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**Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences at the University of the Free  
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**TITLE: EMPLOYEES' PERCEPTIONS OF DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT  
STRATEGIES IN A SOUTH AFRICAN TRAVEL COMPANY**

**by**

**LINTLE JOYCE LEDWABA**

2006033464

**SUPERVISOR: PETER CHRISTIE**

Johannesburg, South Africa

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## DECLARATION

I, Lintle Joyce Ledwaba, declare that the Master's degree research dissertation, publishable manuscripts and published articles, and coursework that I herewith submit for the Master's degree qualification in Business Administration at the University of the Free State is my independent work, and that I have not submitted it previously at another institution of higher qualification for obtaining any qualification.

L.J. Ledwaba \_\_\_\_\_

Lintle Joyce Ledwaba

15 October 2024

Date

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this dissertation to God Almighty, for giving me the strength, guidance and wisdom to pull through. I further dedicate this to my family for their unwavering support and consistent prayers, to my friends and colleagues for their words of wisdom and advice, and to my research participants who made themselves available and ensured the data collection process was successful. I'm grateful for the opportunity that the travel company leadership has provided and trusted me to interact with their employees in support of this initiative. To the late Malerato Edith Bereng, for believing in me. To my children, Boitsepo, Kgosi and Awande, I hope this serves as an inspiration for you and I pray for greater grace and heights.

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## ABSTRACT

Diversity is essential in today's interconnected world as it fosters creativity, innovation, and adaptability within organisations. A diverse workforce combines different viewpoints, experiences and skills, which can considerably improve problem-solving and decision-making processes. Companies can gain a competitive advantage by accepting people of all backgrounds, including colour, gender, age, and culture. This study examines employees' perspectives on diversity management techniques in the South African tourism industry.

Utilising a qualitative research methodology, the study examines the relationship between diversity management and key factors such as employee engagement, productivity, and retention. Through thematic analysis of data gathered from interviews, several prominent themes emerged, including inclusivity, a variety of backgrounds, and the principles of equality and fairness in understanding workplace diversity.

The findings underscore the importance of effective diversity management in nurturing a robust company culture and enhancing overall organisational performance. Recommendations for improving diversity management strategies include ongoing training and awareness initiatives, better communication, increased representation of diverse groups in leadership positions, the establishment of community partnerships, and the continuous evaluation and adaptation of these strategies. The study acknowledges its limitations and suggests avenues for future research, highlighting the necessity for larger sample sizes, longitudinal studies, and refined methodologies to gain a deeper understanding of diversity management practices within the travel industry. Overall, this research provides valuable insights to assist organisations in creating more inclusive workplaces, ultimately leading to greater employee engagement and satisfaction.

**Key words:** employee engagement, productivity, retention, inclusivity, workplace culture, leadership diversity, community partnerships, equality and fairness, innovation, organisational performance

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>B2B</b>	Business-2-Business
<b>DEI</b>	Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion
<b>ERG</b>	Employee Resource Groups
<b>HRD</b>	Human Resource Division
<b>HRM</b>	Human Resource Management
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
<b>SIT</b>	Social Identity Theory

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

### 1.1 BACKGROUND

Diversity management refers to the actions put in place by an organisation aimed at the promotion of more inclusion of employees from various backgrounds into its organisational structure, which is enforced through specific policies and programmes (Yadav & Lenka, 2020). This means that the organisation acknowledges employees' differences while recognising their differences as valuable, and the differences include, *inter alia*, age, religion, sex, ethnic group, and race (Babundo, 2023). Ensuring the prevention of discrimination and promoting inclusiveness are key goals. To achieve the desired state of effective diversity management, the organisation must include diversity management in its strategic planning and ensure there is consistency with diverse management practices, which is achieved through training (Peng, 2023).

The Human Resources Division (HRD), in collaboration with other departments, plays a crucial role in facilitating effective diversity management to ensure the success of policies and programmes. According to Hossain (2023), the HRD can support diversity management by fostering a culture of inclusivity within the workplace, including the implementation of Employee Resource Groups (ERGs). These groups provide employees with shared backgrounds a safe space to express themselves while also encouraging collaboration with other groups to promote diversity. Additionally, workplace diversity training, which highlights its importance, and strategies to increase employee engagement across diverse backgrounds are widely endorsed by scholars (Areiqat, Hamdan, Zamil & Aldabbagh, 2020; Croitoru et al., 2022; Miminoshvili & Černe, 2022).

However, the most critical factor in the success of diversity initiatives is ensuring that organisational leaders recognise the importance of diversity and take active responsibility in inspiring employees to embrace it (Morris, 2023). It is important to note that organisational culture is predominantly defined by line management rather than Human Resources. While Human Resources may design and implement comprehensive policies, their impact is limited without the commitment of line management, particularly top-level leadership.

Organisational culture is a multifaceted phenomenon that permeates every aspect of an organisation's operations (Westrum, 2004). The successful implementation of HR-driven initiatives ultimately depends on line managers, who are responsible for overseeing employees and ensuring that organisational values and priorities are translated into day-to-day workplace behaviours. Their decisions and actions act as influential cues, shaping the expectations and attitudes of their teams (Miyonga et al., 2018; Tsai, 2011). Top-level executives, in particular, must lead by example, as effective line management is vital for fostering a culture that aligns with strategic objectives and encourages employee engagement (Miyonga et al., 2018). Without this leadership, even the most well-designed policies risk becoming ineffective.

In a study where perceptions about diversity management in the hospitality industry were investigated in the United States of America, the findings showed that there was a positive association between inclusive Human Resource Management (HRM) policies and the job performance of employees (Mistry, Okumus & Orłowski, 2021). In the same study, inclusive Human Resources Management policies of diversity management were also positively associated with service innovation behaviour (Mistry *et al.*, 2021). However, challenges may be experienced by organisations when it comes to the effective implementation of diversity management policies and leaders may face barriers such as resistance when creating a culture of diversity and inclusion in the workplace. (Chikwe, Dagunduro, Ajuwon, & Kuteesa, 2024; Nwakanma, 2024; Velasco, 2019).

In a study conducted in South Africa where respondents were employees of Bed and Breakfast establishments, the findings showed that effective implementation of diversity management practices had a positive influence on employees' psychological capital (Sealome & Chipunza, 2020). The four dimensions of psychological capital are self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience, which are a person's positive psychological traits that are developed and sustained to boost well-being plus performance (Choudhary & Parbha, 2023).

The focus of this study is to explore the perceptions of employees of a South African travel company on diversity management, focusing on how the employees perceive the effectiveness of the applied diversity management strategies. Effective communication is one of the diversity management strategies.

This is because all employees need to be comfortable when it comes to communicating with other employees, as well as their leaders, making it easy for them to share challenges, knowledge, and creative ideas (Olusegun, Abdulraheem & Nassir, 2018). Added to effective communication, education and awareness are at the top of the priority strategies for diversity management, which means each organisation must have diversity management training programmes plus awareness plans where visual reminders are displayed randomly and during gatherings in the workplace (Amegashie, 2018). Diversity training and awareness programmes are especially important in developing countries because there are widely varied beliefs, as well as rigid social and cultural bonds, which necessitate ensuring there is an understanding of the importance of diversity in the workplace and how it will benefit the organisation (Turi, Khastoori, Sorooshian & Campbell, 2022).

When there is effective communication, the result is more organisational trust, which is a mediating variable between diversity management and employee engagement (Alshaabani, Hamza & Rudnák, 2022). At the same time, the facilitation of fairness, respect and appreciation by diversity management leads to an increase in the level of organisational trust (Alshaabani *et al.*, 2022). Hence, there is higher employee engagement because employees become more aware of the organisation's goals, while they feel motivated. Diversity in the workplace promotes opportunities for new learning experiences and the gained problem-solving skills help to improve employee performance (Volson, 2020). Effective diversity management strategies include performance management, leadership initiative, communication, and shared vision. and they are reported to significantly promote employee retention (Nnadi & Chinedu, 2019). Overall, there are multiple diversity management strategies, and a comprehensive approach needs to be applied, which can only be successful when there is effective communication and knowledge sharing.

Organisations prioritising diversity and inclusivity are better positioned to engage with a broad range of customers, suppliers, and stakeholders due to the heightened positive image of the organisation (Rusu, Bilți, Barbu & Bălan, 2023). Added to the aforesaid, such organisations are more likely to attract and retain the diverse skills and creativity that will assist in the adoption of valuable innovations; therefore, helping the

organisations to be more competitive in the global marketplace (Ensari, Gurel & Alay, 2017).

The South African Employment Equity Act (Act 55 of 1998) states that diversity encompasses distinct and individual human variations, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, social status, religious or political convictions, ethical principles, and country of origin. The Act was enacted as one of the pieces of legislation to raise the employment standards of South Africa through an improvement of business quality and trust over time, and to ensure fairness in employment (Steenkamp, 2023). The Act applies to all employers and employees in South Africa, except the South African National Defence Force, the National Intelligence Agency and Secret Services, which means it also applies to the travel industry (Steenkamp, 2023).

According to Chauke and Zungu (2023), there is a marginalisation when it comes to training and awareness in the hospitality sector in general in South Africa. Their study focuses on discrimination against disabled people and the results highlight that existing legislation and policies are too generalised. This agrees with the findings of the study by Kalargyrou and Costen (2017), which indicate that there is limited research on the discrimination against employees with disabilities in the hospitality sector, as well as other under-represented groups. Although no studies have focused on the travel industry in particular, effective diversity management leads an organisation to have a sustainable competitive advantage, plus being contextually and socially responsible (Syed & Tariq, 2017).

The travel industry by its nature is about cultural experiences in different destinations and countries. Thus, diversity is critical for the success of a travel business as each touchpoint encompasses cultural experiences from one destination to another, including the people who are encountered along the way (Khan, 2019). It is because of this reality that organisations must implement diverse approaches and policies to successfully engage and facilitate diversity management. Accordingly, this study aims to explore employees' perceptions of diversity management strategies in a selected South African travel company through an analysis of how diversity management approaches impact employee engagement, productivity, and retention. The expected

outcome is to provide valuable insights into how organisations in the travel industry can bolster their diversity and inclusion initiatives to achieve optimal outcomes.

## **1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The travel industry in South Africa faces numerous challenges, particularly concerning diversity and inclusion. One significant issue is the persistent inequality and income disparities across nationalities, genders, and economic sectors within the sector (Philipp et al., 2022). The lasting impact of apartheid has created barriers for certain demographic groups, hindering their entry and progression in the tourism industry (Thomas & Jain, 2003).

In addition, the industry struggles to deliver authentic and varied experiences that appeal to a diverse range of travellers. Smaller tour operators often face difficulty competing with larger, internationally funded companies offering standardised, cost-effective packages. This lack of diversity in tourism offerings limits opportunities for local entrepreneurs and marginalised communities to participate meaningfully in the sector (Muzirambi & Mearns, 2018).

Another key challenge is the insufficient representation and decision-making power of local communities, especially in rural areas. Protests and damage to public transport infrastructure have further undermined the availability of safe and reliable transport for tourists, intensifying the industry's diversity-related issues (The Competition Commission, South Africa, 2021). Addressing these challenges requires a holistic, multi-stakeholder approach that prioritises equity, inclusivity, and the empowerment of local communities. Sustained investment in training, capacity building, and infrastructure, alongside targeted policies and regulations, can help establish a more inclusive and resilient travel industry in South Africa (The Competition Commission, South Africa, 2021; Sarmaha & Goswami, 2021).

The sector also faces significant barriers to advancing diversity, which hampers its ability to fully contribute to the country's inclusive tourism objectives. Despite South Africa's rich cultural and linguistic diversity, bus operators often lack cultural awareness and effective communication, failing to meet the needs of both domestic and international tourists (Mbatha & Naude, 2021). Workforce diversity within the industry remains limited due to historic inequalities in education and employment,

compounding representation challenges (Ndlovu & Rogerson, 2019). Many bus companies prioritise established routes and attractions, neglecting rural and underserved communities, thereby restricting broader economic participation (Rogerson & van der Merwe, 2021).

Moreover, high costs, inadequate accessibility for individuals with disabilities, and entrenched stereotypes about South Africa among international tourists create further barriers to inclusivity and equitable growth in the industry (Swart & Bob, 2020; Department of Tourism, 2022). Tackling these issues is vital to ensuring that bus tours and the wider travel industry align with the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion, fostering a more inclusive and representative tourism landscape in South Africa.

### **1.3 OBJECTIVES**

#### **1.3.1 Primary objective**

The primary objective of this study is to identify the perceptions of employees on diversity management strategies in a South African travel company.

#### **1.3.2 Secondary objectives**

The secondary objectives of this study are as follows:

- to explore diversity management strategies currently in place at a South African travel company,
- to identify employees' perceptions of the association between diversity strategies and employee engagement, productivity, and retention in the workplace, and
- to examine how employees, perceive the diversity management strategies in place at a South African travel company.

### **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

#### **1.4.1 Primary research question**

The primary research question of this study is the following: "What are the perceptions of employees on diversity management in a South African travel company?"

### **1.4.2 Secondary research questions**

The secondary research questions for this study are as follows:

- What are the diversity management strategies currently in place at a South African travel company?
- What is the employees' perception of the association between diversity strategies and employee engagement, productivity, and retention at a South African travel company?
- How do employees perceive the diversity management strategies in place at a South African travel company?

## **1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The qualitative research methodological approach was followed in this study as it aimed to collect information concerning the perceptions of participants on diversity management strategies at a South African travel company (Ugwu & Eze-Val, 2023). The study focused on acquiring an in-depth understanding of the association between diversity management and employee engagement, productivity, and retention, which was achieved in an exploratory manner made possible by using the qualitative research methodological approach (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). The adopted research design was phenomenological and cross-sectional because data was collected at one point and there were exclusion and inclusion criteria for the participants (Setia, 2016). This allowed for the collection of the perceptions of the participants, which were then analysed and interpreted accordingly. The data for this study was collected at a single point in time through semi-structured interviews; audio recordings were also made.

Non-probability was the applied form of sampling, and the sampling technique used was purposive, which entails deciding whether potential participants have the information needed to address the research problem of a study (Verma *et al.*, 2017). The potential participants of this study were selected because they were believed to have information on diversity management at a South African travel company, as well as perceptions about the effectiveness of the applied diversity management strategies.

To gather the data, a semi-structured interview guide was used, and it consisted of a series of open-ended questions that promoted dialogue. Semi-structured interviews allow for exploration because of the open-ended questions and the conversational approach; this means participants can ask questions for clarity while they can also elaborate more in their answers (Ruslin *et al.*, 2022).

To accommodate all attendees, meeting invitations were sent out through an Outlook calendar that featured a selection of dates suitable for everyone. Then, upon being given consent by each participant, interview sessions were communicated. The benefit of using audio recordings is that more information is captured as opposed to written text, which means there is an increase in the research rigour of a study and its validity (Rutakumwa *et al.*, 2020). The data collection was performed over three weeks because of the availability of the participants.

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the collected qualitative data after it had been transcribed. The process followed includes the identification of codes, which are then used to identify themes, and the results are discussed according to the identified themes (Kampira & Meyer, 2019). The main themes included the identification of applied diversity management strategies; the association between diversity management and employee engagement, productivity, and retention; and the recommendations of the participants concerning changes that must be made by the travel company for the diversity management strategies to be more effective.

## **1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

### **1.6.1 Theoretical significance**

This study aimed to conduct a comprehensive investigation that yields concrete and measurable results, thus improving our knowledge and comprehension of the research subject matter. Through thorough data analysis and interpretation, a detailed report is provided that encompasses the topic's essential aspects, identifies areas requiring further exploration, and offers practical implications for stakeholders, including policymakers, practitioners, and fellow researchers. Diversity management is crucial to a strong company culture and contributes to the bottom line of the organisation. Organisations gain significant advantages from implementing effective diversity management strategies. These benefits include fostering inclusivity across a wide

spectrum of customers, suppliers, and stakeholders; enhancing the organisation's reputation; leveraging diverse skills and creativity; boosting employee engagement and performance; and improving staff retention (Alshaabani et al., 2022; Ensari et al., 2017; Rusu et al., 2023; Volson, 2020).

### **1.6.2 Academic significance**

Incorporating empirical data obtained from the travel industry in South Africa will refine the theory to a greater degree of precision and accuracy, providing a more detailed and comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. The diversity management strategies and employee perceptions data will inform academic research if there is a gap to pursue or explore from the insights gathered. The Social Identity Theory (SIT) formed the foundation for this study, and it helped in the understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying group dynamics, intergroup relationships, and collective behaviour, which relate to diversity management dynamics (Turner *et al.*, 1987).

### **1.6.3 Business significance**

This study provides abundant invaluable insights that can benefit entrepreneurs and employees, equipping them to make informed decisions that significantly impact their companies. Company leaders can ensure their business strategies are aligned with diversity management strategies, which will be enhanced with an understanding of the association between different diversity management strategies and employee engagement, productivity, and retention. This wealth of knowledge can be harnessed to make smarter, more practical choices, leading to improved outcomes and a flourishing business.

### **1.6.4 The significance and relevance of choosing the travel industry**

The travel industry has long been a significant and dynamic sector, offering a wide range of opportunities for individuals and businesses alike. As the world becomes increasingly globalized, the travel industry has experienced exponential growth, becoming one of the largest and fastest-expanding sectors of the global economy (Luo & Zhou, 2021; Djuric et al., 2016). The statistics clearly demonstrate the profound impact of the travel industry. According to the World Tourism Organization, international tourism revenue accounted for 8% of the world's total export earnings in

1998, and the forecast for 2020 was over \$1 trillion in revenue generated by the industry (Mazumder et al., 2012). Furthermore, the travel industry has been reported to contribute 9.5% to the world's Gross Domestic Product and employ around 9.9% of the global employed population. (Jang & Hsieh, 2021). The travel industry is also highly dynamic, constantly evolving to meet the changing needs and preferences of consumers (Sjaifuddin, 2020; Jang & Hsieh, 2021; Motaghi, 2018). Hence, the travel industry is undoubtedly a crucial and multifaceted sector that offers numerous opportunities for growth, development, and positive social impact.

The travel industry is a cornerstone of South Africa's economy and social fabric, making a substantial contribution to the country's GDP and creating employment opportunities for millions. With its strategic location, rich cultural heritage, and breathtaking natural landscapes, South Africa has become a sought-after destination for both domestic and international travellers, fueling the growth and significance of its travel industry (Rogerson, 2011). A vital component of this industry is the role played by travel companies, including tour operators, coaches, and bus services. These entities are essential for facilitating tourist mobility, connecting them to diverse destinations and enriching their travel experiences. Coaches and bus companies, in particular, offer an affordable and accessible mode of transport, supporting a wide spectrum of travellers while also bolstering the country's public transport system (The Competition Commission, South Africa, 2021). Beyond its economic contributions, the travel sector is a catalyst for development and poverty alleviation in South African communities. Tourism drives prosperity in towns across the country, as evidenced by its significant multiplier effect: every 12 tourists create one job, and every R200 million spent in tourism generates 700 direct jobs and 560 indirect jobs (The Competition Commission, South Africa, 2021). This highlights the industry's ability to stimulate economic activity and uplift local livelihood.

In summary, the travel industry in South Africa is a key driver of economic growth, job creation, and cultural preservation. Its continued success hinges on sustained investment, robust infrastructure, and a commitment to promoting inclusivity and sustainability within the sector.

