fragmented talent management functions into integrated pipeline systems that create sustainable pathways for BIPOC professionals. The implications for positive social change include the potential for business leaders to increase the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions in their organizations and generate financial impact through expanded customer patronage and access to a broader BIPOC talent pool.

Keywords

BIPOC Employment Experience, Minoritized Group Employment Experience, Senior-Level Leadership, Diversity Leadership, Employment Tenure, Company Commitment, Team Leadership, Diversity and Leadership, Leadership Ethics, Competitive Advantage, Equality, Diversity, Inclusion Theory, Leader-Member Exchange Theory

1. Introduction

Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)—an inclusive umbrella term for professionals from historically underrepresented racial and ethnic groups in North American organizational contexts, while acknowledging that this grouping encompasses meaningfully distinct communities whose experiences of systemic exclusion differ in important ways—continue to face significant underrepresentation in senior leadership positions across industries, creating both persistent equity challenges and missed opportunities to strengthen organizational performance. Despite decades of diversity initiatives, BIPOC individuals encounter systemic barriers that limit advancement to executive-level roles, with representation in Fortune 500 CEO positions remaining below 5% (Ubaka et al., 2023). This underrepresentation reflects deeper organizational failures in talent acquisition, de-

velopment, and retention systems that structurally reinforce existing inequities while limiting organizations' access to the diverse perspectives essential for innovation and competitive advantage. Traditional talent acquisition approaches often fail to effectively identify, attract, and advance BIPOC professionals due to embedded biases in recruitment processes, assessment methodologies, and advancement criteria (Holladay et al., 2023). These systemic limitations not only restrict career opportunities for qualified BIPOC candidates but also constrain organizational access to diverse perspectives—defined here as diversity in perspectives, problem-solving approaches, and experiential frameworks, distinct from demographic representation alone—that drive innovation, expand market insights, and improve financial performance in increasingly diverse markets and customer bases (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2020).

Addressing BIPOC underrepresentation is both an ethical imperative and a strategic necessity. Research demonstrates that diverse leadership teams are significantly more likely to outperform less diverse counterparts, linking representation directly to measurable financial outcomes (Manoharan et al., 2021). These performance differentials underscore the urgency of developing systematic approaches to BIPOC talent acquisition and pipeline development that operate at the organizational level rather than as isolated initiatives.

This article presents findings from a qualitative pragmatic inquiry examining BIPOC talent acquisition and pipeline development as a foundational organizational framework through which business leaders can systematically increase BIPOC representation in senior-level positions while positively impacting financial performance. The study identifies a comprehensive framework built on three core components—sourcing, recruiting, and pipeline development for diverse talent; identifying and attracting BIPOC candidates; and inclusive skills and competency assessment methodologies—reinforced by two supporting organizational mechanisms: compensation and pay equity, and measurements, metrics, and accountability. Together, these components create a structured, systematic approach that transforms diversity efforts from isolated initiatives into integrated talent management ecosystems—coordinated systems in which acquisition, development, and retention functions reinforce one another to create sustainable advancement pathways for BIPOC professionals.

This article offers three contributions to the existing literature. First, it validates the composite conceptual framework integrating Sue's (2001) Multidimensional Cultural Competency (MDCC) framework, Akbar and Parker's (2021) EDI theory, and Kotter's (1996) Change Management model as an effective foundation for BIPOC talent pipeline development. Second, it identifies five evidence-based components of a BIPOC talent acquisition and pipeline development framework that business leaders may use to increase BIPOC representation in senior-level positions while enhancing organizational financial performance. Third, it offers recommendations for future research to address the identified gaps in current knowledge and strengthen business practice in this area.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Systemic Barriers in Traditional Talent Acquisition

Contemporary research reveals that traditional talent acquisition methodologies reflect embedded biases that disproportionately disadvantage BIPOC professionals seeking senior-level advancement. [Holladay et al. \(2023\)](#) demonstrate that interview processes often favor candidates who reflect existing organizational leadership demographics, creating self-perpetuating cycles that advance homogeneous leadership rather than broadening representation. These biases are reinforced by what [Rosette et al. \(2008\)](#) identify as the White leadership standard—an implicit cognitive framework through which leadership competence is evaluated against dominant-group norms, systematically disadvantaging BIPOC candidates regardless of their qualifications or demonstrated capabilities. These biases manifest through cultural references that privilege dominant-group experiences and evaluation criteria that conflate conformity with competence, resulting in the systematic exclusion of qualified BIPOC candidates. To counter these dynamics, [Holladay et al. \(2023\)](#) describe a structured intervention encompassing updated recruitment policies, improved interview panel composition, trained interviewers, and revised candidate screening procedures—each designed to directly address the barriers BIPOC professionals face at the point of assessment.

The persistence of these barriers reflects what [Fitzsimmons and Callan \(2020\)](#) identify as a diversity gap in leadership, where BIPOC individuals are systematically excluded from opportunities for social capital development, field experience, and professional network building essential for senior leadership progression. [Raddatz et al. \(2024\)](#) further demonstrate that the anticipation of racial discrimination creates compounding psychological and professional burdens for BIPOC professionals, shaping career decisions, dampening advancement aspirations, and generating cumulative disadvantages that persist throughout their careers. These exclusionary patterns compound over time, operating across multiple organizational levels—from initial recruitment through advancement decisions—in ways that are rarely visible in aggregate demographic data but are deeply consequential for individual advancement trajectories. Addressing these patterns requires more than structural changes to external hiring processes. Organizations must first conduct systematic internal assessments to identify where representation gaps exist before designing targeted external sourcing strategies ([Kamali et al., 2024](#)). This internal diagnostic function creates the data-driven foundation from which equitable recruitment practices are built, ensuring that diversity efforts are responsive to actual organizational conditions rather than applied uniformly without evidence.

Leadership accountability represents an equally critical mechanism for dismantling systemic barriers. [Hakovirta et al. \(2023\)](#) demonstrate that organizations whose executive leadership teams prioritize diversity as a strategic performance objective—rather than a peripheral compliance function—achieve measurably stronger innovation outcomes and long-term sustainability. This finding under-

scores that organizational change in diversity outcomes requires senior leaders to take explicit ownership of equity goals, embedding accountability structures into performance expectations rather than delegating diversity responsibilities to human resources functions alone (Kamali et al., 2024). When leadership commitment operates at the structural level, organizations are better positioned to recognize and address the evaluative blind spots that formal diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives are designed to eliminate (Olenick & Somaraju, 2024). Reducing these barriers also yields measurable organizational benefits: research consistently demonstrates that access to cognitive diversity—defined here as diversity in perspectives, problem-solving approaches, and experiential frameworks, distinct from demographic diversity and referring specifically to the breadth of thinking that varied professional backgrounds produce—drives innovation, expands market insights, and strengthens competitive positioning in increasingly diverse markets and customer bases (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2020). Dismantling systemic barriers is therefore not only an equity imperative but a strategic precondition for the proactive pipeline development strategies addressed in the following section.

2.2. Strategic Pipeline Development

Effective BIPOC talent acquisition requires fundamental transformation from reactive diversity hiring to proactive pipeline development that creates sustainable advancement pathways through systematic talent identification, cultivation, and advancement. Kamali et al. (2024) emphasize that sustainable leadership capacity development requires systematic rather than episodic talent acquisition practices, demanding sustained organizational commitment that extends beyond immediate hiring needs. This commitment must encompass career progression planning and succession planning as core organizational functions rather than supplementary initiatives.