## 1.7 CHAPTER LAYOUT

The chapters in this report are outlined as follows:

**Chapter 1** serves to indicate why the study was conducted by providing a discussion of the introduction, background, and significance of the study. The chapter also shares the aim and research objectives, as well as the main and secondary research questions developed to address the explored research problem.

**Chapter 2** focuses on a critical discussion of relevant literature and synthesis of the information to highlight existing gaps in the literature and indicate why the concepts investigated in this study are of value.

**Chapter 3** deals with the research methodology followed in this study. The chapter shares detailed information about the chosen data collection and analysis methods, plus techniques that were applied.

**Chapter 4** is the results reporting and discussion chapter, where the results of this study are compared to those of published empirical studies.

**Chapter 5** is the final chapter, and it provides the conclusion and recommendations. The chapter indicates if this study's aim and objectives were truly achieved.

## 1.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter provided information on the background of this study, discussing the reasons for and significance of conducting the study. The primary and secondary research objectives were shared, as well as a summary of the research methodology, and the sampling and data collection and analysis methods. The chapter also shared information on the actions taken to ensure that the research process was ethical, protecting the participants of this study.

The literature review is discussed in the next chapter. It provides discussions aimed at ensuring further insight into the explored concepts.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is a discussion of existing knowledge in the literature concerning diversity, diversity management, and diversity management strategies adopted by organisations. The purpose of a literature review is to share examples of various contributions to existing knowledge in a particular field; provide evidence or explain by referring to concepts and theory; and, upon identifying gaps in the literature, guide further research (Snyder, 2023). A literature review thus helps in identifying empirical evidence and methodological and knowledge gaps (Chigbu, Atiku & Du Plessis, 2023). This happens when a researcher synthesises existing knowledge and gains a comprehensive understanding of the explored or investigated phenomena and concepts (Taherdoost, 2023). Accordingly, this literature review is a critical analysis of various studies conducted through analysing empirical and secondary data, as well as publications from reputable organisations, ending with the highlighting of the identified gaps in the literature concerning diversity management strategies.

##### 2.1.1 Theoretical foundation

###### 2.1.1.1 *Social identity theory*

The core idea of Social Identity Theory (SIT) is that an individual's self-concept consists of both personal and social identity elements (Masenyama, 2005). The theory, initially developed by Henri Tajfel, explores group dynamics and their impact on individual behaviours (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). According to Hasan (2012), people tend to evaluate and define themselves based on the groups they belong to, as these groups offer a collective self-concept, known as social identity. Tajfel (1978) defines social identity as the part of an individual's self-concept that stems from their membership in one or more social groups, along with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership. Social identity represents the portion of a person's self-concept that is derived from belonging to a social group (Tamburrini et al., 2015). Ashforth and Mael (1989) argue that identity is linked to a person's desire to interact with others and affiliate with groups. Group identity shapes how individuals

respond to different situations (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991), and group members can influence a person's attitudes and behaviours (McKinley et al., 2014).

Solomon (2006) contends that humans are inherently social beings who need to belong to specific groups. He also suggests that people conform to these groups, using others as mirrors to guide their behaviour through observation. During adolescence, peer acceptance becomes particularly significant, with individuals dedicating considerable time to seeking approval from their group and striving to appear “cool” (Pratt, 2003). To fit into a group, consumers may alter their behaviour. However, Hogg and Terry (2001) concluded that social identity holds more power than individual identity. Maziriri (2016) argues that, according to SIT, individuals derive part of their self-esteem from identifying with the social groups to which they belong. When a particular social identity is salient, individuals are motivated to distinguish their group positively from others, preferring to view their group as both distinct and superior (Maziriri, 2016). This theory also assesses the influence of groups such as friends, peers, family, and the broader community. Furthermore, Brewer (2001) asserts that social identities are interdependent, meaning that the traits and behaviours expressed by an individual depend on and are responsive to the actions and expectations of others within the relationship. People act in ways primarily because of their identity – how they see themselves (Korte, 2007). The way individuals perceive both others and themselves significantly affects their behaviour (Pratt, 2003).

The SIT suggests that individuals develop their identity through group membership (Stets & Burke, 2000) and that they require comparisons with others to feel accepted within a group (Ojala & Nesdale, 2004). The aim of SIT is to understand how individuals make sense of themselves and others in their social surroundings (Korte, 2007). Additionally, SIT posits that individuals seek a positive self-concept, which they can achieve through a positive social identity (Niens et al., 2003).

The theory also explains how individuals categorise themselves into various social groups (e.g., race, gender, ethnicity) and how these group identities influence their behaviour and perceptions. In the context of diversity management, SIT helps to explore how employees' sense of belonging to particular groups may shape their views on diversity policies and practices. It can be applied to examine whether employees

perceive diversity management strategies as inclusive or exclusionary, based on their social identities.

### **2.1.1.2 Empowerment theory: A catalyst for workplace transformation**

The empowerment theory has become a key concept in organisational management, offering a comprehensive framework for understanding and promoting the empowerment of individuals in the workplace. At its core, the theory suggests that empowerment involves a shift from powerlessness to a state of greater control over one's life, future, and surroundings (Tanga & Tangwe, 2014). Developed by scholars such as Conger and Kanungo, the empowerment theory highlights the importance of equipping employees with the tools, resources, and support they need to make meaningful decisions and take initiative in their roles (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2013). According to the theory, empowered employees are more motivated, engaged, and capable of contributing to the success of the organisation. The theory has been extensively studied in the workplace, with researchers demonstrating its multifaceted impact on employee outcomes (Maziriri & Chivandi, 2020; Tanga & Tangwe, 2014). Empowering leadership, which aligns with the principles of empowerment theory, has been shown to enhance employees' self-efficacy and sense of control, leading to increased productivity, job satisfaction, and organisational commitment (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2013).

By fostering an environment that encourages autonomous decision-making, offers opportunities for skill development, and removes bureaucratic barriers, empowering leaders can unlock the full potential of their workforce. Moreover, the empowerment theory underscores the importance of developing a team-based structure and cultivating a culture of trust and open communication as essential elements for successfully implementing empowerment initiatives within organisations (Appelbaum et al., 2014).

This theory is highly relevant to this study as it focuses on enhancing individuals' ability to control their lives, make decisions, and influence their environment, all of which are essential in the context of diversity management. In a South African travel company, the theory can be used to explore how diversity management strategies empower employees by providing them with the necessary resources, support, and opportunities for personal and professional growth. It also highlights the importance of

inclusive leadership and representation, as diverse leadership can help foster a sense of empowerment among employees from various backgrounds, encouraging greater engagement and participation. Furthermore, the theory emphasises the role of training and development in building employees' confidence and competence, which can directly impact job satisfaction, retention, and productivity. By applying the empowerment theory, this study can gain a deeper understanding of how diversity management strategies influence employee perceptions and contribute to organisational success.

## **2.2 DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE**

Diversity in organisations has become a norm because of the accessibility provided by technology and the internet, as well as globalisation (Servaes, Choudhury & Parikh, 2022). Globalisation has resulted in the increasing need for companies to establish themselves in other countries, which requires that diversity be understood and embraced (Bizjak, 2019).

To fully embrace diversity, organisations must develop a more dynamic cultural business model that incorporates diversity values in the workforce, ensuring there are employees from diverse ethnic, racial, religious and gender backgrounds (Bizjak, 2019; Dike, 2013; Edewor & Aluko, 2007). According to Walia and Malik (2015), understanding, valuing, and implementing diversity policies and practices is important for several reasons. Well-managed diversity increases the company's competitiveness and expands the company's capabilities. This approach also helps develop talent that ultimately increases company performance and profits (Walia & Malik, 2015). Additionally, younger generations are more likely to value a company that demonstrates diversity in its practices, as it gives them the confidence to learn from people from different backgrounds (Walia & Malik, 2015). Moreover, a diverse workforce can incorporate the best perspectives and ideas of each employee, leading to better results and increased productivity (Walia & Malik, 2015).

In the context of South African travel agencies, examining diversity management and the associated strategies is crucial for several reasons. Understanding how employees perceive diversity management strategies helps a company understand how strategies are perceived, ensuring that it can adapt them to suit the reality and make

changes or improvements when necessary (Manoharan, Madera & Singal, 2024). To assess the effectiveness of the legislative framework to promote diversity and equality in South Africa, such as the Employment Equity Act, it would be useful to examine employees' perceptions of the implementation strategies (Mula, 2014).

## **2.3 DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT**

### **2.3.1 Global Perspectives on Diversity Management**

Diversity management entails organisational leaders acknowledging that there are differences between people, and the differences are valuable, which encourages good management practices because of the prevention of discrimination while promoting inclusiveness (Samuel & Odor, 2018). This means there will be a diversity of human resources within an organisation, resulting in wide-ranging interpersonal skills that help the organisation adjust faster, supporting human resource branding, the outcome being an improvement in the organisation's image (Urbancová, Čermáková & Vostrovská, 2016). Moreover, globalisation has led organisations to realise how important it is to have a diverse workforce and customers, where effective and efficient diversity management is reflected in how such organisations outperform peer organisations when it comes to factors that include, *inter alia*, “higher economic performance, employee retainment, and increased innovation” (Bründermann, 2022).

The main dimensions of diversity are gender and nationality; however, there are wider dimensions that include age, race and ethnicity, disability status, sexual orientation, and gender identity (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2023). Although the importance of diversity is well-known in organisations, the negative impact is that it sometimes leads to interpersonal conflict in the workplace (Liu, Zhu & Wang, 2023). Interpersonal conflict affects employees and their productivity because they result in knowledge-hiding behaviours, which means there will be compromises when it comes to teamwork and the outcome will be a compromise of the organisation's overall performance (Irshad, Malik & Sarfraz, 2023).

The focus of global organisations is on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) in the workplace, which results in an improvement in organisations' competitiveness when applied comprehensively (McKinsey & Company, 2023). The McKinsey survey shows that some organisations still have challenges when it comes to the implementation of

DEI, which include the following: failing to develop a DEI strategy; a lack of clear criteria for DEI; not walking the talk (especially government institutions); and having inadequate organisational support and a lack of DEI efforts by the leadership (McKinsey & Company, 2023). The recommended approach is that organisations must have inclusive Human Resource Management (HRM) practices, plus employee learning-oriented behaviours, which entail having a culture of inclusivity and periodic awareness and training programmes for all employees (Liu *et al.*, 2023). The benefit of such a comprehensive approach results in employees from various backgrounds, age groups, and genders; the diversity results in a sharing of belief systems, skills and knowledge, which enhances problem-solving (Olu-Ogunleye, Akinbode & Ogunleye, 2022).

The motivation for diversity management and inclusion in organisations globally is because of moral concerns rather than profitability, and targets differ in different geographies (Kharroubi, 2021). For example, most regions in Europe and North America focus on attracting, retaining, and promoting women. However, in all regions, issues arise due to cultural conflicts, which significantly drain the energy of some employees, especially those who are in minority groups (Kharroubi, 2021).

In a survey where the focus was the inclusion of the LGBT group in three countries globally, only 35 per cent of respondents indicated they believed their employers were committed to LGBT inclusion internally (within the organisation) and externally (Deloitte Global, 2023). This is reflected in the response of 40 per cent of the Gen Z and Millennials respondents of the same survey who indicated they were willing to leave the organisations they worked for, to look for organisations that are inclusive of the LGBT group (Deloitte Global, 2023). The aforesaid means that retention will become lower in the organisations they currently work for. Additionally, the respondents from Gen Z (72 per cent) and Millennials (62 per cent) indicated that issues concerning diversity management and inclusion of the LGBT group would be the deciding factor when searching for employment elsewhere (Deloitte Global, 2023).

In 2023, Africa's top employers all indicated that one of their strategies is effective diversity management. The employers included Mercedes-Benz South Africa, Absa Bank, and Accenture Africa (Forbes Africa, 2023). The achievements of these top employers were enhanced by a prioritisation of diversity, amongst other factors; this is

because diversity promotion in organisations results in a better work environment, an increase in employee productivity, and a reduction in turnover intentions (Nweiser & Dajnoki, 2022).

### ***2.3.1.1 Is diversity an objective reality or constructed concept?***

Thomas and Ely (1996) argue that diversity encompasses a wide array of individual differences that contribute to a rich and dynamic workplace. Precisely, the concept of diversity has been a subject of much debate and discussion in academic circles, with scholars and researchers grappling with the question of whether it is an objective reality or a constructed concept. On one hand, there is a perspective that diversity is an essential aspect of the human experience, reflecting the unique and varied ways in which individuals and communities perceive and engage with the world (Jejenywa et al., 2024). This view holds that diversity is a fundamental characteristic of the human condition, shaped by factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and cultural background. From this standpoint, diversity is an objective reality that can be observed and studied, providing valuable insights into the richness and complexity of human societies.

On the other hand, another school of thought argues that diversity is a socially constructed concept, shaped by the perspectives and experiences of dominant groups within a society. This view suggests that the way diversity is defined and understood is often influenced by power dynamics, social norms, and historical legacies. According to this perspective, the interpretation of diversity can vary significantly among individuals and organizations, with some emphasizing the importance of recognizing and valuing differences, while others may view diversity as a potential threat to social cohesion or a means of achieving a competitive advantage (Gumede, 2016).

The literature on diversity also highlights the complex and nuanced nature of the concept, with scholars introducing distinct yet related notions, such as "vertical diversity" and "horizontal diversity" (Jejenywa et al., 2024). The former evaluates differences as superior or inferior, while the latter perceives difference merely as variation.

Nonetheless, both mainstream diversity literature and critical diversity scholarship have contributed to our understanding of diversity in the workplace, recognizing its potential benefits and challenges.

### ***2.3.1.2 The historical context of diversity and transformation in South Africa***

The history of South Africa is marked by deep-rooted racial divisions and a legacy of apartheid, which has left lasting wounds and scars on the nation's social fabric. These historical injustices have significantly shaped the current landscape of diversity and transformation in the workplace. The enduring effects of apartheid policies, which systematically marginalized certain racial groups, continue to influence perceptions and experiences of diversity in modern South African organizations. South Africa's history is deeply entwined with racial divisions and the lasting impact of apartheid, which has left a significant imprint on the country's social fabric (Zhuwao, 2017). These historical injustices have played a pivotal role in shaping the current landscape of diversity and transformation in the workplace, as the effects of discriminatory policies continue to affect perceptions and experiences of inclusivity within contemporary South African organisations (Masenya, 2021).

Apartheid, a system of institutionalised racial segregation, systematically excluded certain groups, resulting in a workforce that was far from representative of the nation's diverse population. This legacy has had wide-reaching consequences, contributing to low levels of education among a large segment of the working-age population and geographical barriers that hinder access to employment opportunities (Duval & Shibata, 2021). The deeply ingrained divisions within South African society have also fostered resistance to change, as employees from various backgrounds may find it difficult to reconcile their past experiences with the demands of contemporary diversity initiatives (Zhuwao, 2017).

Nevertheless, the dynamic and challenging nature of the South African business environment presents an opportunity to leverage the potential benefits of cultural diversity (Gumede, 2016). By recognising the historical context and addressing the complexities of diversity management, organisations can stimulate meaningful social and cultural shifts that promote equity, inclusion, and restorative justice. Diversity management strategies that consider the apartheid legacy can help bridge societal divides and create a more inclusive and representative workforce.

The transformation of South African workplaces involves more than just demographic changes; it requires a deeper societal shift that demands a thorough understanding of the nation's history and the lived experiences of its people (Zhuwao, 2017). Research suggests that critical factors for success include the commitment of senior management, the development of comprehensive human resource policies and practices, the appreciation and management of employee diversity, and the establishment of inclusive organisational cultures that confront historical systemic discrimination (Thomas & Jain, 2003).

### **2.3.2 Diversity Management in South African Organisations**

In South Africa, although Section 9(2) of the South African Constitution paved the way to equality, Section 15 of the Employment Equity Act (Act 55 of 1998) provides the legal framework for the promotion of diversity and equality in the workplace; aiming to eliminate unfair discrimination while promoting equal opportunity and the fair treatment of employees. Regardless of the country's efforts to promote equality and diversity in the workplace, those challenges persist.

There seems to be a problem when it comes to synchronizing the provisions of the Employment Equity Act and organisational practices, which means their implementation is not effective (Dibobo, Ngonyama-Ndou & Mncwabe, 2022). This is reflected by the lack of representation of women in managerial positions in organisations, as well as in the differences in how women and men are generally treated in the workplace (Dibobo *et al.*, 2022). In a study where the focus was on the construction industry of South Africa, the findings show there was no transformation in the industry; it also remained male-dominated (Madikizela & Michell, 2022). This indicates that legislation is insufficient and that there must be inclusive innovative solutions to address the challenges, which result in limited diversity in the industry (Madikizela & Michell, 2022).

In the study where the focus was on managers of the eThekweni Municipality in the KwaZulu-Natal province, South Africa, the findings indicated that there must be a simultaneous application of training and the education of employees on the importance of diversity and diversity management (Mbatha, 2023). This is because managers might be aware of what diversity management is but may fail at the implementation level, especially when it comes to ensuring employees have an adequate work-life

balance, which mostly applies to women who take care of children and/or their families (Mbatha, 2023). Ineffective diversity management means that an organisation will not experience the following benefits: the potential for increased productivity; easily achieving organisational goals; an increase in employee creativity; improved service; and a pleasant work environment (Joubert, 2017).

The hospitality industry is global and that makes diversity of significant importance; this is because of the positive association between diversity management initiatives and service innovation behaviour (Mistry *et al.*, 2021). Innovative behaviour refers to introducing and applying new ideas, products, processes, and procedures to a division or organisation, which will benefit the team and the entire organisation (Kamran & Ganjina, 2017). This is important in the workplace, especially because of the fast-changing business environment and constantly changing customer needs, plus preferences in the hospitality industry.

In an online survey conducted in South Africa in May and June 2023, the respondents were youth between the ages of 18 and 35, and 13 per cent of the respondents indicated they would not recommend people in the same age group to choose a career in the tourism industry (Moraladi & Pillay, 2023). This was because of a lack of youth representation in the industry, as stated by 80 per cent of the respondents of the same survey, and gatekeeping (Moraladi & Pillay, 2023). The respondents also said that there was a lack of knowledge transference and observed biases towards younger people in the industry (Moraladi & Pillay, 2023). The results of the same survey also showed there was discrimination against black youth because of their race, which was reflected by a lack of representation in managerial positions, while they were also denied minimal opportunities to broaden their knowledge within the industry (Moraladi & Pillay, 2023).

Generally, there is a class ceiling issue in South Africa that limits the full implementation of diversity in industries and within organisations. This means employees are discriminated against because of factors that include organisational culture, gender, age, and race (Mbuli, 2022). The Employment Equity Act was enacted over 23 years ago, however, the exclusion of suitably qualified black African women in managerial positions in the private sector in South Africa persists; this is regardless

of legal prescripts that bar the private sector from discriminating against black African women based on race, gender, and class (Matotoka & Odeku, 2021).

The literature generally shows that the South African government has taken steps through legal reforms to facilitate diversity in organisations. The literature also shares examples, providing evidence of the failure of the implementation of legislation in South Africa and beyond concerning diversity management in organisations. What this means is that there must be comprehensive initiatives, involving awareness campaigns and training; this must be inclusive of different types of organisations and communities.

## **2.4 DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES**

### **2.4.1 Communication**

The most important diversity management strategy is communication because it facilitates understanding and knowledge-sharing in an organisation (Olusegun *et al.*, 2018). Through formal and informal communication, the importance of diversity in the workplace is highlighted, ensuring that employees fully understand its value (Olusegun *et al.*, 2018). Formal interpersonal communication is practiced in official meetings, where conversations are facilitated by executive leaders and the importance of the development of a sense of inclusion and belonging is discussed (Wolfgruber, Sturmer & Einwiller, 2021). This shows that leadership is important when it comes to ensuring that there is a culture of inclusivity acknowledgement in the organisation (Wolfgruber *et al.*, 2021).

### **2.4.2 Leadership**

Leaders and managers of an organisation must continuously cultivate behaviours that facilitate employees' perceptions of belonging in the team, while also appreciating the uniqueness of others (Randel *et al.*, 2018). The findings of a study conducted by Molla and Shawlin (2023) show that the main motivating factor in an organisation is having a team of employees with diverse backgrounds and problem-solving abilities, who also have varied expertise. The benefit is that there will be a bigger pool of human resources, the outcome of which is an enhancement of business outcomes, as well as fostering innovation and a productive work environment (Ayub & Jehn, 2018). This requires that team leaders actively promote an organisational culture where diversity

and inclusion are encouraged; this results in employees feeling free to share their opinions and ideas (Leroy *et al.*, 2021).

### **2.4.3 Organisational Culture**

Organisational culture is a set of values, attitudes, beliefs, principles, norms, expectations, and collective practices that distinguish one organisation from others (Schein, 1984; Schein, 1994; Mohelska & Sokolova, 2015). Culture determines what a particular group pays attention to and monitors in the external environment and how the environment responds (Willcoxson & Millett, 2000). Organisational culture shapes workplace dynamics, influences employee behaviour, and plays a key role in the success of diversity management efforts. Organisational culture also has a significant impact on the adoption and implementation of diversity efforts, as well as the effectiveness of the diversity management strategies adopted by an organisation (Jackson, Heyns & McCallaghan, 2019). Leaders play an important role in instilling organisational values that serve as guiding principles that shape the culture, decision-making processes, and behaviours within an organisation (Robbins & Judge, 2018).

Aligning organisational values with diversity management strategies and initiatives is critical to ensuring that diversity efforts are integrated into the organisational culture and implemented effectively at all levels of the organisation (Fujimoto & Härtel, 2017). Driving cultural change to bridge the gap between organisational values and diversity behaviours requires proactive leadership, clear communication, and ongoing commitment to diversity and inclusion goals (Ely & Thomas, 2001). The outcome will be a change in the perceptions of employees concerning diversity in the workplace and why it must be embraced.

### **2.4.4 Human Resource Management Practises**

The importance of the Human Resource division of an organisation when it comes to diversity management is to ensure that it begins at the stage of identifying the necessary skills, to the recruitment stage, and that there is no discrimination in the selection process (Hossain, 2023). Additionally, the division must ensure that all employees attend training sessions on diversity management (Hossain, 2023). The Human Resources division is also responsible for ensuring there are sufficient resources to facilitate innovations suggested by the diverse workforce in the

organisation (Ishmael & Othman, 2023). This is because the diverse employees should be retained and that requires that they be provided with the tools they need to perform their job tasks, potentially leading to them being loyal to the organisation.

The Human Resource division is guided by diversity management policies that are developed and implemented in collaboration with managers or leaders from other divisions within the organisation. Hence, the organisation's leadership must be inspirational and influence the perceptions of employees about diversity in the workplace (Olabiya, 2023).

## **2.5 FACTORS INFLUENCING EMPLOYEE PERCEPTIONS OF DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT**

Factors that influence employee perceptions include organisational culture, leadership support, effective communication, workplace policies and practices, and training and development, as well as personal experiences. Organisational culture influences how employees perceive an organisation's diversity management efforts, and employees in organisations that strongly promote diversity and inclusion tend to have positive attitudes toward diversity (Jackson, Heyns & McCallaghan, 2003). Leaders can use organisational culture to demonstrate support for diversity efforts, while also effectively communicating their commitment to diversity (Nishii & Leroy, 2022). Conversely, a lack of management support creates an environment in which employees are less enthusiastic about diversity and view it with distrust and scepticism (Abdulfatai, 2021).

Consistent, open and transparent communication about diversity, goals and adopted strategies will help create a positive perception of diversity management among employees (Al Marshoudi *et al.*, 2023). When this is missing or inconsistent, employees may feel misinformed and excluded from efforts and strategies to implement diversity in the organisation, which leads to a negative perception towards diversity management strategies (Roberson, Ryan & Ragins, 2017).

### **2.5.1 Training and Development**

Diversity training programmes serve as important tools for creating an inclusive work environment and significantly shape employees' perceptions of diversity management. De Silva (2022) points out that the effectiveness of diversity training depends on many factors beyond the content itself, including the delivery method and the level of

organisational support for implementation. The effectiveness of diversity training is closely related to the organisational climate and corporate culture. According to Rynes, Bartunek, and Daft (2001), a supportive and inclusive organisational climate significantly improves the impact of diversity training initiatives by fostering a culture in which employees feel valued and respected for their unique backgrounds and perspectives.

### **2.5.2 Personal Experiences**

Personal experiences play a key role in employees' perceptions of diversity management in organisations (Halperin, Hameiri & Littman, 2023). This is because positive encounters with diversity, such as participating in inclusive teams or mentoring people from different backgrounds, result in a positive attitude towards diversity management initiatives (Halperin *et al.*, 2023).

Personal experiences not only increase understanding of different perspectives but also help create a sense of belonging and inclusion in the workplace. In contrast, Dobbin, Kim and Kalev (2011) highlight the harmful effects of negative experiences, such as discrimination or exclusion, on the perception of diversity efforts by employees. Such negative encounters can fuel scepticism and undermine confidence in an organisation's commitment to supporting a diverse and inclusive environment.

Employees who have had positive diversity experiences are more likely to actively participate in diversity initiatives and support the organisation's diversity goals (Fujimoto & Härtel, 2017). On the other hand, episodes of discrimination or exclusion can undermine team morale and cohesion and hinder collaboration and innovation (Dobbin *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, companies must prioritise creating an inclusive environment where all employees feel valued and respected, as positive personal experiences are important factors in employee engagement and diversity and inclusion efforts.

## **2.6 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT AND EMPLOYEE JOB SATISFACTION**

Diversity management has become a central aspect of organisational strategy and aims not only to promote fairness and equality but also to increase employee satisfaction and organisational performance. Research by Cox and Blake (1991)

highlights that diversity management initiatives, such as inclusive leadership training and diversity awareness programmes, go a long way toward creating an environment where employees feel valued and included wherever they are. According to a study by Strydom and Erwee (1998), diverse, effectively managed, and inclusive teams have higher levels of creativity, innovation, and performance. By leveraging the unique perspectives and talents of team members from diverse backgrounds, diversity management promotes a culture of collaboration and mutual respect, thereby increasing overall employee job satisfaction (Strydom & Erwee, 1998).

Hays-Thomas (2016) is of the opinion that organisations that prioritise diversity and inclusion have higher levels of employee engagement and loyalty. By fostering a sense of belonging and value, diversity management initiatives help create a positive organisation where employees feel motivated to do their best, leading to greater employee satisfaction and retention.

## **2.7 DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT IN THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY**

The tourism industry, characterised by a multicultural workforce and diverse customer base, presents unique challenges and opportunities when it comes to managing diversity (Madera, Yang, Wu & Ma, 2023). In South Africa, a country known for its cultural diversity and complex history, diversity management in the tourism sector is of particular importance.

Diversity management in South Africa's travel industry has seen progress in recent years, yet significant challenges remain. A report by Grant Thornton (2018) highlighted that nearly half of the businesses in the travel sector were black owned, reflecting efforts toward inclusivity within the industry. However, earlier research by Strydom and Erwee (1998) revealed that while companies recognized the benefits of diversity, many were slow to implement strategies to optimize its potential. More recently, African tourism businesses have started redefining luxury travel by moving beyond traditional safari experiences to offer more diverse and inclusive itineraries (Skift, 2023). Despite such developments, a poll conducted by Business Travel Show Europe (2023) indicated that 66% of travel programs lacked provisions for LGBTQ+ travelers, over half did not cater to solo female travelers, and 41% failed to consider travelers with disabilities. These findings underscore the need for comprehensive diversity

management strategies to address the evolving needs of South Africa's diverse population and international clientele.

Kalargyrou and Costen (2017) conducted a case study on an international hotel chain's diversity programme to underscore the significance of leadership commitment, employee engagement, and organisational culture in advancing diversity and inclusion initiatives. By fostering a culture built on respect, fairness, and equal opportunity, the hotel chain achieved notable enhancements in employee morale, guest satisfaction, and brand reputation.

Similarly, diversity initiatives within the airline industry have been widely studied (Kalargyrou & Costen, 2017). For instance, Manoharan et al. (2024) analysed diversity management practices at South African Airways (SAA). The study highlighted the role of diversity training, employee resource groups, and task forces in fostering cultural awareness, reducing bias, and encouraging collaboration among employees from diverse backgrounds. However, while these initiatives reportedly led to greater employee engagement and improved service delivery, it is important to approach such findings with a critical lens. SAA's history of financial instability and repeated bailouts raises questions about the overall effectiveness of its organisational practices. While the airline's diversity efforts may serve as useful benchmarks, they must be contextualised within the broader challenges that affected its operational sustainability. This highlights the need for a balanced evaluation of diversity initiatives, ensuring that their impact is assessed alongside other critical organisational outcomes.

## **2.8 RESEARCH GAP**

### **2.8.1 Limited focus on the tourism sector**

Much of the research on diversity management focuses on general organisational contexts. This leaves a gap in understanding how these strategies work, specifically within the unique dynamics of the South African tourism industry (Otake-Ebede, 2019).

### **2.8.2 Insufficient consideration of cultural context**

The existing literature may not adequately address the impact of South Africa's cultural context on employees' perceptions of diversity management. There are research gaps regarding the influence of cultural intricacies on the effectiveness of diversity strategies (Bührmann & Schönwälder, 2017).

### **2.8.3 Neglect of intersectionality**

There is a gap in the literature regarding the intersectionality of employee identities and how these intersecting identities influence perceptions of diversity management. For example, Crenshaw's (1989) research highlights the importance of considering intersectionality such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status to understand experiences of discrimination and privilege. Future research could delve deeper into how these intersecting identities influence perceptions of diversity management strategies.

### **2.8.4 No comparative analysis**

There is a gap in the literature regarding the effectiveness of various diversity management strategies in the South African tourism industry. Benchmarking can reveal best practices and opportunities for improvement. For example, the study by Shore *et al.* (2011) highlights the importance of contextualising diversity management strategies within specific organisational and sectoral contexts to determine their effectiveness.

### **2.8.5 Inadequate leadership review**

The literature does not comprehensively examine the role of managers in promoting or hindering positive perceptions of diversity management. A study of management practices and behaviour could fill this gap. A study by Rynes *et al.* (2001) discusses the key role of managers in successfully implementing diversity strategies and supporting an inclusive work environment.

## **2.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

Chapter 2 discussed the literature review on diversity management and diversity management strategies, as well as employees' perceptions of diversity management.

The literature review examined global perspectives on diversity management, its implementation in South African organisations, and its impact on organisational culture and employee perceptions. Gaps identified in the literature included the neglect of intersectionality in employee identity, a lack of comparative analyses of diversity management strategies in the tourism sector, and insufficient consideration of the role of managers in promoting diversity. By bridging these gaps and synthesising relevant theoretical and empirical knowledge, this chapter lays the foundation for an empirical investigation of employee perceptions of diversity management strategies in a South African travel agency.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter deals with a discussion of the research methodology, sharing information on the chosen research design and sampling methods. The discussion includes the selected data collection and analysis methods. It also provides the theoretical reasoning for the choice of each method and technique, and the ethical conduct followed throughout the research process of this study.

A research methodology refers to how the research process was undertaken, indicating the theoretical and philosophical assumptions followed in selecting the data collection and analysis methods plus the techniques (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2023). A research methodology can be quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods. The quantitative research methodology is chosen when a study seeks to test hypotheses and make predictions using measurable variables and statistics techniques (Powoh, 2016). The qualitative research methodology focuses on gathering information on people's experiences and it applies subjectivity to obtain an in-depth understanding of the explored concepts (Powoh, 2016). When the mixed methods research methodology is used, the researcher combines quantitative and qualitative sampling, while quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods are also combined (Hafsa, 2019). This means quantitative research methodology focuses on objectivity, qualitative focuses on subjectivity, and the mixed methods research methodology assumes there is a balance between objectivity and subjectivity in research.

A qualitative research methodological approach was followed in this study because it aimed to collect information concerning the perceptions of participants and their feelings about diversity management strategies at a South African travel company (Ugwu & Eze-Val, 2023). This methodological approach allows for the collection of qualitative data that will provide an in-depth understanding of the explored research problem (Aspers & Corte, 2019).

The study focused on acquiring an in-depth understanding of the association between diversity management and employee engagement, productivity, and retention, which was achieved in an exploratory manner made possible using the qualitative research methodological approach. The qualitative research methodology was suitable because it helps to achieve a deep understanding of complex concepts associated with people's everyday realities (Oranga & Matere, 2023). This is the case in this study where employees are faced with issues of diversity and the managers must constantly find ways to ensure that their diversity management strategies remain effective.

### **3.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH SETTING**

The South African travel company under study is a travel company based in Durban, South Africa, which provides services that are exclusively Business-to-Business (B2B), including an Inbound Tour Operator and Ground Handler for expertise and advice when travelling to Southern Africa. The company specialises in both tailor-made and group travel. The South African travel company was acquired by one of South Africa's biggest companies, allowing for a more diversified and successful company. At the time of the data collection, the company had 200 employees.

### **3.3 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY**

A research philosophy is the researcher's belief about how data must be collected, analysed, and used to add value to existing knowledge in a particular field of study (Mauthner, 2020). Research philosophies serve to provide theories concerning the nature of the investigated reality in research and about how knowledge of reality is produced as well as justified (Mauthner, 2020). The dominating research philosophies in research are positivism, post-positivism, and interpretivism (Gannon, Taheri & Azer, 2022).

Positivism assumes that there is a single objective truth that is independent and self-governing; this means there is factual knowledge that is gained through observations and measurements (Blackwell, 2018). Post-positivism holds the belief that there is objectivity and generalisability in research; however, it argues that human experience that cannot be observed is also important, and that human behaviour can provide valuable knowledge (Maksimović & Evtimov, 2023). Interpretivism is concerned with

gathering information from people's experiences and constructing interpretations within a particular social context, to obtain an in-depth understanding (Ma & Ma, 2022).

In this study, the interpretivism research philosophy was adopted because the study focuses on obtaining an in-depth understanding of the experiences of participants concerning diversity management strategies. This is because interpretivism considers that the world is complex, and people's experiences and their explanations of those experiences are also complex (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020).

The phenomenon of diversity was employed because this study is complex, as well as the associations between diversity management strategies and their association with employee engagement, productivity, and retention. The perceptions of employees at a South African travel company concerning diversity management strategies and how they affected employee engagement, productivity and retention were analysed, and the results were interpreted according to identified themes. These themes are discussed as the researcher interprets the results and develops research findings in the next chapter.

### **3.3.1 Research design**

A research design is a strategy applied to conduct a study. It outlines the logical plan followed to reach a study's primary and secondary research objectives, giving details on how the data was collected, analysed, and interpreted (Khanday & Khanam, 2019).

In qualitative research, the following research designs can be used: ethnographic design, grounded theory, action research, phenomenological research, and narrative research (Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022; Ntinda, 2020; Oranga & Gisore, 2023; Ugwu & Eze-Val, 2023). The research design applied in this study was phenomenological research, and it was cross-sectional because the data was collected at one point and there were exclusion and inclusion criteria for the participants (Setia, 2016). The data for this study was collected at a single point in time through semi-structured interviews, where audio recordings were also made. The benefit of the phenomenological research design is that it describes the situation and then data is collected about people's experiences, which allows for an in-depth understanding of the explored phenomenon (Ugwu & Eze-Val, 2023).

A researcher must apply a reduction process to ensure that no bias emanates from prior assumptions and prejudices about the phenomenon, which may dilute or pollute the interpretation of the analysed results (Umanailo, 2019). Accordingly, no prior assumptions were allowed to result in bias in the interpretation of the results of the data that was collected in this study concerning diversity management strategies' effectiveness and their association with employee engagement, productivity, and retention. Overall, the phenomenological research design aided in describing the status concerning diversity management strategies and in obtaining an understanding of how they impacted employee engagement, productivity, and retention at a South African travel company. It further assisted in gathering insights from the employees, which helped to generate awareness about diversity management strategies' efficacy.

### **3.4 SAMPLING**

Sampling refers to the process of selecting a subset of the population that represents the target population (Bhardwaj, 2019). Sampling is performed because usually data cannot be collected from the entire population, and through sampling researchers save time and costs while the results are obtained faster because the data is more manageable (Bhardwaj, 2019). Sampling can be performed using probability or non-probability sampling methods.

Probability sampling entails using systematic and statistical techniques that ensure all units in a target population have an equal chance of being selected (Stratton, 2023). Non-probability sampling applies subjective selection techniques in the selection of units for participation in the study (Stratton, 2023). The sampling method applied in this study was non-probability sampling because non-random techniques for the selection of participants were applied (Verma *et al.*, 2017).

Types of non-probability sampling techniques include purposive, convenience, and quota sampling (Vehovar, Toepoel & Steinmetz, 2016). Purposive sampling is applied when potential research participants are identified to be rich in the information needed to achieve a study's aim and objectives, addressing the investigated research problem (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). Convenience sampling refers to when a researcher selects units from the target population based on various criteria that include potential participants being easy to access; geographical proximity; availability of potential

participants at a given time that is suitable for data collection; or their willingness to participate (Etikan *et al.*, 2016). Quota sampling entails setting fixed targets for segments of a target population, based on attributes such as age and gender; therefore, selecting potential participants based on predetermined criteria or quotas (Ebenezer & Piate, 2023).

The non-probability sampling technique used in this study was purposive sampling, which involved judging potential participants to have the information needed to address the research problem of the study (Verma *et al.*, 2017). The potential participants of this study were selected because the employees were believed to have information on diversity management at a South African travel company, as well as perceptions about the efficacy of the applied diversity management strategies. These participants were selected because the researcher had access to them and was aware that they possessed the necessary information to achieve this study's aim and objectives.

The recruitment of potential participants followed the guidelines of Negrin, Slaughter, Dahlke, and Olson (2022). Meetings were set with the leadership of the organisation regarding this study. Upon receiving approval from the University of the Free State and the South African travel company's management, meetings were organised with employees to brief them on the study. The potential participants were notified why their contribution would be valuable and ethical issues were addressed to protect the participants from harm. Those who were interested in participating were asked to contact the researcher privately to ensure confidentiality. The details of the ethical considerations are discussed in Section 3.6.

The characteristics used as inclusion criteria were the following: different occupational levels; varied racial backgrounds; LGBTQIA+ identities; and genders. With a target population of 200, a sample of 15 participants was selected at a South African travel company. Exclusion criteria were employees who had worked for the South African travel company for less than six months at the time of data collection.

Purposive sampling was the relevant technique because of the sensitivity of the data collected in this study; it was also chosen because it includes the behavioural attributes of people (Obilor, 2023). Behavioural attributes affect the culture in the

workplace when it comes to embracing diversity, especially the behaviours of leaders. Leaders are important because they are ambassadors and facilitators of the culture of diversity in a workplace (Molla & Shawlin, 2023).