Pipeline development strategies must address both immediate recruitment needs and long-term leadership preparation by coordinating sourcing, assessment, development, and retention into a cohesive organizational system. Titanji et al. (2022) demonstrate that comprehensive talent acquisition initiatives create micro-communities—defined as identity-based professional networks—where individuals with shared identities develop collective resources for professional advancement, contributing to both individual empowerment and organizational capacity building. These community-based approaches recognize that sustainable representation requires social infrastructure, not merely procedural changes.

A critical and often overlooked dimension of pipeline development is the strategic identification and attraction of BIPOC candidates as a function distinct from sourcing alone. Attracting qualified BIPOC professionals requires organizations to assess and communicate their value proposition from a diversity, equity, and inclusion perspective, as BIPOC candidates increasingly evaluate potential employers on demonstrated commitment to racial equity rather than stated values alone (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2020). Central to this attraction capacity is the state

of internal representation. Research indicates that existing BIPOC representation in leadership roles serves as a powerful signal to prospective candidates, with organizations demonstrating internal equity being significantly more effective at external recruitment, as prospective talent assesses organizational credibility through the lived experiences of current BIPOC employees rather than through formal recruitment messaging (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2020). This internal-to-external credibility dynamic means that pipeline development must simultaneously invest in advancing existing BIPOC talent while reaching into external communities to expand candidate access.

Effective pipeline strategies also require cultural bridge-building—deliberate efforts to connect BIPOC candidates with organizational leaders who possess both hiring authority and cultural competency. Paiuc (2021) demonstrates that cultural intelligence is a core competency of inclusive leadership, enabling leaders to navigate cultural differences constructively, reduce identity-based barriers in the recruitment process, and create conditions in which BIPOC professionals can demonstrate their full capabilities without pressure to conform to dominant-group norms (Titanji et al., 2022). These bridging functions prevent cultural identity erasure during the recruitment process and ensure that attraction strategies are reinforced by substantive organizational practices rather than undermined by assimilationist expectations. It is equally important to acknowledge that pipeline development is not a uniform process. The most effective approaches are adapted to organizational context, with leaders aligning strategies to the specific culture, sector, and demographic composition of their organizations rather than applying standardized frameworks without modification (Kamali et al., 2024). This contextual responsiveness is what distinguishes sustainable pipeline development from episodic diversity programming, establishing the foundation for the inclusive assessment and compensation practices examined in the following section.

2.3. Inclusive Assessment and Compensation Equity

Building on the pipeline infrastructure established through strategic sourcing and attraction, organizations must ensure that assessment methodologies evaluate BIPOC candidates equitably once they enter recruitment and advancement processes. Traditional assessment methodologies reflect cultural biases that disadvantage BIPOC candidates despite demonstrated qualifications, requiring systematic redesign of evaluation processes to ensure equitable recognition of diverse backgrounds and experiences. Olenick and Somaraju (2024) reveal that organizations without structured communication strategies for diversity, equity, and inclusion risk misinterpreting diverse life and work experiences as inadequate credentials rather than valuable assets, highlighting the need for assessment frameworks that recognize non-traditional pathways to expertise and leadership capability.

Developing inclusive assessment frameworks requires organizations to deliberately acknowledge and value the diverse skill sets employees bring as a foundation for equitable evaluation. Manoharan et al. (2021) identified six themes in organi-

zational diversity statements that support transparent communication about differences, encompassing recruitment, training, development, and retention of diverse employees. [Wadhwa and Aggarwal \(2023\)](#) further demonstrate that organizations which embed inclusion principles into assessment and evaluation practices—rather than treating them as supplementary to core talent management functions—achieve measurably stronger workforce effectiveness outcomes, including higher retention, deeper engagement, and more equitable advancement rates across demographic groups. A particularly important dimension of inclusive assessment is the recognition of transferable skills and cultural competencies that BIPOC professionals develop through lived experience but which traditional evaluation criteria frequently overlook. [Holladay et al. \(2023\)](#) argue that assessment processes designed around dominant-group norms systematically undervalue competencies developed outside conventional organizational pathways, creating structural disadvantages for candidates whose expertise was cultivated through non-traditional routes. Inclusive competency assessment therefore focuses on what candidates can do and what they bring rather than where or how they developed those capabilities.

Inclusive assessment must also extend beyond point-in-time evaluation to encompass development-oriented methodologies that create pathways for BIPOC professionals to demonstrate capabilities beyond their current roles. Individual development plans (IDPs) represent one evidence-based mechanism for this purpose, providing structured frameworks through which employees identify short- and long-term goals while creating shared accountability between the individual and the organization for skill development ([Kamali et al., 2024](#)). Complementing IDPs, experiential development opportunities—including stretch assignments, panel participation, subject matter expert roles, and community-based leadership positions—provide BIPOC professionals with visible platforms to demonstrate capabilities that may not be apparent within the constraints of their current positions ([Titanji et al., 2022](#)). These structured development investments serve a dual function: they build the competencies required for senior leadership while simultaneously generating the documented evidence of capability that inclusive assessment frameworks require.

Compensation equity represents a critical yet frequently overlooked component of sustainable talent acquisition, serving as both a recruitment advantage and a retention mechanism that signals organizational commitment to equitable treatment. Research consistently demonstrates that BIPOC professionals are more likely to experience pay disparities that deepen over time, undermining both individual advancement and organizational diversity goals ([Manoharan et al., 2021](#)). Addressing compensation equity requires both retrospective analysis of existing pay structures and proactive alignment of compensation with market equity standards. Equally important is the recognition that compensation extends beyond base pay to encompass professional development investments—including sponsorship of industry conferences, board participation opportunities, and ex-

ternal speaking engagements—that expand earning potential and professional visibility for BIPOC professionals over time (Manoharan et al., 2021). Organizations that adopt this broader definition of compensation equity create more compelling value propositions for BIPOC talent while generating the professional capital accumulation that supports long-term advancement. Together, inclusive assessment and comprehensive compensation equity create the organizational conditions necessary for the measurement and accountability frameworks examined in the following section.

2.4. Measurement and Accountability Frameworks

Sustainable BIPOC representation requires robust measurement systems that translate diversity aspirations into operational accountability. Manoharan et al. (2021) demonstrate that organizations that institutionalize diversity metrics and hold leaders accountable for progress—moving beyond aspirational diversity statements to operational follow-through—are significantly better positioned to achieve long-term equity goals. However, effective measurement extends beyond demographic tracking to include assessment of organizational climate, career advancement rates, retention patterns, and direct connection to business outcomes—creating comprehensive accountability frameworks that drive continuous improvement rather than periodic reporting.

A foundational component of effective measurement is the use of employee voice data and organizational climate assessment to identify systemic barriers that demographic data alone cannot reveal. Survey-based methodologies that assess employee perceptions of inclusion, advancement opportunity, and leadership equity provide organizations with diagnostic intelligence about the internal conditions affecting BIPOC retention and progression (Olenick & Somaraju, 2024). This diagnostic function is essential because representation gaps in senior leadership often reflect accumulated organizational climate failures—insufficient mentorship, unclear advancement criteria, and exclusionary informal networks—that surface in employee experience data before they appear in demographic statistics (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2020). Organizations that integrate employee voice data into their measurement frameworks are therefore better equipped to intervene proactively rather than reactively.

Performance tracking and retention metrics constitute equally essential components of sustainable accountability. Manoharan et al. (2021) demonstrate that organizations with structured diversity accountability mechanisms—including defined advancement timelines, retention benchmarks, and development program participation metrics—generate more consistent equity outcomes than those relying on aspirational diversity statements without operational follow-through. Phillips and Klein (2023) reinforce this finding, demonstrating that change management initiatives achieve sustainable transformation only when clear performance metrics are embedded into implementation structures from the outset, creating accountability mechanisms that hold leaders responsible for

measurable progress rather than aspirational intent. These structured metrics shift diversity responsibility from peripheral human resources functions to core leadership performance expectations with measurable consequences (Kamali et al., 2024).

The most sophisticated measurement frameworks establish explicit connections between diversity outcomes and organizational financial performance, transforming equity metrics into strategic business intelligence. Hakovirta et al. (2023) confirm that organizations leveraging executive leadership diversity alongside robust performance measurement systems achieve stronger innovation outcomes and long-term organizational sustainability than those treating diversity as a standalone compliance objective. This business impact orientation aligns diversity measurement with the financial performance imperatives that drive executive decision-making, creating return-on-investment frameworks that sustain organizational commitment beyond initial diversity programming phases (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2020). When diagnostic assessment, performance tracking, retention metrics, and business outcome measurement operate as an integrated system, organizations create accountability ecosystems capable of transforming diversity objectives from aspirational statements into operational imperatives with demonstrable and sustainable results.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in a composite conceptual framework comprising three complementary theories that together address the cultural, structural, and change management dimensions of increasing BIPOC representation in senior leadership. Each theory contributes a distinct analytical lens: Sue's (2001) Multidimensional Cultural Competency (MDCC) framework addresses the cultural awareness and multilevel competencies required to recognize and dismantle bias in talent systems; Akbar and Parker's (2021) Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) theory addresses the systemic and policy-level changes required for authentic and sustained inclusion; and Kotter's (1996) eight-step Change Management model addresses the organizational implementation structures through which diversity transformation is initiated, sustained, and institutionalized. Applied together, these frameworks provide an integrated analytical foundation for examining how business leaders can move beyond episodic diversity initiatives to build systematic, equity-centered talent acquisition and pipeline development systems (see Table 1).

Table 1. Theories used to examine talent acquisition and pipeline development.

Theory	Date	Theorist	Application to This Study
Multidimensional Cultural Competency (MDCC)	2001	Sue	Provides a multilevel framework for understanding how cultural awareness, knowledge, and skills operate at individual, institutional, and societal levels to address bias in talent acquisition and advancement processes

Continued

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Theory	2021	Akbar & Parker	Extends representation goals to address systemic inequities in organizational policy, practice, and culture that persist after initial recruitment successes, grounding the study's focus on authentic inclusion and equitable advancement
Change Management Theory	1996	Kotter	Offers an eight-step model for implementing and sustaining organizational transformation, explaining why fragmented diversity efforts fail and how integrated, leadership-driven approaches create lasting change in talent management systems.

3.1. Multidimensional Cultural Competency (MDCC) Framework

Sue's (2001) MDCC framework provides a foundation for understanding how organizational leaders can develop the cultural awareness, knowledge, and skills necessary to recognize and dismantle systemic barriers affecting BIPOC professionals. The framework emphasizes that cultural competency operates at individual, institutional, and societal levels simultaneously, requiring multilayered interventions that address both interpersonal dynamics and structural conditions rather than relying on surface-level awareness training alone. At the individual level, cultural awareness involves leaders' recognition of their own assumptions, biases, and cultural worldviews—precisely the evaluative blind spots that shape hiring decisions and advancement criteria in ways that systematically disadvantage BIPOC candidates. At the institutional level, cultural competency requires organizations to examine how policies, practices, and informal norms embedded in talent systems reproduce dominant-group advantages even in the absence of explicit discriminatory intent.

Applied to talent acquisition, the MDCC framework illuminates how bias operates at each stage of the hiring and advancement process—from the design of job descriptions and sourcing strategies through assessment criteria and succession planning—guiding the development of culturally responsive practices that recognize the full scope of BIPOC candidates' capabilities rather than measuring them against standards built for and by dominant groups. Akpapuna et al. (2020) extend this application to organizational behavior management, demonstrating that embedding multicultural competency principles into talent management systems produces measurably more equitable outcomes by shifting evaluation criteria from conformity-based to capability-based assessment. Together, these insights establish cultural competency not as an individual virtue but as an organizational design imperative—one that must be embedded structurally into talent acquisition systems to produce the equitable outcomes that authentic inclusion requires.

3.2. Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Theory

Akbar and Parker's (2021) EDI theory emerged from a growing recognition in the

diversity literature that representation-focused approaches—while necessary—are insufficient to address the deeper cultural and systemic conditions that determine whether BIPOC professionals can lead authentically, contribute fully, and advance equitably once they enter organizations. Earlier diversity management frameworks tended to treat underrepresentation as a pipeline problem solvable through targeted recruitment, overlooking the organizational climate, policy structures, and leadership practices that shape whether diverse talent is retained, developed, and advanced after hiring (Arora & Wolbring, 2022). EDI theory re-frames the challenge by insisting that organizational leaders must address systemic inequities in policy, practice, and culture simultaneously rather than sequentially, recognizing that recruitment gains are quickly eroded when the organizational environment fails to support equitable advancement.

The theory's emphasis on authentic inclusion—creating conditions in which BIPOC professionals experience genuine belonging, voice, and opportunity rather than conditional acceptance contingent on cultural conformity—directly grounds this study's examination of inclusive assessment methodologies, compensation equity, and pipeline development as interconnected rather than independent organizational functions. Vogel and Erickson (2021) demonstrate that EDI principles applied to leadership development specifically—rather than diversity programming broadly—generate stronger and more durable advancement outcomes for underrepresented professionals by addressing the structural barriers that prevent qualified candidates from accessing senior roles. This application of EDI theory provides the theoretical grounding for the study's integrated framework, in which sourcing, assessment, compensation, and accountability mechanisms are understood as a unified system for advancing equitable leadership representation rather than as discrete human resources functions.

3.3. Kotter's Change Management Theory

Kotter's (1996) eight-step change management model offers a structured account of how organizations can successfully implement and sustain diversity transformation initiatives, explaining why fragmented diversity efforts consistently fail to produce lasting change while integrated, leadership-driven approaches create sustainable transformation in organizational culture and talent management systems. The model's first four steps—establishing urgency, building a guiding coalition, developing a clear vision, and communicating that vision broadly—address the organizational conditions required before any systemic change can take hold. Applied to BIPOC talent acquisition, these steps explain why diversity initiatives that lack executive sponsorship, clear strategic framing, and organization-wide communication consistently remain peripheral rather than becoming embedded in core talent management functions (Graves et al., 2023).

The model's subsequent steps—empowering broad-based action, generating short-term wins, consolidating gains, and anchoring change in organizational culture—address the implementation structures through which transformation is

sustained over time. Phillips and Klein (2023) demonstrate that change management initiatives in organizational contexts achieve sustainable outcomes only when performance metrics are embedded into implementation structures from the outset, creating accountability mechanisms that hold leaders responsible for measurable progress rather than aspirational intent. This finding directly supports the study's emphasis on measurements, metrics, and accountability as a foundational component of the BIPOC talent acquisition framework, explaining how leadership commitment translates into organizational transformation when supported by structured implementation processes and ongoing accountability mechanisms. Kotter's framework therefore provides the structural scaffolding through which the cultural competency and equity principles established by the MDCC and EDI frameworks are translated into actionable, measurable, and sustainable organizational change.