Data saturation was the determinant of the final sample size, which was reached after interviewing 15 participants. Data saturation refers to the stage in the data collection and analysis preparation where the researcher observes that new information would not provide any more value-producing insights into the study's findings and conclusions (Naeem, Ozuem, Howell & Ranfagni, 2024). Moreover, it is important to highlight that the selected travel company was chosen based on a personal contact who brought to the researcher's attention the need for a scholarly examination of diversity management issues within the organisation. This investigation was deemed necessary to address these challenges and enhance the company's business performance.

#### **3.4.1 Ensuring the quality and rigor of the research**

To uphold the quality and rigour of the research, various methods were utilised. Peer debriefing and member checking were integrated throughout the research process, as recommended by Treharne and Riggs (2015). Furthermore, reflexivity was employed to address potential biases, in line with the guidance of Johnson et al. (2020). The principles of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, as established by Lincoln and Guba (1985), were also adopted to enhance the trustworthiness of the study. Credibility was ensured by accurately representing the findings and the phenomenon under investigation. The richness of the data and results enhances the potential for the study to be transferable to similar future research endeavours.

### **3.5 DATA COLLECTION METHODS**

In qualitative research, primary data can be collected using three main methods: interviews, focus groups, and observations (Busetto, Wick & Gumbinger, 2020). Interviews entail collecting data by asking questions, where there are two or more people involved and an interviewer is asking the questions (Taherdoost, 2021). The interviewees were a total of 15 employees from the Durban branch of the South African travel company – the final sample size was determined by data saturation, as indicated in Section 3.3.

Interviews are categorised as follows (Taherdoost, 2021):

- Structured – standardised questions are asked.
- Semi-structured – an interview guide is used during interview sessions but there is flexibility because of open-ended questions that allow for conversational discussions.
- Unstructured – informal interview sessions are held and there is no specific structure, and the conversations are casual.

Focus group discussions are settings where four to eight people have a collective conversation that is led by the researcher and guided by pre-set questions, allowing participants to share their viewpoints, experiences, and perceptions about a particular topic (Manzano, 2023). Observations refer to a qualitative data method that involves one person observing research units and recording the information, which is performed within the natural setting of the participants, and following guidelines (Kumar, 2022).

In this study, data was collected at one point through semi-structured interviews, and the interview guide consisted of a series of open-ended questions that promoted dialogue. The development of the semi-structured interview guide was carefully informed by an extensive review of the literature on diversity management. The process began by identifying key concepts that are central to diversity management, as highlighted in previous research studies. These concepts included topics such as employees' perceptions of diversity policies, the inclusivity of workplace environments, the impact of leadership on diversity initiatives, and the challenges and opportunities associated with managing diverse teams. The questions were designed to be open-ended to allow participants to share their experiences and perspectives freely, thereby encouraging rich and nuanced responses. The goal was to ensure that the interview guide was comprehensive yet flexible, enabling the exploration of diverse viewpoints while maintaining alignment with the objectives of the study. By grounding the interview guide in established literature, this study ensured that the questions were both relevant and capable of generating insights that contribute to the broader understanding of diversity management in the workplace. Semi-structured interviews allow for exploration because of the open-ended questions and the conversational

approach; this means participants can ask questions for clarity while they can also elaborate on their answers (Ruslin *et al.*, 2022). Compared to structured and unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews are flexible and adaptable, while they allow for the acquiring of in-depth information from participants because they can elaborate on their answers (Ruslin *et al.*, 2022).

To accommodate all attendees, meeting invitations were sent out through an Outlook calendar that featured a selection of dates suitable for everyone. Participants are expected to provide consent before semi-structured interviews start. Recordings are also valuable reference tools used during the data analysis process. The benefit of using audio recordings is that more information is captured as opposed to a written text, which means there is an increase in the research rigour of a study and its validity (Rutakumwa *et al.*, 2020). Throughout the data analysis process, the researcher can also play back the recordings and ensure that no information is omitted. In this study one of the 15 participants did not consent to being recorded, so the provided answers were written on the interview guide by the researcher.

### **3.6 DATA ANALYSIS**

The analysis of qualitative data is rigorous, systematic, organised, and iterative; additionally, because of the amount of detail produced, it is usually time-consuming and could be overwhelming (Ravitch & Carl, 2019).

A data analysis strategy that promotes transparency and ensures the trustworthiness of a qualitative study is memoing, which is a process that entails the recording of thoughts and taking notes throughout a study (Bingham, 2023). This means the researcher will not disregard any information and they will take note of extra information that was not anticipated. Although there is automated software that can be used to analyse qualitative data, the fundamental principle is the same, which is the identification of patterns or common themes (Archer, 2018). The process involves the breaking down of all the data into smallest parts (codes), followed by re-structuring and grouping the codes into categories that are referred to as themes (Archer, 2018).

Data analysis was performed by following the thematic analysis process, which was performed after the qualitative data had been transcribed. Analysing qualitative data involves carefully examining the data set and identifying patterns that reveal

underlying themes. This process requires the researcher to reflect on their subjective experience as they make sense of the data (Nieman, 2023). The process includes the identification of codes, which are then used to identify themes, and the results are discussed according to the identified themes (Kampira & Meyer, 2019).

Upon reviewing the literature, Naeem, Ozuem, Howell & Ranfagni (2023) recommend the following thematic analysis steps, which were applied in this study:

- Step 1 was transcription, where the researcher familiarised themselves with the data as well as selecting quotes.
- Step 2 was keyword selection where recurring words were identified.
- Step 3 was coding, and it involved assigning segments of data that captured the core message of the data.
- Step 4 was theme development, and it entailed the organisation of codes into meaningful groups and identifying associations.
- Step 5 was the conceptualisation that involved the interpretation of keywords, codes, and themes.
- Step 6 was the development of a conceptual model, which determines whether the study has succeeded in answering its research questions and highlighting the study's contribution to existing knowledge.

The predetermined main themes obtained in this study included the identification of applied diversity management strategies; the association between diversity management and employee engagement, productivity, and retention; and the recommendations of the participants concerning changes that should be made by the travel company for the diversity management strategies to be more effective.

### **3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Researchers are required to consider ethical issues that may arise at any point during the research process. This is because a study's participants might potentially be exposed to psychological, financial, or social harm (Rana, Dilshad & Ahsan, 2021). Ethics are also referred to as moral philosophy and that means researchers are

entrusted with the responsibility to make sure that participants' rights are protected, and they must also build trusted relationships with the participants (Rana *et al.*, 2021).

Overall, researchers are expected to demonstrate research integrity, which is a set of overarching ethical principles that include honesty, openness, objectivity, fairness, and accountability (Miller, Moore & Eden, 2023). These are ethical norms or standards of behaviour that result in scholars trusting each other's studies as well as society trusting research findings (Miller *et al.*, 2023).

The participants in this study might be treated unfairly if the managers and employees discovered how they truly felt about diversity and diversity management strategies at the organisation. This might lead to dissatisfaction because of the discrimination that might result at the workplace. The worst-case scenario is that there might be unfair dismissals of some employees because they participated in this study and because of their perceptions of the implemented diversity management strategies. When a study is conducted and information is collected from human subjects, they must be protected from any form of harm. According to Arifin (2018), the protection of a study's participants is more important in qualitative research because of the depth of information provided by participants.

In this study, the researcher did not use any speech that might disempower or demean the participants during the briefing, as well as during the semi-structured interview sessions. Also, the participants were allowed to communicate without hindrance, intervention, or any fear of intimidation (Mirza, Bellalem & Morza, 2023).

Accordingly, the actions that were taken to ensure that this study was conducted ethically are shared in the sub-sections to follow.

### **3.7.1 Informed consent**

Before conducting any activity involving the participants, a thorough and detailed notification is to be sent to everyone, outlining the purpose, nature, and scope of the activity. This provides each participant with a clear understanding of the expectations and potential outcomes of their involvement. This process is followed to ensure that the participants are fully informed and engaged in the activity and that their consent

was explicitly obtained; therefore, ensuring that interactions with participants are transparent, respectful, and fully informed.

Informed consent is an ethical requirement when research involving a collection of data is conducted, and it is also a legal requirement where the researcher must be transparent about the study and avoid deception of the participants (Sindhuri & Dongre, 2023). The informed consent document for this study indicated that each participant understands what the study is about, why their contribution is valuable, and the potential risks of taking part in the study.

### **3.7.2 Confidentiality and privacy**

To ensure the confidentiality of the participants, their names or any other personal information were not recorded. Instead, each participant was assigned a unique identifier ranging from Participant 1 to Participant 15. This is for the protection of the participant's privacy and to ensure that their identity is not revealed in any way. Further, there is no mention of any personal or work information of the participants in this study in the final report that would lead to their identification (Lachlan, 2017).

### **3.7.3 The right to withdraw**

As part of the informed consent process, the participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study without any negative consequences or penalties. They were provided with clear instructions on how to begin the process to withdraw and who to contact if they had any questions or concerns. The participants were also reassured that their decision to withdraw from the study would not affect their relationship with the researcher or the institution. Moreover, any issues related to confidentiality and data privacy were addressed and clarified to ensure that the withdrawal process would be smooth and secure.

### **3.7.4 UFS Ethics Committee**

To ensure that a research process adheres to ethical standards, the University of the Free State has an Ethics Committee. The research proposal was submitted to the Committee so that it could ensure that the research was conducted in a manner that was ethical and fair to all the parties involved.

### **3.7.5 Safekeeping**

The University of the Free State Business School holds the exclusive copyright ownership of all data recordings and transcriptions, which are meticulously generated and maintained to ensure the highest standards of accuracy and completeness. The collected data and confidential information about the participants will be kept in a safe for at least five years at the University. The documents will then be destroyed to avoid compromising the privacy of the participants and their confidentiality.

### **3.8 DISSEMINATION OF THE FINDINGS**

The findings of this study are compiled in this report and will be made publicly available by the University of Free State. The researcher will also write a journal article for publication.

### **3.9 CONCLUSION**

This chapter provided details on the research methodology, design, and philosophical assumptions of the study. It also discussed the data collection and analysis methods as well as why they were relevant, compared to other methods. The chapter also gave details on the ethical conduct adopted throughout the research process of the study, indicating how the participants were protected from any form of harm.

In the next chapter, the results are shared and discussed in a way whereby they are compared to existing knowledge in the literature.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter covered the research methodology and design, whereas this chapter focusses on the data analysis. Data analysis entails organizing, analyzing, and extracting meaning from research data. The study used Bengtsson's (2016) thematic analysis method to record the interviews, transcribe them, and thoroughly review them.

Thematic analysis is a thorough technique of discovering, evaluating, and reporting themes that arise from qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Maziriri, Madinga & Lose, 2017; Muposhi, 2015; Muposhi, Dhurup & Surujlal, 2015). Thematic analysis was chosen as the basic approach for this qualitative analysis as it matched the exploratory nature of the research (Maziriri *et al.*, 2017). This rigorous process enables researchers to thoroughly review interview transcripts and uncover relevant themes (Glesne, 2011; Maziriri *et al.*, 2017; Muposhi, 2015; Muposhi, Dhurup & Surujlal, 2015). Researchers utilizing thematic analysis must choose from a few methodologies that can differ greatly in their conceptualizations of qualitative research, knowledge production, and essential categories such as themes (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

#### 4.2 PARTICIPANTS' DEMOGRAPHIC BACKGROUNDS

Table 4.1 offers a full overview of the study participants' demographic characteristics, highlighting the diversity of gender, age, race, and tenure within the sample. The gender distribution reveals a predominance of female participants, with 11 out of 15 identifying as female. Moreover, the sample's gender distribution is diverse, with a variety of gender identities represented. Out of the 15 participants, 11 are female, three are male, and one identifies as LGBTQIA+. This broad mix of gender identities provides a wide range of perspectives and experiences, deepening the understanding of the research issue. The inclusion of alternative gender identities enriches the analysis by adding diverse opinions; however, the dominant female representation should be considered when interpreting the results.

The age distribution of the participants is divided into two groups: six participants are aged between 18 and 35, and nine are between 35 and 65 years old. This age split ensures a range of viewpoints from both younger and more experienced employees. The inclusion of a larger number of more seasoned employees (ages 35 to 65) could provide valuable insights into long-term experiences with diversity management strategies, while younger participants offer emerging views and expectations.

In terms of racial composition, the participants demonstrate significant diversity. There are seven black participants, one Coloured participant, four Indian participants, and three white participants, reflecting South Africa's multicultural landscape. The majority representation of black individuals aligns with the country's demographic makeup, enhancing the study's ability to capture diverse experiences and attitudes towards diversity management across different racial backgrounds.

The participants' tenure with the company varies widely, ranging from less than one year to over ten years. Specifically, there are two participants with less than one year of experience, six with one to five years, four with six to years, and three with more than ten years.

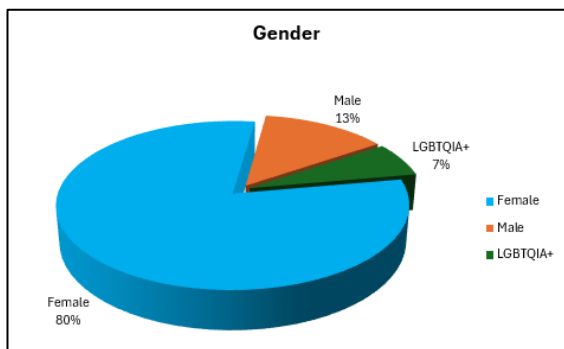
This broad tenure range ensures a mix of perspectives from newer and more established employees, crucial for understanding how perceptions of diversity management may evolve over time. New employees may have different expectations and experiences compared to longer-tenured employees, providing a comprehensive view of diversity strategies at different career stages.

The diverse demographic profile of the participants enriches the study by offering nuanced insights into how different groups perceive and experience diversity management strategies. This diversity of perspectives is essential for developing a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness and impact of these strategies across various segments of the workforce.

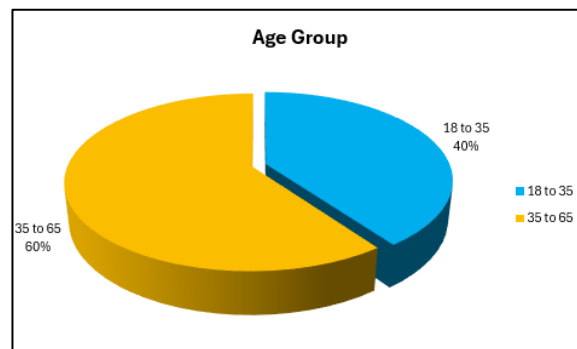
**Table 4.1: The participants' demographic characteristics**

Participant	Gender	Age Group	Race	Years with Company
Participant 1	Female	18 to 35	Black	1 to 5 years
Participant 2	Female	35 to 65	Black	Over 10 years
Participant 3	Male	18 to 35	Black	1 to 5 years
Participant 4	LGBTQIA+	18 to 35	Black	1 to 5 years
Participant 5	Female	35 to 65	Black	Over 10 years
Participant 6	Female	35 to 65	White	Over 10 years
Participant 7	Female	35 to 65	Indian	Over 10 years
Participant 8	Female	35 to 65	Indian	1 to 5 years
Participant 9	Female	35 to 65	White	6 to 10 years
Participant 10	Female	18 to 35	Black	Less than 1 year
Participant 11	Female	35 to 65	Coloured	6 to 10 years
Participant 12	Female	35 to 65	White	6 to 10 years
Participant 13	Female	18 to 35	Black	1 to 5 years
Participant 14	Male	18 to 35	Indian	Less than 1 year
Participant 15	Female	35 to 65	Indian	1 to 5 years

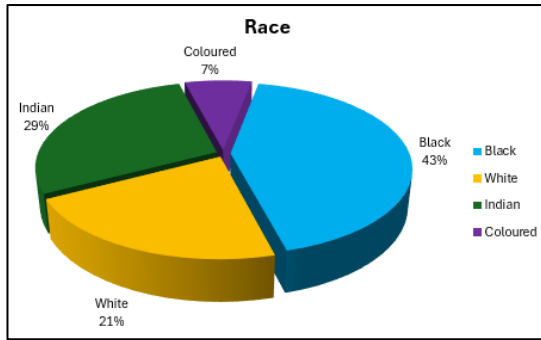
Source: Author's own compilation



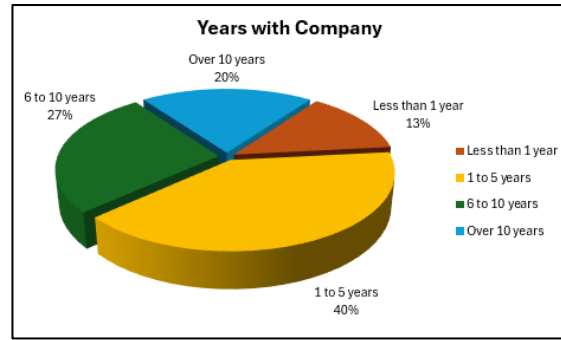
Source: Field data (2024)  
**Figure 4.1: Gender**



Source: Field data (2024)  
**Figure 4.2: Age group**



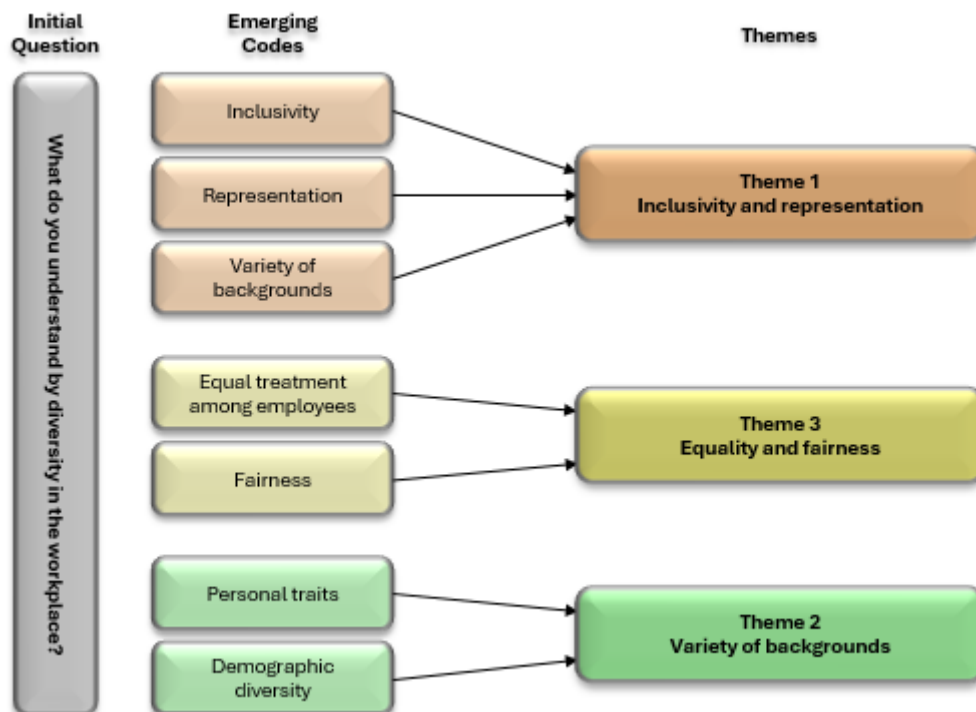
Source: Field data (2024)  
**Figure 4.3: Race**



Source: Field data (2024)  
**Figure 4.4: Years with company**

### 4.3 THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPANTS' UNDERSTANDING OF DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

The individual interviews were analysed to identify recurring themes. Table 4.2 below outlines the coding framework that informed the study's findings. It illustrates the initial question posed to a South African travel company employees regarding their understanding of diversity in the workplace. From this question, several codes emerged, which were developed using the three levels of meaning formation (Chinyamurindi *et al.*, 2021; McCormack, 2000; Nachmias and Nachmias, 1996).



Source: Field data (2024)

**Figure 4.5: Coding scheme for the meaning of diversity in the workplace**

Based on the participants' responses, three main themes emerged regarding their understanding of diversity in the workplace: inclusivity and representation, variety of backgrounds, and equality and fairness. Each theme is supported by direct quotes from the participants.

#### **4.3.1 Theme 1: Inclusivity and representation**

This theme focuses on the concept of workplace diversity, which involves incorporating individuals from a wide range of demographic backgrounds and ensuring that all viewpoints are heard.

The participants emphasized the significance of fostering an inclusive environment that recognizes and incorporates diverse groups. This sentiment is well-captured in the following comments:

“It’s basically about inclusivity in the workplace ... with you having people from different backgrounds, culture, different religions, different genders, racial groups ... and also people living with disabilities as well and also the individuals who have formed part of the LGBTQIA community.” [Participant 3]

Another participant explained that:

“... diversity we can say it’s about being inclusive; ensuring that we’ve got diverse representation um representing gender, race, sexual orientation and people living with disabilities as well.” [Participant 10]

This was supported by another participant, who stated:

“So, my understanding of diversity is basically um, various people from various backgrounds that includes um, cultural diversity, gender, age groups, sexual orientation ... social backgrounds ... religious beliefs, educational background, economical background.” [Participant 6]

#### **4.3.2 Theme 2: Variety of backgrounds**

This theme highlights the recognition of the various personal and social traits that individuals bring to a workplace. It underscores the importance of a broad spectrum of attributes, including race, culture, and gender, which enrich a diverse work environment.

This perspective is well-captured in the following statement:

“So, I would say diversity in the workplace is um, obviously people of different ages, different race groups, um, different like religious backgrounds, basically um, diverse different people.” [Participant 7]

Another participant said:

“Well, I can say diversity in the workplace refers to um, the individuals different backgrounds; it can be cultural, race, gender, age, disability or any other characteristics within the organization.” [Participant 4]

Moreover:

“So, it’s the variety of different kinds of people in the organization or in general. So, I would say it’s normally race, gender; lately more it’s gender identity, your sexual orientation, even age, disabilities, so those kind of things in the workplace.” [Participant 9]

#### **4.3.3 Theme 3: Equality and fairness**

This theme focuses on the idea that diversity encompasses not only acknowledging and incorporating different groups but also guaranteeing equitable and fair treatment for all individuals. It underscores the importance of organizational strategies and policies in advancing equality. This perspective is succinctly captured in the following supporting verbatim responses:

“Diversity for me it’s um, in the workplace it’s when like my company would have like um ... strategies um to benefit the company um and make sure that um they do leverage you know um and manage ... making sure we’ll see everyone is standing because um I would say an equal platform to me yeah equal, you say equal, yeah, equality more than anything else.” [Participant 5]

In addition:

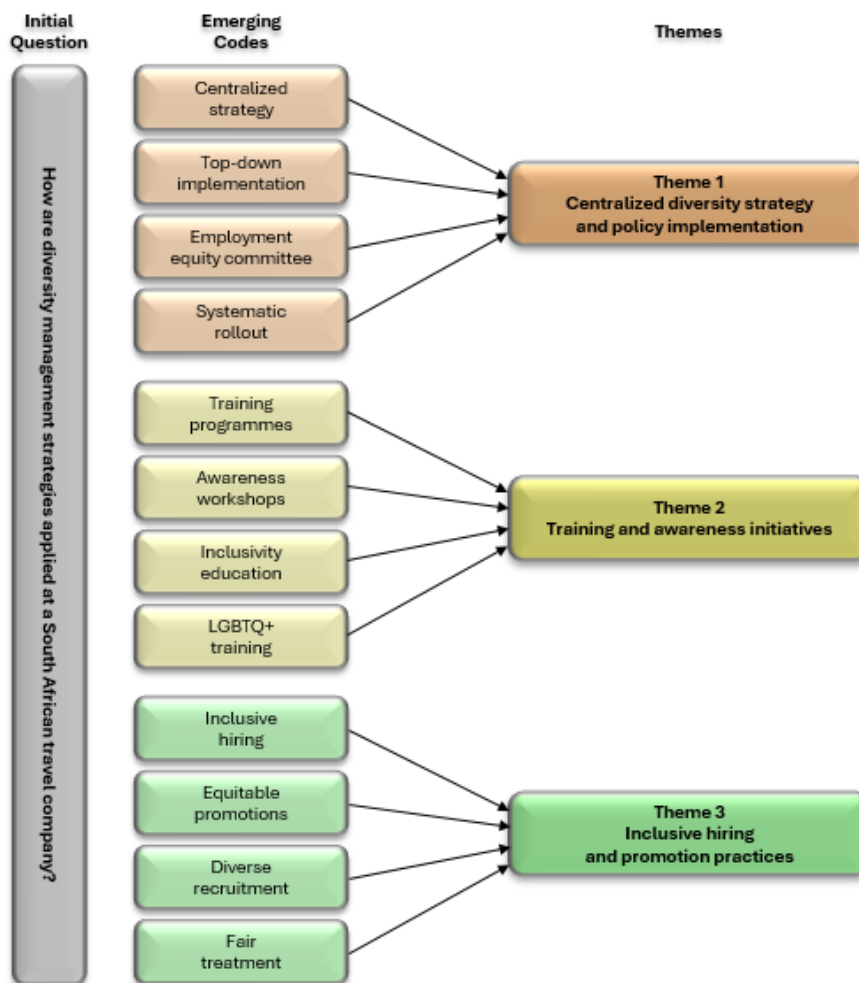
“... it provides an equal an opportunity for all workers, yes um, regardless their gender, religions, age, colour. That’s how I, I understand.” [Participant 13]

Also:

“... the reason why our policies within the workplace are you know really important is ... to ensure further that there is no employee within that particular category feels discriminated within the workplace.” [Participant 1]

#### 4.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS CENTRED ON HOW DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES ARE APPLIED AT A SOUTH AFRICAN TRAVEL COMPANY

The individual interviews were analyzed to identify key themes. Table 4.3 below outlines the coding framework that guided the study's findings. It details the initial question posed to South African travel company employees about how diversity management strategies are implemented at the organisation. From this question, several codes emerged, developed through the three levels of meaning formation (Chinyamurindi *et al.*, 2021; Nachmias and Nachmias, 2022; McCormack, 2000).



Source: Field data (2024)

**Figure 4.6: Coding scheme on how diversity management strategies are applied at a South African travel company**

Based on the participants' responses, a thematic analysis reveals three central themes regarding the application of diversity management strategies at a South African travel company. These themes collectively illustrate that the company implements diversity management strategies through centralized policy implementation, targeted training and awareness programmes, and inclusive hiring and promotion practices. This perception is supported by direct quotes.

#### **4.4.1 Theme 1: Centralized diversity strategy and policy implementation**

Several participants noted that diversity management strategies at the South African travel company are centrally developed and then implemented across various departments. These strategies are initiated by top management and are systematically rolled out to ensure consistency throughout the organization.

"The diversity strategy for that particular year ... it is centralized so it focuses from the top, predominantly if I could put it in that way, and then of course it is rolled out really in most cases." [Participant 1]

In addition:

"We've got an employment equity committee which meets regularly ... these meetings actually assist us in ensuring that we are actually diverse ... when it comes to being employment equity." [Participant 10]

#### **4.4.2 Theme 2: Training and awareness initiatives**

Training and awareness programmes are essential components of the diversity management strategy. The company organizes workshops and training sessions to educate employees on diversity, inclusivity, and specific topics like LGBTQ+ awareness. This demonstrates a dedication to creating an inclusive workplace through ongoing learning and involvement. This commitment is reflected in the following direct quotes:

"Recently we are now actively ... advocating having these ... inclusivity workshop where we obviously spoke about LGBTQI and just unpacking and understanding what it is." [Participant 4]

Additionally:

"There was an initiative for an inclusivity workshop which was for our management team ... to create awareness and train awareness."  
[Participant 7]

#### **4.4.3 Theme 3: Inclusive hiring and promotion practices**

The participants emphasized the importance of inclusive and equitable hiring and promotion practices. The company strives to promote diversity in recruitment and offers equal opportunities for advancement regardless of race, gender, or other personal attributes. This sentiment is reflected in the following direct quotes:

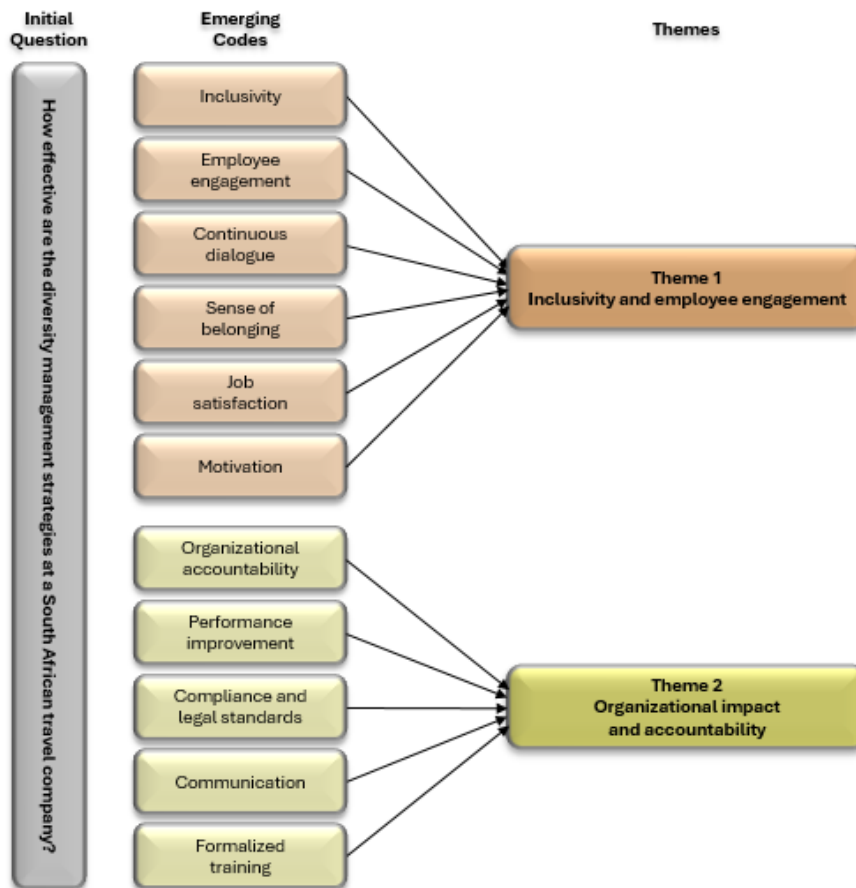
"We try to create a fair and healthy working environment where everyone is treated equally ... we try to mix employees from different religious backgrounds and different cultures." [Participant 3]

Another participant stated:

"In this last year we've seen a lot of promotions within our colour, different ethnic groups ... management is trying to develop and move away from the way things were to the new way it should be." [Participant 8]

#### **4.5 THEMATIC ANALYSIS ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES AT A SOUTH AFRICAN TRAVEL COMPANY**

The individual interviews were compared to identify key themes. Table 4.4 below shows the coding framework used in the study. It captures the responses of a South African travel company's employees on the effectiveness of diversity management strategies. Codes were developed based on the initial question, using three levels of meaning formation.



Source: Field data (2024)

**Figure 4.7: Coding scheme on the effectiveness of diversity management strategies at a South African travel company**

Based on the participants' responses, two central themes emerge regarding the effectiveness of diversity management strategies at a South African travel company: inclusivity and employee engagement, and organizational impact and accountability. In summary, the diversity management strategies at a South African travel company are considered effective in creating an inclusive work environment that enhances employee engagement and motivation. Additionally, these strategies have a significant impact on organizational practices, ensuring accountability and compliance, which contributes to the overall effectiveness and success of the company.

#### **4.5.1 Theme 1: Inclusivity and employee engagement**

This theme highlights the positive impact of diversity management strategies on fostering inclusivity and enhancing employee engagement.

The participants emphasized that these strategies have cultivated a work environment where employees feel valued, included, and motivated. This sentiment is reflected in the following direct quote:

"The workshops are effective and the constant conversations that are happening ... So, it's not just a secluded, just workshop and then done. So, it's a constant and like open dialogue that's happening." [Participant 4]

This emphasizes the continuous dialogue and workshops that assist employees in becoming more tolerant and open to diverse cultural beliefs; thereby, promoting an inclusive work environment.

Another participant noted:

"One of the most important things there is, you know, that motivates us as human beings is to belong to something. And I think within that diversity management strategy, to feel that you belong to something is definitely something that motivates a person." [Participant 6]

This response highlights the importance of a sense of belonging and inclusion as a key motivator for employees. It demonstrates how diversity management strategies could lead to increased job satisfaction and motivation. One respondent explained:

"A lot of people, um, in the office, they look forward to coming to the office ... I think everybody looks forward to the environment and no one's dreading coming there. So, I think automatically that gives you like, um, motivation to do your best." [Participant 7]

This demonstrates that the inclusive environment cultivated by diversity management strategies directly enhances employee motivation and productivity.

#### **4.5.2 Theme 2: Organizational impact and accountability**

This theme explores the extensive influence of diversity management strategies on organizational practices, such as communication, accountability, and overall performance. The participants highlighted the importance of these strategies in promoting fairness, improving organizational culture, and fostering accountability:

"So, I would create an implementation plan or implementation pillars, and every member of EXCO will be accountable for that ... We have a meeting every second week ... to give an update of that respective pillar and project." [Participant 1]

This response shows how systematic planning and accountability measures at the executive level help ensure the effective implementation of diversity strategies.

Another participant stated:

"So, another thing is that if we do not comply, we will be penalized. So, for example, when it comes to BEE purposes, our score will drop, and for employment equity, we won't pass our audits." [Participant 15]

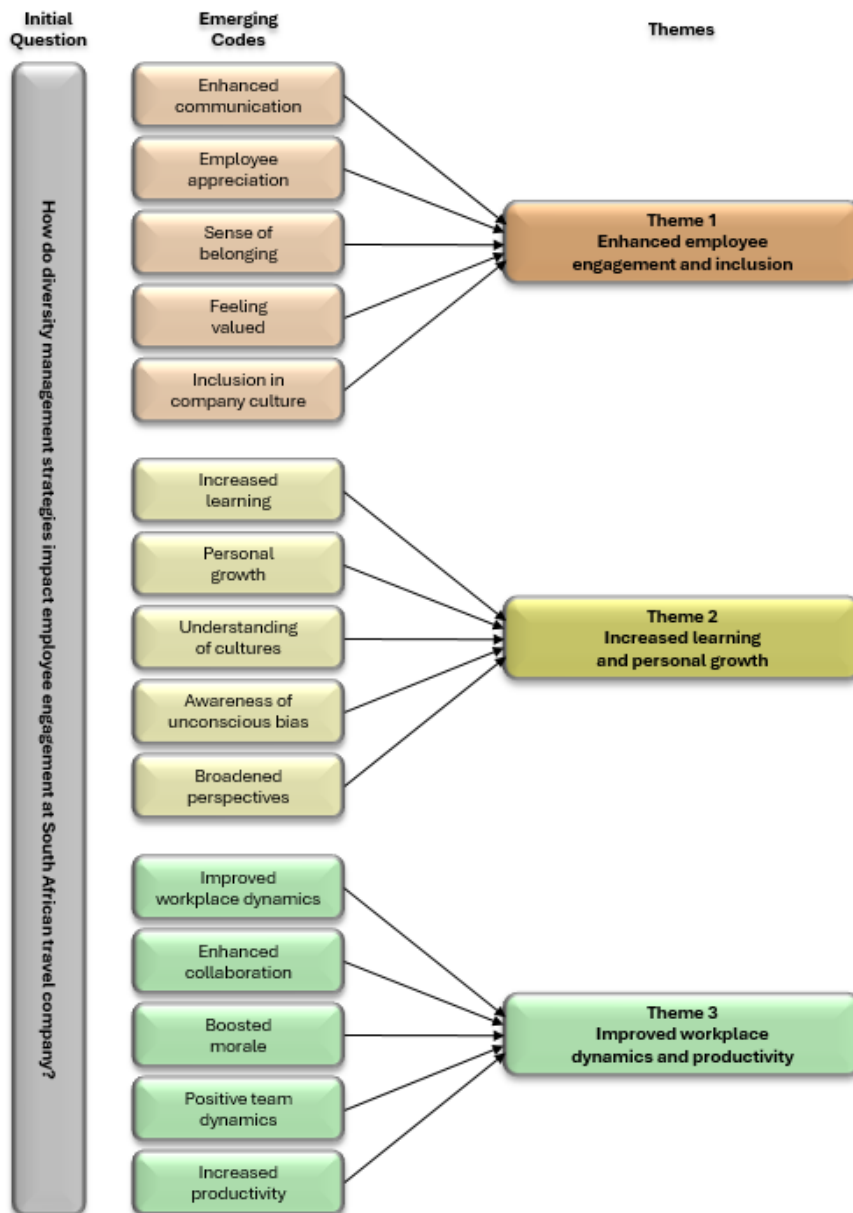
This indicates that compliance and accountability in diversity management are crucial for meeting legal and organizational standards; thus, affecting the company's overall performance and reputation. Participant 9 noted the following:

"We have now been able to have that training and have that formality come into place ... It has really helped our middle management level gain confidence ... in becoming more comfortable with engaging, collaborating." [Participant 9]

This highlights the positive impact of formalized diversity training on middle management, which in turn improves organizational culture and performance.

#### **4.6 THEMATIC ANALYSIS ON DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES IMPACTING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AT A SOUTH AFRICAN TRAVEL COMPANY**

The individual interviews were analyzed to identify key themes. Table 4.5 below shows the coding framework used to inform the study's findings. The Table represents the initial question asked to South African travel company employees about how diversity management strategies impact employee engagement. Several codes were created based on this question, following the three levels of meaning formation (Chinyamurindi *et al.*, 2021; McCormack, 2000; Nachmias and Nachmias, 1996).



Source: Field data (2024)

**Figure 4.8: Coding scheme on diversity management strategies impacting employee engagement at a South African travel company**

The identified themes demonstrate that diversity management strategies at a South African travel company have had a positive impact on employee engagement, personal development, and workplace productivity. The emphasis on inclusion, learning, and enhanced dynamics has fostered a more supportive and efficient working environment. These themes are elaborated on in the following sections:

#### **4.6.1 Theme 1: Enhanced Employee Engagement and Inclusion**

The implementation of diversity management strategies has significantly improved employee engagement by fostering an inclusive and supportive work environment. The employees feel valued and respected, which enhances their connection to their roles and the company.