3.4. Integrating the Composite Framework

Taken together, the MDCC framework, EDI theory, and Kotter's Change Management model form a coherent and mutually reinforcing analytical foundation for this study. The MDCC framework establishes the cultural and interpersonal competencies that must be developed at individual and institutional levels to recognize and address bias in talent systems. EDI theory situates those competencies within the broader systemic and policy-level changes required for authentic inclusion, connecting individual practices to organizational conditions. Kotter's model provides the implementation architecture through which both cultural competency and equity principles are translated into sustained organizational transformation rather than isolated initiatives. This integrated framework guided both data collection and analysis processes, providing a multilevel lens through which participant strategies for BIPOC talent acquisition and pipeline development were examined, interpreted, and connected to the scholarly literature on diversity, equity, and organizational change. The following section describes the methodological approach through which these frameworks were operationalized in the collection and analysis of participant data.

4. Methods

A qualitative pragmatic inquiry research method and design was used for this study—prioritizing practical, problem-oriented knowledge generated from real-world professional experience rather than abstract theoretical development, and distinguished from phenomenological or grounded theory approaches by its explicit focus on producing actionable findings for organizational practices—selected for its ability to generate nuanced, context-rich insights into the strategies business leaders have implemented to increase BIPOC representation in senior leadership. Given the limited empirical literature on practitioner-level strategies for BIPOC talent acquisition and pipeline development, the qualitative design was especially appropriate for capturing the nuanced, context-dependent approaches

that business leaders have implemented to increase BIPOC representation in senior-level positions—insights that quantitative methods are ill-equipped to generate from this understudied population. The pragmatic inquiry approach further aligns with the composite theoretical framework guiding this study, as the MDCC, EDI, and Kotter frameworks share a common emphasis on applied organizational change—making practitioner-generated evidence the most relevant and meaningful form of data for examining how these frameworks operate in practice.

4.1. Participant Selection

Purposive sampling was used to select nine business leaders in North America who had implemented effective strategies to increase BIPOC representation in senior-level positions and positively impact financial performance. For the purposes of this study, *effective strategies* refer to intentional organizational practices for which participants could demonstrate at least five years of measurable progress in increasing BIPOC representation in senior-level positions. *Positive financial performance* encompasses organizational outcomes associated with increased BIPOC representation, including expanded customer patronage, reduced turnover costs, improved employee satisfaction, and enhanced organizational sustainability; given the qualitative design, these outcomes were assessed through a combination of pre-screening documentation review and participant accounts rather than standardized financial metrics. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling strategy in which participants are deliberately selected based on characteristics directly relevant to the research question, rather than through random selection. Purposive sampling was selected over probability-based approaches because it enables the intentional identification of information-rich cases most likely to illuminate the research phenomenon—in this context, leaders with direct demonstrated experience implementing BIPOC advancement strategies rather than general familiarity with diversity initiatives (Ames et al., 2019; Campbell et al., 2020).

Candidate eligibility was assessed through a two-stage screening process conducted prior to enrollment and separated from the primary semistructured interviews. In the first stage, candidates identified through professional networks, personal connections, industry associations, and social media platforms completed a structured pre-screening protocol in which they described their organizations' BIPOC advancement trajectories, including the specific initiatives implemented, the roles over which they held talent acquisition authority, and the approximate duration and nature of measurable progress achieved. Candidates were required to demonstrate a minimum of five years of documented progress in increasing BIPOC representation in senior-level positions to advance to the second stage. In the second stage, the researchers reviewed publicly available organizational documents—including published diversity and inclusion reports, organizational demographic disclosures, and professional publications authored or cited by the candidate—to provide independent contextual corroboration of the advancement trajectories and organizational outcomes candidates described during pre-screen-

ing. Enrollment decisions were made by the researchers prior to scheduling primary interviews, on the basis of both the structured pre-screening responses and the document review, ensuring that eligibility determination was functionally distinct from the data collection process. This two-stage protocol addresses the potential for circular sampling by establishing that participants were selected on the basis of evidence assessed before and independent of the interview data from which the study's findings are drawn. While the qualitative design necessarily relies on participant accounts for depth and nuance, the pre-screening and document review provided an external anchoring function that strengthened the independence between sampling criteria and findings.

Participants represented diverse organizational contexts including insurance, technology, legal, nonprofit, and business and medical consulting sectors. All participants held senior leadership roles with direct influence over talent acquisition decisions, with experience levels ranging from 18 to 37 years in their respective fields. The project reached data saturation—the point at which additional interviews yield no new themes or codes, indicating the dataset is analytically sufficient—after eight interviews, with one additional interview conducted for confirmation.

4.2. Data Collection

Primary data were collected through semistructured interviews lasting 45 to 90 minutes per participant. The semistructured format enabled consistent exploration of core research questions while allowing flexibility to pursue unique perspectives and emergent themes arising from individual participant experiences (Junnier, 2024). A standardized interview protocol was used across all sessions to ensure consistency and reduce bias, while adaptive follow-up questions allowed deeper exploration of participant-specific insights. Interview questions addressed strategies employed, implementation challenges, organizational contexts, and measurable outcomes. Supplementary data sources consisted of publicly available industry-level documents linked to the sectors represented by participants rather than to individual organizations, consistent with the study's focus on leader-level strategies rather than organizational practices. Document types included industry workforce data, published industry demographic surveys, trade association publications, and sector-specific industry reports drawn from public records. The number of supplementary documents varied by industry and participant, ranging from none to 15 documents per participant depending on the availability of relevant public records in each sector. These documents were incorporated as a secondary data stream to provide contextual corroboration of participant-reported strategies and to situate individual leader accounts within the broader workforce conditions of their respective industries.

All interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent and transcribed verbatim to preserve data accuracy and integrity. Member-checking sessions were conducted following initial analysis, during which participants reviewed research-

ers' interpretation of their responses and confirmed accuracy, clarified meaning, and elaborated where needed—a process that strengthens the credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative findings (de Loyola González-Salgado et al., 2024).

4.3. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis—a qualitative method for systematically identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning across a dataset—was employed to systematically identify patterns and meanings across the dataset, providing an analytic approach well-suited to capturing the complexity of practitioner strategies within their organizational contexts (Busetto et al., 2020). The analytic process followed six phases: familiarization with data, initial code generation, theme development, theme review, theme definition, and final reporting. The researchers applied substantive thematic coding simultaneously and in parallel to both the interview transcripts and the supplementary industry-level documents, treating both data streams as active inputs to the analytic process rather than assigning documents a purely corroborative role. NVivo computer software was the primary coding environment for both data streams, supporting coding, mind-mapping, and theme identification across the full dataset. In parallel, Microsoft Excel was used to conduct supplementary thematic coding of the same materials, with both tools applied concurrently throughout the analytic process. This dual-platform approach—in which NVivo and Excel coding proceeded simultaneously on the same interview and document data—enabled cross-verification of code assignments and enhanced the transparency and consistency of the analytic process. The integration of industry-level document codes alongside interview transcript codes during theme development allowed emerging themes to be assessed against the broader sectoral contexts in which participants operated, strengthening the contextual grounding of the final framework.