This theme is supported by the following verbatim responses:

"Through constant reassurance and keeping lines of communication open, and just being transparent with employees, I found that it has helped to sort of overcome that burden." [Participant 1]

Participant 4 explained:

"I have been validated and always shown appreciation ... you feel so valid and seen." [Participant 4]

Additionally:

"I feel very happy to be here and I'm very happy to be here ... I feel like I'm part of the company that is now like a family for me." [Participant 8]

Moreover:

"It's so important that employees feel included and valued ... when you feel included, you get involved in diversity management, you become part of the company culture." [Participant 11]

#### **4.6.2 Theme 2: Increased learning and personal growth**

This theme highlights how diversity management strategies have led to increased learning opportunities and personal growth for the employees. The employees have gained a deeper understanding of different cultures and practices, which has improved their interpersonal skills and broadened their perspectives. The following direct quotes illustrate this:

"I've learned a lot ... I sort of know ... I learned so much, like I walk out of there like, oh my gosh, because sometimes you're nervous and you're like, I don't want to ask because I mean this person might think I'm being facetious." [Participant 15]

Participant 9 noted:

"I've learned a lot more ... the word unconscious bias and how it can be perceived ... it is such an important lesson." [Participant 9]

Participant 6 stated:

"I definitely have a different approach to social diversity ... it's thanks to that the company is actually exposing us to do that." [Participant 6]

#### **4.6.3 Improved workplace dynamics and productivity**

This theme highlights the positive impact of the strategies on workplace dynamics by fostering open dialogue, minimizing resistance, and promoting collaboration. Consequently, it has resulted in improved teamwork, boosted morale, and enhanced productivity. These concepts are encapsulated in the following remarks:

"The working environment is healthy ... everything is done in a transparent way, so nothing is done behind closed doors." [Participant 3]

Another participant said:

"The diversity at work makes things exciting ... you never get bored, you never get complacent, and work doesn't become mundane." [Participant 7]

Another participant supported this by saying:

"It has created awareness on making sure that there is a strong sense of inclusion ... making sure that staff feel very much included." [Participant 5]

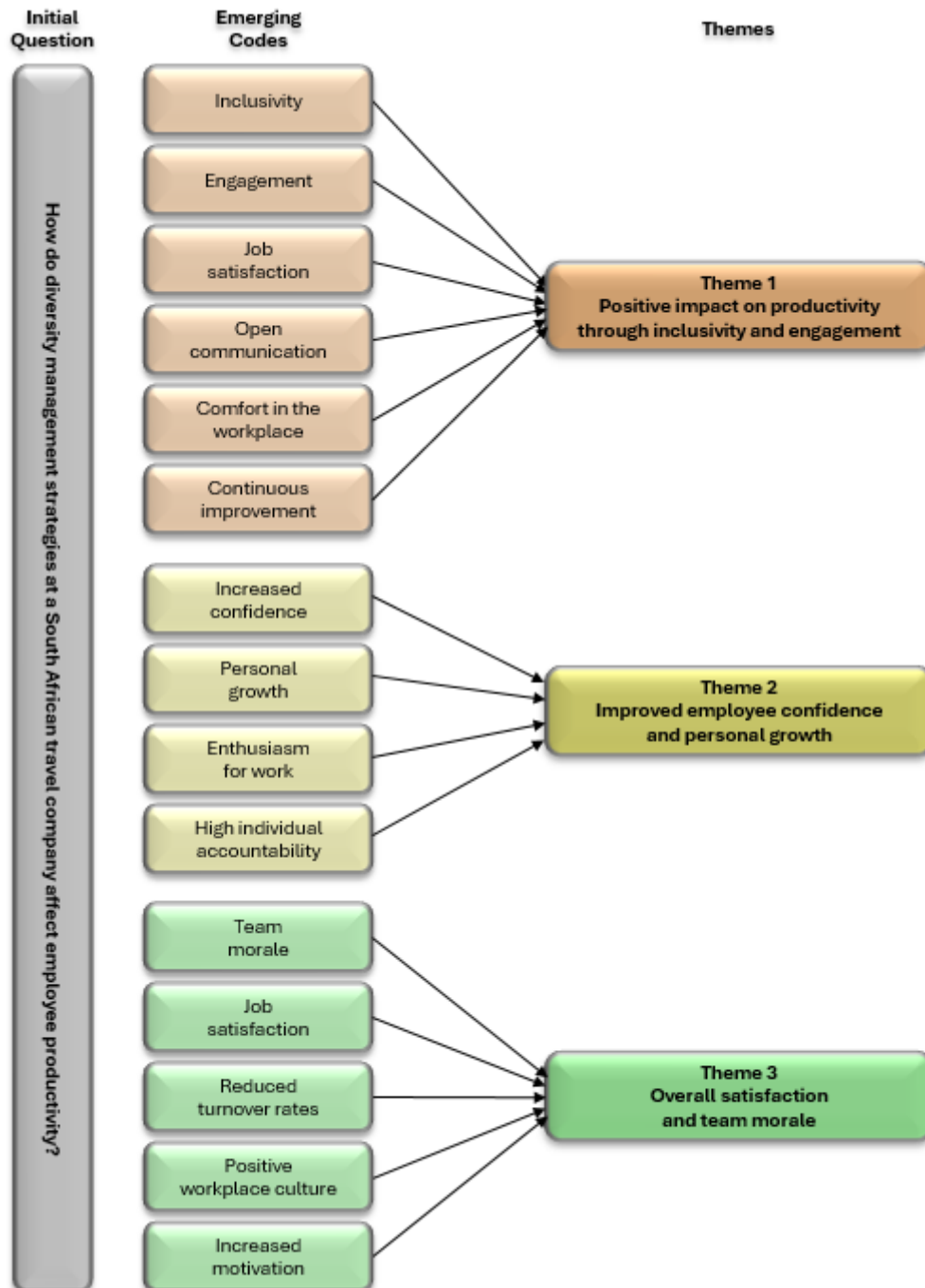
Participant 14, in turn, stated:

"It was very interesting working with people and, you know, getting to know them ... it was good to actually work with these people." [Participant 14]

### **4.7 THEMATIC ANALYSIS ON HOW THE DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES APPLIED BY A SOUTH AFRICAN TRAVEL COMPANY AFFECTED EMPLOYEE PRODUCTIVITY**

The individual interviews were compared to understand the themes that emerged. Table 4.6 below presents the coding scheme used in the study. It outlines the initial question posed to South African travel company employees, asking them to elaborate on how diversity management strategies at the company impacted employee

productivity. Several codes emerged from this question, which were then analyzed using three levels of meaning formation (Chinyamurindi *et al.*, 2021; McCormack, 2000; Nachmias and Nachmias, 1996).



Source: Field data (2024)

**Figure 4.9: Coding scheme on how the diversity management strategies applied by a South African travel company affected employee productivity**

The diversity management strategies at a South African travel company have significantly enhanced employee productivity by fostering an inclusive and engaging work environment that increases confidence and job satisfaction. This is elaborated on in the following points:

#### **4.7.1 Theme 1: Positive Impact on productivity through inclusivity and engagement**

This theme revealed that diversity management strategies at a South African travel company have had a predominantly positive effect on employee productivity. These strategies have created an inclusive environment that boosts engagement and job satisfaction, as evidenced by the following direct quotes:

"Having those open conversations and knowing that it's okay for me to say, 'Please excuse me, guys'; I'm not going to be part of this celebration; I'm going to move so people are free to say, 'I'll be here' and listen or 'please can I be excused'? They can carry on their work, so everybody's just comfortable to save space and everybody can just perform at their optimum." [Participant 2]

Participant 7 stated:

"I would definitely think it's increased productivity. If you look at it down through the years, I will think we are getting better every year. We are growing every year. We're hiring people constantly." [Participant 7]

#### **4.7.2 Theme 2: Improved employee confidence and personal growth**

This theme emphasizes the strategies that have led to increased employee confidence and personal growth, resulting in a positive impact on productivity.

These ideas are succinctly summarized in the following comments:

"A lot of staff now have a lot of growth in them and confidence in them, and once a person is confident, chances are the productivity will be high." [Participant 5]

Moreover:

"I feel like I need to make sure all my stuff is done 100 percent ... I feel very enthusiastic in my work." [Participant 8]

### **4.7.3 Theme 3: Overall satisfaction and team morale**

The theme of overall satisfaction and team morale is highlighted in this discussion. High staff morale and job satisfaction, which are fostered by effective diversity management, play a crucial role in creating a stable and productive work environment. This inclusive atmosphere boosts employees' happiness and engagement with their work, leading to increased motivation and commitment. Moreover, higher job satisfaction helps reduce turnover rates and promotes a more collaborative and efficient team dynamic. Ultimately, effective diversity management creates a positive cycle that benefits both individual well-being and organizational performance. These ideas are summarized in the following comments:

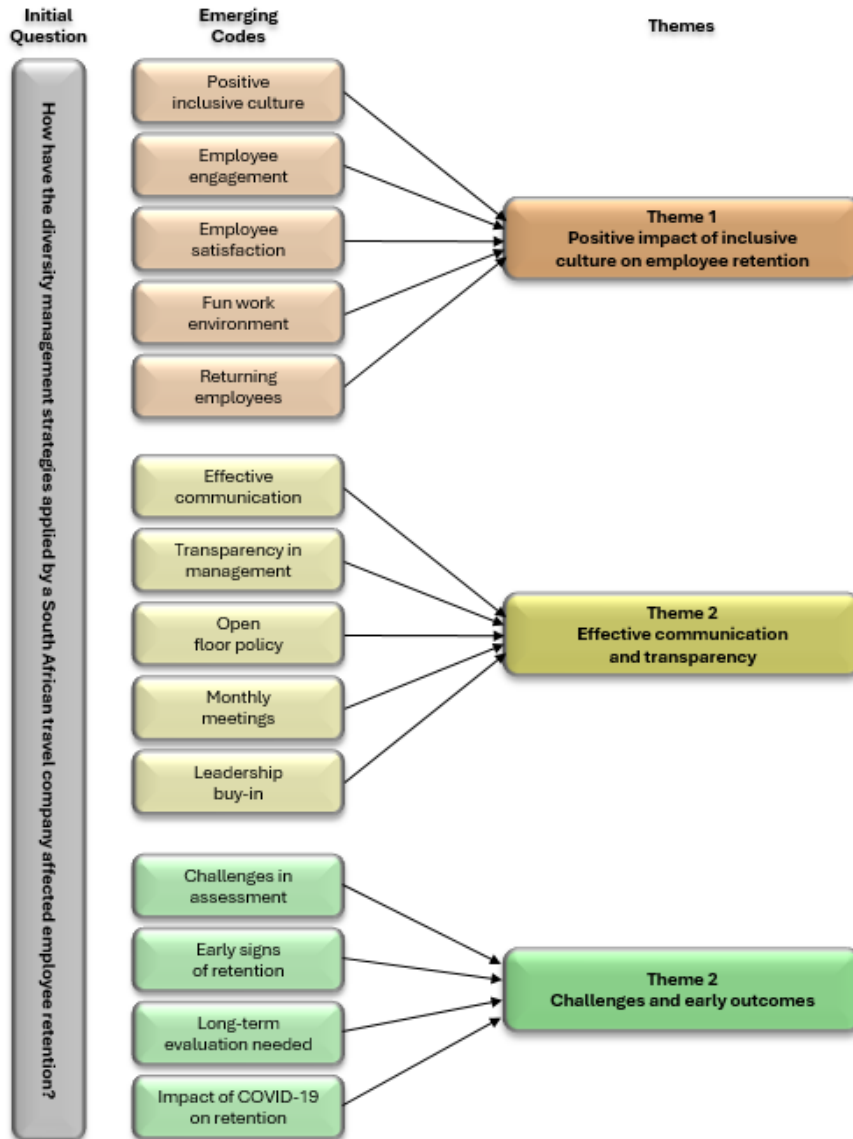
"Overall job satisfaction, the staff morale is high. We don't have high staff turnaround." [Participant 11]

Another participant said:

"Happy employees tend to be more productive ... having a diverse culture and interaction and engagement creates a happier working space."  
[Participant 9]

## **4.8 THEMATIC ANALYSIS ON HOW THE DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES APPLIED BY A SOUTH AFRICAN TRAVEL COMPANY AFFECTED EMPLOYEE RETENTION**

The individual interviews were analysed to identify emerging themes. Table 4.7 below presents the coding scheme used in the study. The Table shows the initial question asked to South African travel company employees about the impact of the company's diversity management strategies on employee retention. Several codes were generated based on this question, following the three levels of meaning formation (Chinyamurindi *et al.*, 2021; McCormack, 2000; Nachmias and Nachmias, 1996).



Source: Field data (2024)

**Figure 4.10: Coding scheme on have the diversity management strategies applied by a South African travel company affected employee retention**

Three themes were identified: the positive impact of an inclusive culture, effective communication and transparency, and the challenges of early outcomes. The South African travel company can now better understand how its diversity management strategies are influencing employee retention and identify areas that may require further attention or adjustment. These themes are presented in Sections 4.8.1 to 4.8.3.

#### **4.8.1 Theme 1: Positive impact of inclusive culture on employee retention**

The theme relating to the positive impact of an inclusive culture on employee retention can be seen in the following direct quotes from participants:

“After constant training and engagement, it started stabilizing ... we did find five key pillars that we needed to work on, communication being the top ... employees felt that we needed to communicate more, we needed to be more transparent with communication and include everyone.” [Participant 1]

Participant 6 explained:

“So, there are consultants that have left, and there are consultants that have come back. So that is also a testament that the company is doing right because you don’t hear that very often, that people leave, and they come back.” [Participant 6]

Another participant had the following to say:

“People love to work for this company ... We have fun ... like last week we had Olympic Games ... we also have free yoga classes ... Anyone is free to join.” [Participant 13]

#### **4.8.2 Theme 2: Effective communication and transparency**

Another significant theme is the importance of effective communication and transparency in creating a positive work environment. Participants emphasized that open communication is essential for addressing concerns and implementing diversity management strategies successfully, which ultimately improves retention rates. This sentiment is reflected in the following verbatim quotes:

“From a retention perspective, you mentioned earlier on that ... open communication engagement stuff, I engaged, they buy into leadership, buys into you know these policies and strategies.” [Participant 5]

Furthermore:

“We have what we call a monthly meeting that is like our town hall ... Every Friday she sends out a newsletter ... I think that the open floor policy throughout our management; our managers sit on the floor.” [Participant 9]

### **4.8.3 Theme 3: Challenges and early outcomes**

Despite the overall positive impact, some participants indicated that it is still too early to fully assess the long-term effects of the diversity strategies on employee retention. This theme suggests that while there are promising signs, a thorough evaluation will require more time. This sentiment is captured in the following comments:

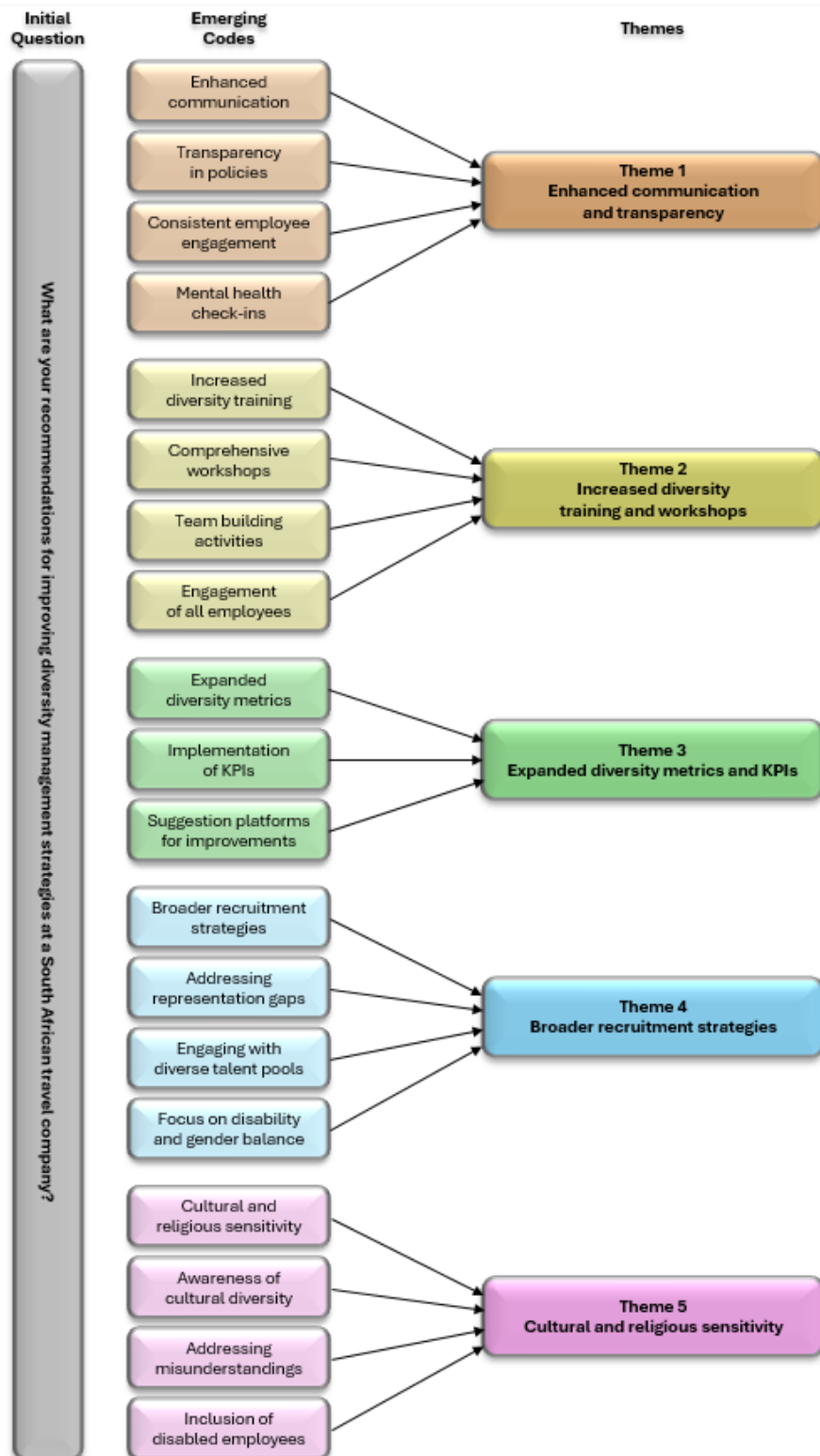
“It is a bit early to speak about retention, but nobody has left because we’ve started celebrating Pride Month or acknowledging whatever. No, no.”  
[Participant 4]

Also:

“Prior to COVID, yes, we were able to retain staff. We had a very low staff turnover where there were hardly any people leaving ... post-COVID, lots of things have changed.” [Participant 7]

## **4.9 THEMATIC ANALYSIS ON RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES AT A SOUTH AFRICAN TRAVEL COMPANY**

The individual interviews were analysed to identify common themes. Table 4.8 below outlines the coding scheme that informed the study's findings. Table 4.8 illustrates the initial question posed to the South African travel company employees, focusing on their suggestions for enhancing diversity management strategies within the organization. From this question, several codes emerged, which were then categorized using three levels of meaning formation (Chinyamurindi *et al.*, 2021; McCormack, 2000; Nachmias and Nachmias, 1996).



Source: Field data (2024)

**Figure 4.11: Coding scheme on recommendations for improving diversity management strategies at a South African travel company**

The identified themes represent a comprehensive strategy for enhancing diversity management at a South African travel company. They highlight communication, training, metrics, recruitment, and cultural sensitivity as crucial areas for improvement. These themes are detailed in Sections 4.9.1 to 4.9.5 below.

#### **4.9.1 Theme 1: Enhanced communication and transparency**

Many participants stressed the importance of improved communication and transparency within the organization to enhance diversity management. Effective communication is considered a key element in ensuring that diversity policies and initiatives are comprehended and embraced by all employees. This sentiment is encapsulated in the following remarks:

"Better communication, communication to basically, yeah, to improve. We've started already. We have a plan, but for it to be more robust."  
[Participant 1]

In addition:

Better communication, open communication. [...] like checking in on staff, mental health, wellbeing." [Participant 7]

Also:

"Consistency in employee engagement and transparency, I think it's a big thing for people." [Participant 5]

#### **4.9.2 Theme 2: Increased diversity training and workshops**

Another theme in the narrative is the importance of enhanced diversity training and workshops. It is widely agreed that continuous diversity training and workshops are crucial. These programmes should be thorough and involve all employees to promote a collective understanding of diversity and inclusion issues. The following key points were highlighted:

"More diversity workshops so that people just can't understand what diversity is." [Participant 2]

In addition, Participant 8 said:

"It would be nice if the whole company could go on proper training."  
[Participant 8]

Also:

"More team building. [...] with regards to diversity management, anything else?" [Participant 13]

#### **4.9.3 Theme 3: Expanded diversity metrics and KPIs**

Another theme is expanded diversity metrics and KPIs. The participants made the following suggestions:

"The ramping up of KPIs. [...] We are currently finalizing that." [Participant 1]

Participant 6 stated:

"With the suggestion section on the intranet where people can actually leave suggestions on how improvements can be made." [Participant 6]

#### **4.9.4 Theme 4: Broader recruitment strategies**

A theme of broader recruitment strategies emerged from the discussions. The participants highlighted the need to address gaps in representation, especially among disabled employees and in achieving gender balance. They suggested expanding recruitment efforts and tapping into a more diverse talent pool. This sentiment is well captured in the following comments:

"Broadening our recruitment options and not maybe using one recruitment agency, but rather maybe four." [Participant 10]

Participant 9 said the following:

"The one area that we probably need to improve on is the disability [...] Maybe getting involved in more of the school's environment for tourism and travel qualifications." [Participant 9]

#### **4.9.5 Theme 5: Cultural and religious sensitivity**

Cultural and religious sensitivity emerged as a key theme. The participants emphasized the significance of raising awareness about cultural and religious diversity to promote inclusivity in the workplace and minimize misunderstandings. This sentiment is reflected in the following verbatim quotes:

"Be more aware of people's religions and cultures. [...] Employees should also be more aware of it." [Participant 14]

This was supported by another participant who stated:

"We do lack in the disabled employees' site. [...] The other employee resigned because she found another job that allowed her to work from home permanently." [Participant 3]

#### **4.10 DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES AT A SOUTH AFRICAN TRAVEL COMPANY: TOPOLOGY DIAGRAM**

To visually represent the employees' perceptions of diversity management strategies at a South African travel company, a comprehensive topology diagram that highlights the interconnected themes was created. This diagram (see Figure 4.1) will help illustrate how different aspects of diversity management are perceived and their impact on various outcomes such as employee engagement, productivity, and retention.

To visually represent employees' perceptions of diversity management strategies at a South African travel company, a comprehensive topology diagram was created to highlight interconnected themes. This diagram (Figure 4.1) illustrates how different aspects of diversity management are perceived and their impact on outcomes such as employee engagement, productivity, and retention.

At the core of the diagram is the central node labelled "Diversity Management Strategies at a South African travel company", representing the organization's approach to managing and enhancing diversity in the workplace. Radiating from this central node are three main themes: inclusivity and representation, variety of backgrounds, and equality and fairness. These themes emphasize the importance of creating an inclusive environment that values diverse backgrounds and ensures fair treatment for all individuals. Branching out from these main themes are implementation themes, including a centralized diversity strategy and policy implementation, training and awareness initiatives, and inclusive hiring and promotion practices. These branches show how diversity strategies are applied in practice, with a centralized approach, targeted training programmes, and efforts to ensure inclusive recruitment and promotion practices.

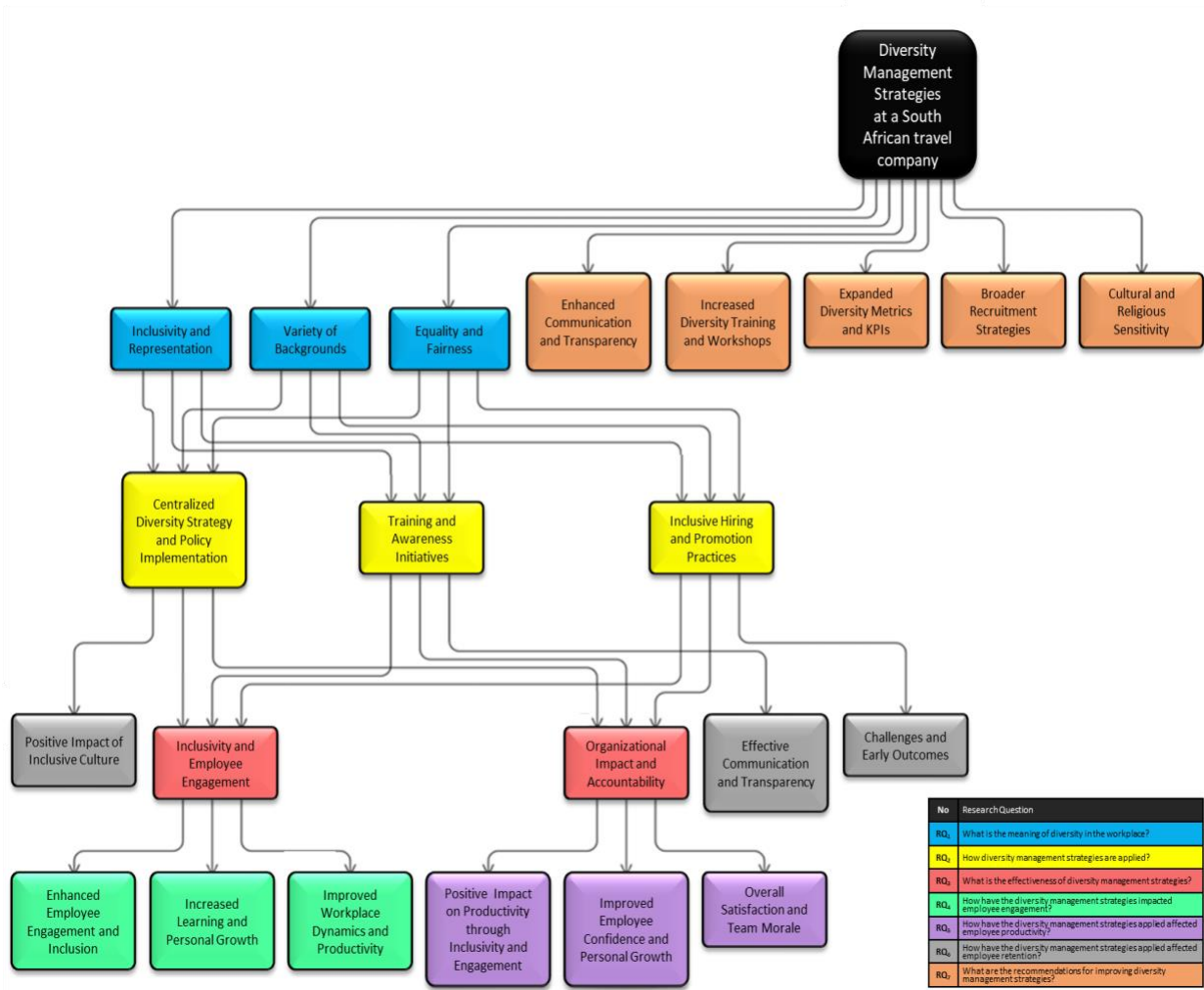
The effectiveness themes highlight the impact of these strategies on the organization, focusing on inclusivity and employee engagement and organizational impact and accountability. These themes demonstrate how the strategies contribute to a more engaged workforce, enhance organizational practices, and ensure accountability.

Further detailing the impact, the diagram divides into Impact Nodes focusing on employee engagement, productivity, and retention. Enhanced employee engagement and inclusion, increased learning and personal growth, and improved workplace dynamics and productivity illustrate the positive effects of diversity management on employee experience, emphasizing the benefits of fostering an inclusive work environment.

The section on impact on employee productivity shows how inclusivity and engagement contribute to productivity, with factors such as positive impact on productivity through inclusivity and engagement, improved employee confidence and personal growth, and overall satisfaction and team morale indicating the positive effects of diversity management on job satisfaction, confidence, and team morale. Regarding employee retention, the diagram reflects themes such as positive impact of inclusive culture, effective communication and transparency, and challenges and early outcomes, highlighting the influence of an inclusive culture and transparent communication on retention rates, while acknowledging challenges in assessing long-term effects.

The recommendations section of the diagram suggests areas for further enhancement in diversity management strategies, including enhanced communication and transparency, increased diversity training and workshops, expanded diversity metrics and KPIs, broader recruitment strategies, and cultural and religious sensitivity. These recommendations emphasize the need for improved communication, comprehensive training, and a broader approach to recruitment and cultural awareness to strengthen diversity management efforts.

Overall, Figure 4.1 below offers a clear and organized view of how a South African travel company's diversity management strategy are perceived by employees and their impacts on various outcomes, providing valuable insights for enhancing the organization's approach to diversity and inclusion.



Source: Author's own compilation

**Figure 4.12: A topology of employees' perceptions of diversity management strategies at a South African travel company**

#### 4.11 DISCUSSION

Section 4.11 offers a detailed analysis of the data findings using thematic analysis. This section correlates the results with the research questions to facilitate a comprehensive discussion of the emerging themes. The aim is to provide a structured interpretation of how the data addresses the research objectives. Each theme is examined in relation to the relevant research question, shedding light on the patterns and trends observed during the analysis. This approach enhances data comprehension and maintains a strong connection to the original research goals.

#### **4.11.1 Discussion pertaining to the understanding of diversity in the workplace**

The analysis of employees' perceptions of diversity management at a South African travel company highlights three key themes: inclusivity and representation, a variety of backgrounds, and equality and fairness. These themes reflect the diverse ways in which employees interpret and experience diversity within the organization. Participants' understanding of diversity prominently revolves around the themes of inclusivity and representation. Employees expressed the necessity of ensuring that diverse perspectives are acknowledged. Participant 3 emphasized that diversity entails integrating individuals from various backgrounds, including race, religion, gender, and sexual orientation. This aligns with academic literature that emphasizes the importance of creating a workplace where diverse groups are not only present but actively included (Cox & Blake, 1991; Roberson & Park, 2007). Research by Shore, Cleveland and Sanchez (2011) support this view, stating that inclusive environments contribute significantly to employee satisfaction and organizational commitment. The theme of a variety of backgrounds underscores the broad range of attributes such as race, culture, and gender that employees bring to the workplace.

The comments by Participant 7 reflect a recognition of this diversity in terms of personal and social characteristics. This understanding is consistent with the work of Thomas and Ely (1996), who argue that diversity encompasses a wide array of individual differences that contribute to a rich and dynamic workplace. Their research suggests that recognizing and valuing these differences can lead to enhanced organizational performance.

The theme of equality and fairness highlights the role of organizational strategies and policies in promoting equitable treatment. Participant 5 and Participant 13 emphasized that effective diversity management involves not only acknowledging diverse groups but also ensuring that all employees are treated fairly and equitably. This perspective is supported by the work of Robbins and Judge (2019), who suggest that fairness in workplace practices is crucial for fostering an inclusive culture and improving overall employee morale and productivity.

#### **4.11.2 Discussion on how diversity management strategies are applied at a South African travel company**

Three central themes emerged regarding the application of diversity management strategies at a South African travel company: centralized policy implementation, targeted training and awareness programmes, and inclusive hiring and promotion practices. The centralized approach to diversity management at a South African travel company, as described by Participant 1 and 10, involves top-down strategy development and implementation. This is consistent with research by Nishii and Mayer (2009), who argue that successful diversity initiatives often start with strong, centralized leadership that sets the tone for the entire organization. Centralized strategies help ensure consistency and alignment with organizational goals. Moreover, training and awareness programmes are critical to the South African travel company's diversity strategy. The focus on workshops and educational initiatives aligns with the findings of Kundu and Turan (2017), who highlight the importance of continuous learning and dialogue in fostering an inclusive workplace. By promoting awareness and understanding through targeted training, the company will support a more informed and empathetic workforce. Lastly, the emphasis on inclusive hiring and promotion practices reflects a commitment to equity within the organization.

The participants' observations on fair recruitment and advancement practices resonate with the work of Bell *et al.* (2011), who emphasize that inclusive hiring practices are essential for creating a diverse and representative workforce. This approach not only enhances diversity but also contributes to a more dynamic and effective organisation.

#### **4.11.3 Discussion on the effectiveness of diversity management strategies**

The effectiveness of diversity management strategies at a South African travel company is evaluated based on inclusivity, employee engagement, organizational impact, and accountability. The strategies have a positive impact on inclusivity and employee engagement, as the participants referred to an inclusive environment that boosts motivation and job satisfaction. Research by Mor Barak, Findler and Kates (2016) supports this, indicating that inclusivity leads to higher employee engagement and satisfaction.

The theme of organizational impact and accountability emphasizes how diversity strategies enhance overall organizational performance. Aligning with Dobbin and Kalev's (2016) findings, systematic planning and compliance are essential for ensuring the effectiveness of diversity initiatives and upholding organizational standards.

#### **4.11.4 Discussion on diversity management strategies impacting employee engagement**

The analysis indicates that diversity management strategies at a South African travel company have a positive impact on employee engagement, personal development, and workplace productivity. These strategies have created a more inclusive and supportive environment, leading to increased employee engagement. This finding is in line with research by McKay, Avery and Morris (2007), which suggests that inclusive environments result in higher levels of employee motivation. The reported sense of belonging and inclusion among employees at a South African travel company highlights the broader benefits of fostering an inclusive work culture. Additionally, the diversity management strategies have resulted in enhanced learning opportunities and personal growth, consistent with research by Bennett (2013) that underscores the importance of exposure to diverse perspectives for personal development and interpersonal skills.

The positive effects on workplace dynamics and productivity are significant, with improved teamwork and morale contributing to higher productivity levels. This is supported by the findings of Kundu and Turan (2017), who observed that diversity has a positive impact on team dynamics and organizational performance.

#### **4.11.5 Discussion on how diversity management strategies affect employee productivity**

The impact of diversity management strategies on employee productivity at a South African travel company is examined through the positive effects on productivity, enhanced employee confidence, and overall satisfaction. The inclusive environment fostered by diversity strategies has had a beneficial influence on productivity, in line with research by Nishii and Mayer (2009) indicating that inclusive practices improve employee performance. Increased employee confidence and personal development resulting from diversity strategies also contribute to higher productivity, as supported by Jackson *et al.* (2003), who highlight the importance of confidence and growth

opportunities in driving employee productivity. Furthermore, effective diversity management at the company has led to high staff morale and job satisfaction, which further boosts productivity. This correlation is consistent with the findings of Kossek, Lobel and Brown (2011), underscoring the connection between job satisfaction, team morale, and productivity.

#### **4.11.6 Discussion on how diversity management strategies affect employee retention**

The themes of the positive impact of an inclusive culture, effective communication, and transparency, as well as the challenges of early outcomes, offer valuable insights into how diversity management strategies influence employee retention. An inclusive culture fosters a sense of value and support among employees, contributing to higher retention rates. Research by Allen, Shore and Griffeth (2003) underscores the significance of creating an inclusive work environment for retaining employees.

Effective communication and transparency are essential factors in employee retention, as highlighted by Pannell (2022), who emphasizes the importance of transparent communication in maintaining employee satisfaction and retention. While some challenges and early outcomes suggest that it is premature to fully evaluate the long-term effects of diversity strategies on retention, ongoing assessment and the adaptation of diversity initiatives, as recommended by Jayne and Dipboye (2004), are crucial for ensuring their effectiveness.

#### **4.11.7 Discussion on recommendations for improving diversity management strategies**

The recommendations for enhancing diversity management strategies include improving communication, increasing training, expanding metrics, broadening recruitment, and promoting cultural sensitivity. Effective communication and transparency are essential for supporting diversity management, as highlighted by Schieman and Glavin (2011).

Ongoing diversity training and workshops are crucial for ensuring comprehensive understanding and engagement, as emphasized by Purdie-Vaughns and Walton (2011). In addition, establishing robust diversity metrics and key performance

indicators (KPIs) is necessary to track progress and hold the organization accountable, as noted by Roberson and Park (2007).

Expanding recruitment efforts to address representation gaps is further recommended, in line with Gelfand, Raver, Nishii and Schneider's (2013) findings on the importance of broad recruitment strategies. Increasing awareness of cultural and religious differences is also vital for creating a more inclusive environment, as argued by Thomas and Ely (1996) in their research on the significance of cultural sensitivity in effective diversity management.

## **4.12 ANALYSIS OF THE THEMES**

The thematic analysis of participants' understanding of diversity management at a South African travel company reveals a complex interplay of themes, each contributing uniquely to the overall narrative.

### **4.12.1 Stronger Themes**

The themes of inclusivity and representation (Section 4.3.1), as well as equality and fairness (Section 4.3.3), emerged as particularly strong. The participants emphasized the critical role of creating an inclusive environment that values diverse perspectives and experiences. The recurring mention of equal treatment and equitable practices highlighted a deep commitment to fostering a fair workplace. This focus on inclusivity not only aligns with contemporary organizational values but also resonates strongly with employee expectations, indicating a robust foundation for diversity management.

### **4.12.2 Weaker Themes**

In contrast, the theme of challenges and early outcomes (Section 4.8.3) presented a more tentative perspective. While the participants acknowledged that diversity strategies had begun to show positive results, many expressed uncertainties about their long-term impact on employee retention. This hesitation indicates that, despite initial successes, further time and evaluation are necessary to fully assess the effectiveness of these strategies. The less assertive nature of this theme contrasts sharply with the stronger themes of inclusivity and fairness.

### **4.12.3 Complementary Themes**

Several themes complemented each other, particularly enhanced employee engagement and inclusion (Section 4.6.1) and positive impact on productivity through inclusivity and engagement (Section 4.7.1).

The participants noted that the inclusivity fostered by diversity management strategies directly correlated with increased engagement and job satisfaction, which in turn boosted productivity.

This synergy illustrates how an inclusive workplace can lead to enhanced performance, reinforcing the notion that engagement and productivity are interdependent.

### **4.12.4 Contrasting themes**

Conversely, themes such as expanded diversity metrics and KPIs (Section 4.9.3) and cultural and religious sensitivity (Section 4.9.5) presented contrasting viewpoints. While the former emphasizes the need for quantitative measures and assessments to gauge diversity management effectiveness, the latter underscores the qualitative aspect of cultural awareness and sensitivity. This divergence highlights a potential tension within the organization: balancing measurable outcomes with the nuanced understanding of diverse cultural contexts.

Overall, the thematic analysis demonstrates that the South African travel company has made significant strides in its diversity management strategies, particularly in fostering inclusivity and equality. However, the varying strengths of these themes point to areas needing further attention, particularly in establishing long-term evaluations and addressing cultural nuances. By continuing to build on the stronger themes while addressing the gaps identified in weaker ones, the organization can enhance its diversity management initiatives and further improve employee engagement and retention.

#### **4.13 CONCLUSION**

Chapter 4 presented a thematic analysis of employee perceptions regarding the effectiveness of diversity management strategies at a South African travel company. The results reveal that employees highly appreciate inclusivity, the diversity of backgrounds, and a sense of equality and fairness within the organisation. The centralised policies, focused training programmes, and inclusive recruitment practices have significantly boosted employee engagement, productivity, and retention rates.