Intercoder reliability—the degree of agreement between two or more independent coders applying the same coding scheme to the same qualitative data, used as a measure of analytic consistency and rigor—was established through independent coding by two researchers, achieving agreement rates above 85%, consistent with established standards for qualitative research rigor (Krawczyk et al., 2019). Disagreements were resolved through discussion and consensus, with refined coding criteria applied to subsequent coding rounds to ensure consistency. Data saturation was confirmed during analysis when, following the eighth interview, no new codes were generated, and no new themes emerged beyond those already identified from earlier interviews—with existing themes instead receiving further confirmation and elaboration. The ninth interview was conducted to verify this signal, and the absence of new codes or themes across both NVivo and Excel coding streams, as independently confirmed by both researchers, provided the basis for concluding that the dataset was analytically sufficient to address the research question. Reflexivity was maintained throughout the analytic process via analytic memos and ongoing critical reflection on research positionality, ensuring that in-

terpretations remained grounded in participant accounts rather than shaped by researcher assumptions.

The five-component framework presented in this study was derived inductively from the coded dataset, emerging from patterns of interdependence observed across participant accounts rather than imposed as a predetermined structure. As coding progressed, it became apparent that the identified components did not operate as discrete or independent strategies; rather, participants consistently described them as mutually reinforcing elements in which each component enabled and amplified the others. This relational pattern across accounts was the basis for organizing the findings as an integrated framework rather than a thematic inventory. Two components warrant specific explanation regarding their retention despite contributing lower participant counts. Compensation and pay equity, while raised by three of the nine participants, was retained as a full and independent framework component because its content was sufficiently distinct that absorbing it into another component would have obscured meaning critical to understanding equitable talent advancement; additionally, the literature strongly corroborated its inclusion as a standalone dimension even where participant data was thinner, providing theoretical grounding that supported its analytic weight. Measurements, metrics, and accountability, contributed by six of the nine participants, reflected a structural condition of the sample rather than a limitation of the component's significance—not all participants operated within organizational contexts that had formalized measurement infrastructures, meaning the lower count reflects variation in organizational context rather than lesser relevance of the component to the framework as a whole. Together, these analytic decisions were guided by the principle that framework components should be retained where they contribute distinct and non-redundant meaning to the model, regardless of whether every participant contributed data to every component.

4.4. Ethical Considerations

Given that participants were discussing professional experiences involving racial equity, organizational inequity, and BIPOC advancement—topics that carry both personal significance and potential professional sensitivity—the study was designed with comprehensive ethical safeguards consistent with the principles established in the Belmont Report ([National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979](#)). Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained prior to data collection, ensuring that all procedures met established standards for the ethical treatment of human research participants. Participants provided informed consent prior to their interviews and were fully briefed on the study's purpose, procedures, data use, and their rights as participants.

Confidentiality was protected through the anonymization of all identifying information in data storage and reporting, with participant identifiers used in place of names throughout all analytic and dissemination materials ([Leahy, 2022](#)). Par-

ticipation was entirely voluntary, and participants retained the right to withdraw at any time without consequence. All collected data were securely stored in password-protected files with access restricted to authorized researchers, ensuring that sensitive professional disclosures remained protected throughout the research process.

5. Professional Practice: BIPOC Talent Acquisition and Pipeline Development

The overarching research question guiding this study was: What effective strategies have business leaders used to increase the number of BIPOC employees in senior-level positions and positively impact financial performance? The analysis revealed BIPOC talent acquisition and pipeline development as a foundational strategic framework encompassing effective approaches that business leaders implemented to address impartiality in hiring processes and increase BIPOC representation in senior leadership, thereby enhancing financial performance. Findings are interpreted through the composite conceptual framework integrating Sue's (2001) MDCC framework, Akbar and Parker's (2021) EDI theory, and Kotter's (1996) Change Management model. Eight of the nine participants contributed data across three primary subthemes generating 42 excerpts, supported by two additional organizational mechanisms generating 47 excerpts, for a combined total of 89 excerpts across five interconnected subthemes (see Table 2). Together, these subthemes create a progressive framework that transforms talent acquisition from reactive hiring practices into proactive, systemic approaches that consistently advance BIPOC professionals while driving enhanced organizational performance.

Table 2. BIPOC talent acquisition and pipeline development.

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

5.1. Sourcing, Recruiting, and Pipeline Development for Diverse Talent

Eight participants identified intentional sourcing, recruiting, and pipeline development as critical components for increasing BIPOC representation in senior-

level positions while positively impacting organizational performance. Consistent with Holladay et al.'s (2023) finding that traditional recruitment perpetuates inequities by relying on networks that historically exclude BIPOC professionals, participants consistently described effective talent acquisition as requiring intentional, sustained efforts to identify, connect with, and cultivate relationships within diverse talent communities before job openings arise. Their approaches encompassed five interconnected practices: prioritizing internal BIPOC talent identification, implementing targeted recruitment focused on specific skill sets, expanding recruiting beyond traditional channels, developing alternative talent sources, and broadening candidate pools to include diverse backgrounds.

5.1.1. Systematic Internal Assessment and External Relationship Cultivation

Participants demonstrated that effective diverse talent acquisition requires a dual methodology integrating systematic internal assessment with strategic external relationship cultivation. Participants described beginning with a rigorous internal assessment of leadership gaps and BIPOC representation before designing targeted external sourcing strategies—a sequenced approach that ensures diversity efforts are responsive to actual organizational conditions rather than applied uniformly without evidence. For example, a senior technology executive articulated that the first step involves conducting an internal assessment to determine gaps in leadership where BIPOC representation was lacking, with that assessment then informing the next steps of sourcing professional networks for BIPOC talent beyond the corporate walls. This dual methodology creates data-driven partnerships with human resources to develop targeted requisitions that attract qualified BIPOC candidates while establishing meaningful professional networks across organizational and community boundaries. This approach aligns with Kamali et al.'s (2024) emphasis on systematic rather than episodic talent acquisition requiring sustained organizational commitment. Consistent with the MDCC framework's institutional-level competency, the internal assessment function reflects organizations developing the cultural knowledge necessary to recognize their own representation gaps—a prerequisite to designing externally targeted sourcing strategies grounded in evidence.

5.1.2. Leadership Accountability and Cultural Adaptation

Participants consistently emphasized that successful pipeline implementation requires senior leadership accountability and deliberate cultural adaptation rather than uniform programmatic solutions. Participants described leadership ownership of BIPOC advancement as non-negotiable, noting that no universal approach guarantees success and that strategies must be deliberately aligned with the specific organizational culture being built. For example, a senior insurance executive emphasized that the DNA of an organization starts at the top and the responsibility of senior leadership is to keep an organization vital, while noting that diverse talent strategies require a multi-layered approach to address an issue prevalent in corporate America. These findings underscore Kotter's (1996) emphasis on build-

ing guiding coalitions and creating organizational urgency as prerequisites for sustainable transformation. When senior leaders model accountability for BIPOC advancement and adapt strategies to specific cultural contexts, they signal organizational seriousness that reshapes internal norms and creates conditions for lasting change. Together, the dual methodology of systematic internal assessment and external cultivation—anchored by leadership accountability and cultural responsiveness—establishes the foundational infrastructure from which the identification and attraction strategies examined in the following section are made possible.

5.2. Identifying and Attracting BIPOC Candidates

Eight participants implemented strategic approaches to identifying and attracting BIPOC candidates, recognizing that attraction is a distinct organizational function from sourcing that requires its own deliberate investment. Consistent with [Fitzsimmons and Callan's \(2020\)](#) research establishing that BIPOC candidates increasingly evaluate employers on demonstrated commitment to racial equity rather than stated values alone, participants described identification as going beyond demographic data—requiring genuine understanding of where BIPOC individuals are excelling, what motivates their career decisions, and how they evaluate organizational credibility. Their approaches encompassed four interconnected practices: internal talent identification, expanded sourcing networks, external relationship cultivation, and targeted recruitment that collectively created frameworks for broadening talent pools and establishing sustainable leadership pathways.