However, there are opportunities for improvement in communication, training expansion, and the development of more refined diversity metrics. These findings underscore the critical importance of a strategic approach to diversity management.

Chapter 5 will offer conclusions and actionable recommendations to enhance diversity management practices at a South African travel company.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **OVERVIEW, RECOMMENDATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

In the previous chapter, a detailed analysis and interpretation of the findings were presented. This chapter offers a comprehensive overview of the study, placing the objectives within the context of diversity management. The primary goal of this research was to explore employees' perceptions of diversity management strategies in a South African travel company. Drawing on the theoretical framework and study insights, recommendations were made for key stakeholders to enhance diversity management practices at a South African travel company. Furthermore, this chapter acknowledges the limitations of the study and discusses implications for future research.

#### **5.2 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY**

In order to draw the relevant recommendations and conclusion on this study, it is imperative to use the inputs obtained over the previous four chapters. The objectives of this study, as stated in Chapter 1, will be revisited in Section 5.2.1, to determine if they have been achieved.

The main purpose of Chapter 1 was to provide the background of the study and the problem statement, formulate the research objectives, and outline the research methods. Thus, the Chapter provided a comprehensive overview of the study, beginning with the background on diversity management in Section 1.1, which outlined its importance, and the various strategies employed by organizations to foster inclusivity. Section 1.2 presented the problem statement, highlighting the ambiguity surrounding diversity management strategies at a South African travel company. In Section 1.3, the primary and secondary objectives were established, focusing on exploring employee perceptions of these strategies. Section 1.4 laid out the research questions guiding the study, followed by Section 1.5, which detailed the qualitative research methodology adopted, including the data collection and analysis techniques. The significance of the study was discussed in Section 1.6, emphasizing its theoretical, academic, and business relevance. Finally, Section 1.7 outlined the chapter layout for

the report, and Section 1.8 concluded the chapter by summarizing the key elements covered, including the rationale for the study and ethical considerations taken to protect participants.

Chapter 2 provided a comprehensive literature review on diversity and diversity management strategies. Section 2.1 introduced the Chapter's focus on existing knowledge and the identification of research gaps. In Section 2.2, the importance of diversity in the workplace was discussed, particularly within South African travel agencies, emphasizing the need to understand employee perceptions. Section 2.3 examined diversity management from global perspectives, highlighting its benefits and challenges, such as interpersonal conflicts, while Section 2.4 detailed various diversity management strategies, including communication, leadership, organizational culture, and human resource practices. Section 2.5 explored the factors influencing employee perceptions, with subsections on training and development and personal experiences. In Section 2.6, the relationship between diversity management and employee job satisfaction was analysed. Section 2.7 focused on the unique challenges of managing diversity in the travel industry, identifying specific research gaps related to intersectionality and the need for comparative analysis. Finally, Section 2.8 provided a chapter summary that synthesised the key findings and established a foundation for future empirical investigations in the context of South African travel agencies.

Chapter 3 outlined the research methodology employed in the study, detailing the chosen research design and data collection methods. Section 3.1 introduced the Chapter's focus on the methodological framework, explaining the selection of qualitative research to capture the participants' perceptions of diversity management strategies at a South African travel company. In Section 3.2, the research setting was described, highlighting the company's background and employee demographics. Section 3.3 discussed the research design, which was phenomenological and cross-sectional, emphasizing the importance of understanding the participants' experiences. Section 3.4 elaborated on the data collection methods, focusing on semi-structured interviews that facilitated in-depth dialogue, while Section 3.5 detailed the data analysis process, employing thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes. Ethical considerations were extensively addressed in this section, including informed consent and participant confidentiality.

Section 3.6 highlighted the dissemination of findings, while Section 3.7 provided the chapter conclusion, summarizing the key elements of the research methodology and their relevance to the study's aims.

Chapter 4 provided a comprehensive thematic analysis of employee perceptions regarding the effectiveness of diversity management strategies at a South African travel company. It began with an introduction to data analysis methods in Section 4.1, followed by an overview of the participants' demographic backgrounds in Section 4.2, which highlighted the diversity within the sample. The Chapter then delved into the thematic analysis of the participants' understanding of diversity in the workplace, identifying key themes such as inclusivity and representation (Section 4.3), the variety of backgrounds (Section 4.3.2), and equality and fairness (Section 4.3.3). Sections 4.4 and 4.5 examined the application and effectiveness of diversity management strategies, respectively, revealing how centralized policy implementation, training initiatives, and inclusive practices contributed to employee engagement and organizational impact. Further, Sections 4.6 and 4.7 focused on how these strategies positively influenced employee engagement, productivity, and retention. Recommendations for improving diversity management were discussed in Section 4.9, emphasising enhanced communication, expanded training, and cultural sensitivity. Finally, Section 4.12 provided a conclusion summarizing the findings and their implications, underscoring the importance of fostering an inclusive and equitable work environment.

### **5.3 THE EVALUATION OF THE OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

To ensure that the study met its intended purposes, it is essential to address all the research objectives based on the data generated. In the following section, these objectives are revisited to illustrate how each was successfully achieved within the framework of the research. This comprehensive review highlighted the alignment of the findings with the original goals and demonstrated the relevance and implications of the results in the context of diversity management strategies. By systematically examining each objective, the researcher aims to provide a clear understanding of how the insights gathered contributed to the broader discourse on workplace diversity and inclusivity.

### **5.3.1 Primary objective**

The primary objective of this study was to explore the perceptions of employees on diversity management strategies in a South African travel company. Each of the objectives, as identified in Chapter 1 (Section 1.9.2), are stated, after which the research results are summarised.

#### **5.3.1.1 *To identify diversity management strategies currently in place at a South African travel company***

This objective was achieved in Section 4.4, which examined the diversity management strategies implemented at a South African travel company. Through thematic analysis of the participants' responses, three central themes were identified that encapsulate the company's approach to diversity management. These themes illustrate that the South African travel company employs a comprehensive strategy that includes centralized policy implementation, targeted training and awareness initiatives, and inclusive hiring and promotion practices.

Centralized policy implementation ensures consistency across departments, aligning all staff with the organization's diversity goals. Targeted training programmes aim to raise awareness and educate employees on various aspects of diversity, fostering an inclusive workplace culture. Additionally, the emphasis on inclusive hiring and promotion practices underscores the company's dedication to providing equal opportunities for individuals from diverse backgrounds. Together, these strategies not only enhance diversity within the organization but also contribute to a more dynamic and effective work environment, ultimately promoting employee engagement and satisfaction.

#### **5.3.1.2 *To view the association between diversity strategies and employee engagement, productivity, and retention at a South African travel company***

This objective was addressed in Section 4.6, where the researcher identified themes indicating that the diversity management strategies at a South African travel company have positively influenced employee engagement. The focus on inclusion, learning, and improved workplace dynamics has contributed to a more supportive and efficient environment.

Section 4.7 highlighted that these strategies have significantly boosted employee productivity by creating an inclusive and engaging atmosphere that enhances confidence and job satisfaction. Finally, Section 4.8 examined how the diversity management strategies implemented by the South African travel company have impacted employee retention. Three key themes emerged: the positive effects of an inclusive culture, the importance of effective communication and transparency, and the challenges related to early outcomes. This analysis provides the South African travel company with a clearer understanding of how its diversity management strategies affect employee retention, and it identifies areas that may need further focus or improvement.

### **5.3.1.3 *To explore how employees perceive the diversity management strategies in place at a South African travel company***

This objective was achieved in Chapter 4 by examining employees' perceptions of the diversity management strategies implemented at a South African travel company. Through thematic analysis, the researcher identified key themes that reflect how employees perceive these strategies and their impact on the workplace. In Section 4.10, a comprehensive topology diagram was developed to visually represent these perceptions, illustrating the interconnected themes that emerged from the analysis. Overall, Figure 4.1 offers a clear and structured representation of employees' views on the diversity management strategies at the South African travel company and their effects on various outcomes, providing valuable insights for enhancing the organisation's commitment to diversity and inclusion.

## **5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on an in-depth examination of the existing literature and the empirical findings from this study, several key recommendations are offered for general practitioners at the South African travel company and other travel companies seeking to improve their diversity management practices.

### **5.4.1 Continuous training and awareness initiatives**

First and foremost, the South African travel company should prioritise ongoing training and awareness programmes. While the current training initiatives have shown positive results, there is a pressing need for regular updates and expanded content that

addresses new and emerging issues in diversity and inclusion. Workshops focused on cultural competency, unconscious bias, and intersectionality could significantly enhance employees' understanding and empathy. It is essential that these training sessions are customized to reflect the unique demographic and cultural context of the South African travel industry, ensuring that they are both relevant and effective. These recommendations are in line with the findings of Sealome and Chipunza (2020), who stress the importance for managers and employees to understand diversity.

To secure a sustainable future, organizations need to deepen their knowledge of diversity, value cultural distinctions, and adeptly manage their diverse workforce. This can be bolstered by consistently implementing diversity management practices in human resource operations and providing ample training and development opportunities. These initiatives can help reduce disparities in career outcomes among different groups and promote appreciation for individual differences, ultimately contributing to the retention of a diverse workforce (Sealome & Chipunza, 2020).

The proposed recommendations mirror the work of Mazibuko and Govender (2017) who stated that diversity awareness training programmes should form part of an organisation's induction, to ensure that dignity, respect, and appreciating differences are understood by all employees and form part of an organisation's DNA.

#### **5.4.2 Enhanced communication of diversity initiatives**

Improving communication about diversity initiatives is also critical. Employees should be informed regularly about the goals, progress, and outcomes of the company's diversity management strategies through consistent updates and open forums. This transparency fosters trust and encourages a culture of inclusivity where employees feel valued and heard.

Implementing regular feedback mechanisms – such as surveys and focus groups – can help gauge employee sentiment and allow for timely adjustments to policies and practices based on their insights. These recommendations are in line with Bovana's (2014) emphasis on the importance of communicating with stakeholders to explain the change process and actively involve them.

A company's primary stakeholders are its staff, so it is crucial to facilitate communication both vertically within the department and horizontally across different occupational groups and directorates (Bovana, 2014). This necessitates the establishment of flexible systems that ensure regular, thorough communication and allow for ongoing feedback, engaging all stakeholders in the management of diversity (Bovana, 2014). Furthermore, Zhuwao (2017) explains that an effective diversity management programme requires clear communication channels between employees and senior management. This clarity helps employees understand the objectives of workforce diversity management and how these goals align with the organization's overall business objectives (Zhuwao, 2017).

#### **5.4.3 Promoting diversity in leadership roles**

Furthermore, it is essential to promote diversity within leadership positions. Ensuring that diverse voices are represented in decision-making roles not only enhances a company's credibility regarding diversity management but also serves to inspire employees throughout the company. This can be facilitated through mentorship programmes targeted at underrepresented groups and by creating clear pathways for career advancement that prioritize diversity. Such initiatives can empower diverse talent and enrich the leadership landscape. According to Mazibuko and Govender (2017), diversity should be promoted in leadership roles; this can be achieved by an organisation if line managers are trained in team development and conflict management to reinforce an inclusive culture that the organisation enshrines, to extract maximum benefit from diverse teams.

#### **5.4.4 Establishing community partnerships**

Establishing community partnerships is essential for travel companies, such as the South African travel company under study. Collaborating with local community organizations and educational institutions can significantly enhance recruitment efforts by providing access to a wider talent pool. Such partnerships also create opportunities for community engagement initiatives that reflect the company's commitment to diversity and inclusion. This alignment with community values can improve the company's public image and boost employee morale, reinforcing a sense of shared purpose among the staff. These views are in line with the literature. Morris (2023) asserts that diversity is expected to become increasingly important in the coming years

as communities become more diverse. Individuals are now part of a global market that is highly competitive, making diversity in institutions and businesses essential (Baleviciene, 2021).

Successful businesses are more likely to foster positive relationships with communities by actively creating employment opportunities, offering professional development, and supporting local organisations. In line with the discussions on broader recruitment strategies and the importance of enhancing representation, particularly for disabled employees and achieving gender balance, organisations should consider expanding their recruitment efforts to reach a more diverse talent pool. Additionally, as highlighted by the theme of cultural and religious sensitivity, businesses can further contribute to their communities by promoting inclusivity within the workplace, ensuring a deeper understanding and respect for cultural and religious differences. This holistic approach not only supports business growth but also strengthens community ties, benefiting both the organisation and its surrounding environment (Richardson, 2023).

#### **5.4.5 Ongoing evaluation and adaptation of strategies**

Finally, it is vital to regularly evaluate and adapt diversity management strategies based on empirical feedback and the evolving needs of an organisation. Continuous assessment can help identify areas for improvement and recognize successful practices. This iterative process ensures that diversity management remains a dynamic and integral part of a company's culture, directly contributing to enhanced employee engagement, productivity, and retention. Bovana (2014) emphasises the significance of evaluations, stating that effectively managing diversity is essentially about good people management. Bovana (2014) further argues that diversity management should be a key component in evaluating managerial and supervisory performance.

By adopting these recommendations, the South African travel company and similar organizations could cultivate a more inclusive and equitable workplace. This commitment would not only enhance their overall performance but also strengthen their reputation in the travel industry, positioning them as leaders in diversity and inclusion.

## **5.5 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH AVENUES**

When evaluating the findings of this study, it is important to acknowledge its limitations, which present opportunities for further research. A primary limitation is the restricted study population, consisting of employees from a single company, a South African travel company, in the South African travel sector. This narrow focus limits the generalizability of the results to other travel companies or different contexts within the South African industry. Future research could broaden its scope by including participants from various travel companies across different provinces to gain more comprehensive insights into employee perceptions of diversity management strategies.

Furthermore, the qualitative approach used in this study involved semi-structured interviews with a relatively small sample size of 15 participants. This limited sample may not fully capture the diverse perspectives within the company, potentially impacting the robustness of the findings. Future studies should consider larger sample sizes and possibly incorporate quantitative methods to improve the generalizability and reliability of the results.

Moreover, the cross-sectional nature of this research poses another limitation. Employee perceptions of diversity management strategies may change over time due to various internal and external factors. A longitudinal research design could be beneficial in future studies to explore how perceptions evolve in response to implemented diversity initiatives, providing a deeper understanding of the long-term effectiveness of such strategies.

Lastly, while this study has provided valuable insights into employee perceptions of diversity management at a South African travel company, the identified limitations underscore the need for further exploration in this area.

By addressing these gaps, future research can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of diversity management practices in the travel industry and offer evidence-based recommendations for enhancing employee engagement and satisfaction. Recognizing these limitations will guide future studies in refining their methodologies and advancing knowledge in this evolving research field.

## **5.6 CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, this chapter has provided a thorough overview of the study, revisited the research objectives and summarised the key findings regarding the exploration of employee perceptions of diversity management strategies within a South African travel company. The study has effectively highlighted the diversity management strategies currently implemented, their impact on employee engagement, productivity, and retention, and how employees perceive these strategies. Based on the analysis, several recommendations have been put forward, including the need for ongoing training, improved communication, greater diversity in leadership, and stronger community partnerships, all of which can enhance diversity management practices within the company.

Furthermore, the limitations of the study, such as the restricted sample size and cross-sectional design, have been acknowledged, with suggestions for future research to further build upon this work. By addressing these limitations, future studies could offer deeper insights into the evolving landscape of diversity management in the South African travel industry, ensuring that organisations continue to develop more inclusive, equitable, and effective strategies that foster employee satisfaction and organisational success.

Overall, this study contributes valuable knowledge to the field of diversity management, particularly within the context of South African travel companies, and lays the groundwork for continued improvement and future research in this area.

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## ANNEXURE A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE

UNIVERSITY OF THE  
FREE STATE  
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE  
VRYSTAAT  
YUNIVESITHI YA  
FREISTATA



### GENERAL/HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (GHREC)

Registration Number: REC-112922-058

08-Jul-2024

Dear Miss Lintle Ledwaba

#### **Application Approved**

Research Project Title:

**EMPLOYEES' PERCEPTIONS OF DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN A SOUTH AFRICAN TRAVEL COMPANY**

Ethical Clearance number:

**UFS-HSD2024/0602**

We are pleased to inform you that your application for ethical clearance has been approved. Your ethical clearance is valid for twelve (12) months from the date of issue. We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your study/research project be submitted via an Amendment on RIMS to the ethics office to ensure ethical transparency. Furthermore, you are requested to submit a Final Report on RIMS for your study/research project to the ethics office once the project has concluded. Should you require more time than the allotted 12 months to complete this research, please apply for an extension by submitting a Continuation/Report on RIMS. Thank you for submitting your proposal for ethical clearance. We wish you success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

**Dr Adri Du Plessis**

**Chairperson: General/Human Research Ethics Committee**

Dr Adri  
du  
Plessis

Digitally  
signed by Dr  
Adri du Plessis  
Date:  
2024.07.08  
18:29:17  
+02'00'

205 Nelson Mandela P.O. Box 339  
Drive Bloemfontein 9300  
Park West Tel: +27(0)514019337  
Bloemfontein 9301 [duplessisA@ufs.ac.za](mailto:duplessisA@ufs.ac.za)  
South Africa [www.ufs.ac.za](http://www.ufs.ac.za)



## ANNEXURE B: THE INTERVIEW GUIDE



Dear Participant

I am a postgraduate student at the University of Free State's business school, and I am collecting information needed for a study entitled "Employees' perceptions of diversity management strategies in a South African travel company". Your participation is valuable because it will help the company to make improvements in how the leadership approaches diversity management. This will benefit employees and the company in future and the focus is on identifying diversity management strategies that would be more effective. Such strategies may include using a different approach in recruitment, practising inclusivity hiring, diversifying team members, or creating a culture conducive to the facilitation of having diverse employees who appreciate each other's differences.

This interview will take a maximum of 30 minutes and it would be appreciated if you answered all questions. Please note that you are not obliged to participate, and you will not receive any incentives for being a part of this study. Confidentiality is fully granted for your protection and no information that will lead to your identification will be shared publicly or to the management of South African travel company. Should you feel uncomfortable at any point during this interview, you can stop answering questions and not participate any further.

The findings of this study will be shared with everyone in the company and published by the university. All documents will be kept in a safe at the university and destroyed after a year of completion of this study. This means your job will not be compromised in any way or your future employment at another company.

Thank You

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Ledwaba, Lintle Joyce

## Interview guide

### **Section A (Demographic background)**

#### ***Question 1: Gender***

Female

Male

LGBTQIA

Other

#### ***Question 2: Age group***

18 to 35

35 to 65

#### ***Question 3: Race***

Black

Coloured

Indian

White

Other

#### ***Question 4: Number of years working at current company***

Less than 1 year

1 to 5 years

6 to 10 years

Over 10 years

**Section B: Diversity and Diversity Management Strategies**

***Question 5: Please explain what you understand by diversity in the workplace.***

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***Question 6: At South African travel company, how are diversity management strategies are applied?***

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***Question 7: How are the diversity management strategies you mentioned are effective?***

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***Question 8: How have the diversity management strategies affected your engagement with your work and with South African travel company?***

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***Question 9: How have the diversity management strategies applied by South African travel company affected employee productivity?***

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**Question 10: How have the diversity management strategies applied by South African travel company affected employee retention?**

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**Section C: Recommendation/s**

**Question 11: In light of how you perceive the effectiveness of the diversity management strategies applied by South African travel company; what are your recommendations on how improvements can be achieved?**

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