5.2.1. Internal Foundation and Credibility Building

Participants consistently identified internal representation as the prerequisite for external attraction credibility, emphasizing that organizations cannot effectively recruit BIPOC candidates externally while failing to advance existing BIPOC talent internally. Participants described the relationship between internal equity and external credibility as foundational—noting that fair and adequate BIPOC representation in leadership roles signals authentic organizational commitment in ways that formal recruitment messaging alone cannot achieve. For example, a chief commercial officer asserted that new talent will not emerge if existing talent is not being taken care of, and that fair and adequate representation of BIPOC leadership in key roles is vital to attracting BIPOC candidates while significantly contributing to organizational results. These findings directly validate [Fitzsimmons and Callan's \(2020\)](#) research establishing that prospective BIPOC talent assesses organizational credibility through the lived experiences of current BIPOC employees. Applied through the MDCC framework's institutional-level lens, internal representation functions as an organizational cultural competency—the degree to which the institution has embedded equitable advancement into its own leadership structures signals authentic inclusion to external candidates in ways that no recruitment campaign can replicate.

5.2.2. External Relationship Cultivation and Cultural Bridge-Building

Building on this internal foundation, participants established that successful external attraction requires strategic engagement across professional networks and deliberate cultural bridge-building that connects BIPOC candidates with leaders possessing both hiring authority and cultural competency. Participants described these bridging efforts as requiring sustained investment over time rather than transactional outreach, emphasizing that cultural bridge-building prevents identity erasure during the recruitment process and creates the conditions for bidirectional relationship development. For example, a medical consulting leader described connecting BIPOC candidates with leaders possessing hiring authority, observing that bridging cultural knowledge takes time and a gradual approach, with leaders serving as intermediaries to prevent cultural identity erasure. These findings align with [Titanji et al.'s \(2022\)](#) demonstration that comprehensive acquisition initiatives create micro-communities supporting collective BIPOC professional advancement, and with [Paiuc's \(2021\)](#) research establishing cultural intelligence as a core competency of inclusive leadership. Together, the internal foundation and external cultivation findings reveal that attraction strategies achieve optimal results when strong internal representation provides authentic foundations for external outreach while expanded external networks simultaneously inform and enhance internal development strategies—a bidirectional dynamic that consistently attracts qualified BIPOC professionals when supported by culturally competent leadership.

5.3. Inclusive Skills and Competency Assessment Methodologies

Eight participants implemented inclusive skills and competency assessment methodologies, recognizing that traditional assessment processes reflect embedded biases that disadvantage BIPOC candidates despite demonstrated qualifications—biases that [Holladay et al. \(2023\)](#) attribute to dominant-group norms and that [Rosette et al. \(2008\)](#) identify as manifestations of the White leadership standard through which competence is implicitly measured. Participants described assessment reform as requiring systemic redesign rather than procedural adjustment, encompassing five interconnected practices: current skill set assessment, acknowledging diverse backgrounds and experiences, creating stretch assignments to build competencies, leveraging individual development plans, and establishing leadership accountability for BIPOC employee success.

5.3.1. Holistic Evaluation Frameworks

Participants consistently emphasized that equitable assessment requires a fundamental shift from measuring BIPOC candidates against dominant-group benchmarks to evaluating them on the full breadth of their capabilities, experiences, and potential. Participants described holistic evaluation as requiring intentional leadership commitment—recognizing that BIPOC professionals frequently demonstrate capabilities outside their formal roles that conventional assessment criteria fail to capture. For example, a senior legal executive noted that interaction,

knowledge, and experiences from different backgrounds are essential to ensure cookie-cutter representation is avoided, and that BIPOC individuals bring forward unique skills and strengths that may be displayed outside their current role, making a complete assessment necessary to provide a more holistic view of talent. These findings align with [Olenick and Somaraju's \(2024\)](#) research demonstrating that without structured communication strategies, diverse life and work experiences are frequently misinterpreted as credential deficits rather than valued assets. Applied through the MDCC framework, holistic evaluation embodies individual and institutional level cultural competency—leaders developing the awareness and knowledge to recognize BIPOC talent beyond dominant-group metrics and organizations redesigning evaluation criteria to reflect the full scope of candidates' capabilities.

5.3.2. Systematic Development Opportunity Creation

Participants identified systematic development opportunity creation as essential to inclusive assessment, emphasizing that qualified BIPOC professionals are frequently denied the visibility and credentialing experiences that assessment processes subsequently use as evidence of leadership readiness. Participants described structured development investment—including individual development plans (IDPs), stretch assignments, and external opportunity sponsorship—as organizational obligations rather than optional enhancements. For example, a nonprofit chief operating officer explained that BIPOC individuals who are well qualified and accomplished still do not get opportunities to shine professionally beyond their current roles, while a senior insurance executive noted that the IDP is a resource that helps employees identify short-term and long-term goals and creates accountability through measurement. A business consulting leader further emphasized that senior leaders often have not mastered how to structure programs that support skills and competency development, and that assumptions are frequently made that BIPOC employees will develop key competencies independently—an observation that underscores the organizational accountability gap that structured development investment is designed to close.

These findings validate [Kamali et al.'s \(2024\)](#) emphasis on development-oriented assessment as a component of sustainable talent acquisition. Consistent with [Kotter's \(1996\)](#) fifth step of empowering broad-based action, structured development investments dismantle the organizational barriers that prevent BIPOC professionals from accessing the visibility and credentialing opportunities routinely available to their peers—transforming assessment from a gatekeeping function into a talent-developing system.

5.3.3. Cultural Competency Recognition

Participants consistently identified cultural competency recognition as a critical dimension of inclusive assessment—one that requires leaders to explicitly value the competencies BIPOC professionals develop through lived experience rather than discounting them as professionally irrelevant. Participants described cultural

competency as a form of transferable expertise that traditional assessments routinely overlook, noting that intentional manager feedback and peer support structures are necessary to ensure these competencies are recognized and utilized in advancement decisions. For example, a technology executive articulated that BIPOC individuals may have different skill sets and competencies stemming from their background and cultural experiences that have not been recognized professionally, emphasizing the need to align intentional support from managers, human resources, and peer systems for inclusive development discussions. These findings align with [Holladay et al.'s \(2023\)](#) argument that assessment processes designed around dominant-group norms systematically undervalue non-traditional competencies. Applied through EDI theory, recognizing cultural competencies as legitimate professional assets represents the systemic policy and practice change that [Akbar and Parker \(2021\)](#) identify as necessary for authentic inclusion. Together, the holistic evaluation, development opportunity, and cultural competency findings demonstrate that inclusive assessment functions as an integrated system—one that consistently advances BIPOC professionals when evaluation, development, and recognition operate cohesively rather than in isolation.

5.4. Compensation and Pay Equity

Three participants identified compensation and pay equity as a critical supporting mechanism within the broader talent acquisition framework, recognizing that equitable compensation strategies either reinforce or undermine the diversity initiatives established through strategic sourcing and inclusive assessment. Consistent with [Manoharan et al.'s \(2021\)](#) research demonstrating that BIPOC professionals are disproportionately likely to experience pay disparities that deepen over time, participants described compensation equity as requiring both retrospective correction of existing disparities and proactive investment in the professional development opportunities that expand earning potential beyond base pay.

5.4.1. Systematic Internal Pay Analysis

Participants described systematic compensation review as a leadership accountability practice—one that must be proactively initiated rather than reactively triggered by employee complaints. Participants emphasized that pay equity analysis should be embedded into standard leadership transition processes, creating regular diagnostic checkpoints that surface hidden disparities before they compound. For example, a chief underwriting officer described implementing a compensation review within 30 days of each new leadership assignment, involving a review of pay, tenure, and title to compare financial equity across teams performing similar work—a process that revealed one BIPOC team member's base pay was 30 to 40 percent lower than peers performing equivalent work with no identifiable justification. This finding directly validates [Manoharan et al.'s \(2021\)](#) research on pay disparities deepening over time and illustrates the concrete organizational impact of proactive systemic review. Applied through EDI theory, systematic pay analysis embodies the policy-level structural change that [Akbar and Parker \(2021\)](#)

identify as necessary for authentic inclusion—addressing inequities in organizational practice rather than allowing them to persist through assumption or inaction.

5.4.2. External Development and Investment Opportunities

Participants consistently framed external professional development sponsorship as a compensation strategy—one that expands BIPOC professionals' earning potential and organizational visibility beyond what base pay adjustments alone can achieve. Participants described BIPOC-specific industry conferences and professional development events as high-return organizational investments that simultaneously build individual capability, professional networks, and organizational credibility. For example, a business consulting chief executive officer explained that the small monetary investment in existing BIPOC employees who already know the organizational space is a smart financial strategy to increase representation at the leadership level, while a nonprofit executive emphasized that attending events with hundreds of professionals who look like them brings measurable value to the workforce. These findings extend [Manoharan et al.'s \(2021\)](#) compensation framework by operationalizing the broader definition of equitable compensation—encompassing professional capital accumulation—developed in Section 2.3. Consistent with [Kotter's \(1996\)](#) sixth step of generating short-term wins, the tangible returns on investment participants describe provide the visible evidence of progress that sustains organizational commitment to equity beyond initial programming phases. Together, the systematic pay analysis and external development investment findings reveal that compensation equity operates most powerfully as both a corrective and proactive strategy—identifying and remedying existing disparities while simultaneously expanding BIPOC professionals' access to the professional capital accumulation that supports long-term senior leadership advancement.

5.5. Measurements, Metrics, and Accountability

Six participants generating 33 excerpts operationalized measurement, metrics, and accountability frameworks as the organizational infrastructure through which all other talent acquisition components are sustained over time. Consistent with [Manoharan et al.'s \(2021\)](#) research establishing that structured diversity accountability mechanisms generate more consistent equity outcomes than aspirational statements alone, and [Phillips and Klein's \(2023\)](#) finding that sustainable change management requires performance metrics embedded into implementation structures from the outset, participants described measurement not as a reporting function but as a strategic leadership accountability tool that transforms diversity commitments into demonstrable organizational outcomes.

5.5.1. Comprehensive Diagnostic Assessment

Participants consistently emphasized that effective measurement begins with diagnostic assessment of organizational climate—gathering the employee voice data

that reveals systemic barriers invisible in demographic statistics. Participants described survey-based climate assessment as providing the internal intelligence necessary to identify where BIPOC professionals experience disconnection, limited advancement clarity, and leadership representation gaps before those conditions manifest as turnover or declining representation. For example, a technology executive described survey results revealing that BIPOC individuals were not feeling connected to the organization because of a lack of affiliation in leadership positions and no clear path for advancement, while an insurance claims operations leader emphasized the critical relationship between data adequacy and organizational change—adequate data fosters leadership accountability, and leadership accountability fosters positive change. These findings align with [Olenick and Somaraju's \(2024\)](#) research establishing employee voice data as a diagnostic tool for identifying systemic barriers that demographic data alone cannot surface. Consistent with [Kotter's \(1996\)](#) first step of establishing urgency, this diagnostic function generates the evidence base from which organizational leaders can justify the systemic change required—transforming abstract equity commitments into data-supported imperatives that compel action.

5.5.2. Systematic Performance Tracking and Business Impact

Participants consistently described performance tracking and business outcome measurement as the mechanisms through which diversity accountability becomes embedded in organizational leadership culture rather than remaining a peripheral human resources function. Participants emphasized that metrics must extend beyond representation counts to encompass retention benchmarks, advancement timelines, and direct connections to business performance—creating the return-on-investment framing that sustains executive commitment. For example, a technology executive described requiring leaders to establish clear paths specifically focused on BIPOC career progression, resulting in a 72 basis points improvement in employee satisfaction within one year—demonstrating that structured accountability mechanisms translate diversity commitments into measurable organizational outcomes ([Kamali et al., 2024](#)). A chief claims officer extended this connection to business performance, explaining that sales increase when organizations lean into customer expectations, and customers want to know they are buying products and services from organizations that respect differences and represent the communities they serve. This business impact framing transforms BIPOC advancement metrics from peripheral diversity reporting into central performance indicators—a finding validated by [Hakovirta et al. \(2023\)](#), who demonstrate that organizations leveraging leadership diversity alongside performance measurement systems achieve stronger innovation and sustainability outcomes than those treating diversity as a standalone compliance objective.

The analysis reveals that effective measurement frameworks function as an integrated accountability system—where diagnostic climate assessment informs targeted performance tracking, which enables the accountability structures that drive continuous organizational improvement. Collectively, the five subthemes of this

study—sourcing and pipeline development, candidate identification and attraction, inclusive assessment, compensation equity, and measurement and accountability—function not as independent strategies but as an interdependent organizational system. Applied through the composite conceptual framework, the MDCC framework illuminates the cultural competency required at every stage, EDI theory grounds each component in the systemic equity principles necessary for authentic inclusion, and Kotter’s Change Management model explains how integrated leadership commitment and structured accountability transform fragmented diversity efforts into sustainable advancement ecosystems. These findings underscore that BIPOC talent acquisition achieves optimal results when all five components operate as complementary elements of a unified framework—one that consistently advances BIPOC professionals while generating the measurable organizational performance improvements that make equity both a moral imperative and a strategic business priority.

6. Social Change and Professional Practice Implications

The findings of this study reveal significant implications for positive social change that extend beyond organizational performance to affect individuals, communities, and society at large. By identifying effective strategies to increase BIPOC representation in senior leadership, this research contributes to dismantling the systemic barriers that have historically limited access to decision-making roles and economic advancement for underrepresented professionals. At the individual level, advancing BIPOC professionals to senior leadership positions generates enhanced earning potential, strengthened professional networks, and the generational financial improvement that accompanies sustained career advancement. [Hakovirta et al. \(2023\)](#) and [Wadhwa and Aggarwal \(2023\)](#) confirm that organizations committed to BIPOC advancement achieve measurable improvements in employee job satisfaction, high-quality leadership development, reduced BIPOC employee turnover, and strengthened organizational commitment—outcomes that benefit both individuals and the institutions they serve.

At the organizational level, the integrated talent acquisition framework identified in this study creates the conditions for sustained competitive advantage through cognitive diversity, expanded market insights, and enhanced innovation capacity. Organizations that implement systematic pipeline development, inclusive assessment, and equitable compensation strategies demonstrate commitment to BIPOC advancement in ways that strengthen employer brand reputation within diverse communities and increase talent attraction and retention rates across demographic groups ([Akpapuna et al., 2020](#)). The financial implications extend beyond internal performance—organizations that embed BIPOC representation into senior leadership generate measurable increases in customer patronage from BIPOC communities, as prospective customers increasingly evaluate organizational values through the demographics of those in positions of authority and influence.

At the community and societal levels, the advancement of BIPOC professionals to senior leadership positions creates cascading benefits that transcend individual organizational boundaries. Communities served by organizations committed to BIPOC advancement benefit from increased tax revenues generated by organizational investment in local talent pipelines, expanded employment opportunities, and the social capital enhancement that accompanies visible BIPOC leadership representation (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2020). Employees across organizations develop stronger commitments and engagement driven by a sense of self-worth, community pride, and confidence in equitable advancement pathways. At the broadest societal level, reducing BIPOC underrepresentation in senior leadership contributes to the reduction of structural inequality and strengthens the democratic institutions that depend on diverse representation in positions of economic and organizational influence.

For professional practice, the findings offer actionable guidance for business leaders committed to transforming diversity aspirations into measurable organizational outcomes. A key recommendation is for business leaders to implement integrated talent pipeline systems that coordinate sourcing, assessment, development, and retention functions into cohesive advancement ecosystems rather than managing these functions as isolated human resources activities. Leaders should develop the inclusive leadership competencies—particularly cultural intelligence and equitable assessment capability—that enable effective mentorship and advancement of BIPOC professionals while creating organizational cultures where diverse perspectives drive enhanced performance (Paiuc, 2021). Additionally, business leaders should embed compensation equity analysis into standard leadership transition processes and invest in the external professional development opportunities that expand BIPOC professionals' visibility, networks, and earning potential beyond base pay adjustments alone (Manoharan et al., 2021). Organizations that adopt these integrated approaches move beyond surface-level diversity programming to create the sustainable advancement pathways that generate both equity outcomes and the organizational performance improvements that sustain long-term leadership commitment.

7. Directions for Future Research

This qualitative pragmatic inquiry provides an empirically grounded framework for BIPOC talent acquisition and pipeline development, yet several limitations of the current study point to important directions for future scholarship. The sample of nine business leaders, while generating rich qualitative insights across diverse organizational contexts, represents a bounded geographical and sectoral scope that may not capture the full range of strategies applicable across all industry environments. Future researchers should consider expanding the geographical range, sample size, and industry focus of similar inquiries to yield broader applicability and more generalizable findings. In particular, sectors with historically low BIPOC representation in senior leadership—including financial services,

manufacturing, and healthcare—warrant targeted investigation to determine whether the five-component framework identified in this study operates with equal effectiveness across different structural and cultural conditions (Holladay et al., 2023). Researchers who include a broader range of organizational sizes, ownership structures, and geographic locations could better capture the full spectrum of BIPOC talent acquisition experiences and identify contextual factors that moderate strategy effectiveness. A further limitation concerns the assessment of participant eligibility. Although a two-stage pre-screening process was employed—combining a structured candidate protocol with review of publicly available organizational documents—the verification of BIPOC advancement progress and associated organizational outcomes ultimately relied substantially on participant self-report rather than independently audited organizational data. This reliance is appropriate and expected within a qualitative pragmatic design, where depth of practitioner insight is the primary evidentiary standard; however, it does mean that the study cannot rule out the possibility that participants' accounts of their organizations' progress were subject to social desirability or retrospective attribution biases. Future researchers should consider incorporating independent verification mechanisms—such as standardized demographic disclosure forms, third-party diversity audit reports, or longitudinal organizational records—as supplementary eligibility criteria, which would strengthen the independence between inclusion criteria and interview-derived findings and reduce the appearance of circular sampling in purposive qualitative designs of this type.

The qualitative design of this study was intentionally selected to capture the nuanced, practitioner-generated insights that quantitative methods cannot produce from this understudied population. However, the findings now provide a sufficient empirical foundation to warrant quantitative investigation of the relationships between the five identified components and measurable organizational outcomes. Future researchers should employ quantitative and mixed-methods approaches to measure the specific impact of integrated talent acquisition strategies on BIPOC advancement rates, retention metrics, compensation equity gaps, and organizational financial performance over time (Kamali et al., 2024). Survey-based instruments designed to assess the degree to which organizations have implemented each of the five components—sourcing and pipeline development, candidate identification and attraction, inclusive assessment, compensation equity, and measurement and accountability—could generate the statistical evidence necessary to establish causal rather than correlational relationships between integrated pipeline development and senior leadership representation outcomes. Such quantitative validation would significantly strengthen the evidentiary base for the framework presented in this study and provide business leaders with the precision measurement tools needed to evaluate their own implementation progress.

Longitudinal research designs represent a particularly valuable direction for future investigation, as the sustained impact of integrated pipeline strategies cannot be adequately assessed through cross-sectional qualitative inquiry alone. The five

subthemes identified in this study operate synergistically—each reinforcing and building upon the others over time—yet the mechanisms through which these synergistic relationships develop and strengthen across organizational contexts remain underexplored in the scholarly literature (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2020). Longitudinal studies tracking BIPOC advancement outcomes across multiple organizational cohorts over three to five year periods would provide the temporal depth necessary to understand how pipeline investments translate into senior leadership representation gains, how compensation equity interventions affect long-term retention, and how measurement and accountability frameworks sustain organizational commitment beyond initial diversity programming phases. Future research should also examine the role of external environmental factors—including legislative changes, economic conditions, and industry-specific talent market dynamics—in moderating the effectiveness of integrated BIPOC talent acquisition frameworks, ensuring that the evidence base remains responsive to the evolving organizational contexts in which business leaders operate (Phillips & Klein, 2023).

8. Conclusion

BIPOC professionals remain significantly underrepresented in senior leadership positions across industries, creating both persistent equity challenges and missed opportunities for organizational performance enhancement. This qualitative pragmatic inquiry addressed that gap by exploring the effective strategies business leaders have used to increase BIPOC representation in senior-level positions while positively impacting financial performance. Grounded in a composite conceptual framework integrating Sue's (2001) MDCC framework, Akbar and Parker's (2021) EDI theory, and Kotter's (1996) Change Management model, the study identified a five-component framework—sourcing and pipeline development, candidate identification and attraction, inclusive assessment, compensation equity, and measurement and accountability—that transforms fragmented diversity efforts into integrated, sustainable advancement ecosystems. The findings confirm that these five components do not operate independently but function as a mutually reinforcing organizational system in which each component builds upon and amplifies the impact of the others, creating the cumulative organizational transformation that isolated diversity initiatives consistently fail to achieve.

The integrated nature of these findings carries significant implications for both scholarly understanding and organizational practice. For scholars, this study contributes an empirically grounded framework that advances the diversity management literature beyond representation-focused approaches toward a comprehensive, systems-level understanding of how equitable talent acquisition operates across the full arc of BIPOC professionals' advancement journeys. For practitioners, the findings provide actionable evidence that BIPOC advancement is not only an ethical imperative but a strategic business priority—one that generates measurable returns in employee satisfaction, customer patronage, innovation capacity,

and long-term organizational sustainability (Hakovirta et al., 2023). Business leaders who implement the integrated framework presented in this study—coordinating sourcing, assessment, compensation, and accountability into cohesive advancement ecosystems—position their organizations to achieve the dual outcomes of equity and performance that define sustainable organizational success in an increasingly diverse marketplace. The work of advancing BIPOC representation in senior leadership is neither peripheral nor supplementary to organizational strategy; it is foundational to it, and the evidence presented in this study provides the practical roadmap through which that foundational commitment can be realized.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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