



Opara, V. and Ofori, D. W. (2026) 'Leadership and diversity blind spots in organisations: are leaders walking the walk?', *Strategy & Leadership*. DOI: 10.1108/SL-06-2026-0278.

Official URL: <https://doi.org/10.1108/SL-06-2026-0278>

ResearchSPAce

<http://researchspace.bathspa.ac.uk/>

This pre-published version is made available in accordance with publisher policies.
Please cite only the published version using the reference above.

Your access and use of this document is based on your acceptance of the
ResearchSPAce Metadata and Data Policies, as well as applicable law:-

<https://researchspace.bathspa.ac.uk/policies.html>

Unless you accept the terms of these Policies in full, you do not have permission
to download this document.

This cover sheet may not be removed from the document.

Please scroll down to view the document.

'This author accepted manuscript is deposited under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC) licence. This means that anyone may distribute, adapt, and build upon the work for non-commercial purposes, subject to full attribution. If you wish to use this manuscript for commercial purposes, please contact permissions@emerald.com'

Leadership and Diversity Blind Spots in Organizations: Are leaders walking the walk?

Name: Victoria, Opara

Bath Spa University: Bath Business School, UK

Email: v.opara@bathspa.ac.uk

Name: Dudley Ofori

Bath Spa University: Bath Business School, UK

Email: d.ofori@bathspa.ac.uk

Conflict of interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Associated Funding: *This project was funded through the British Academy/Leverhulme Small Research Grants scheme (ref: SRG2526\260260), with funds derived from their partnership with Wellcome.*

Corresponding author: Victoria Opara, Bath Business School, Newton Park Campus, Newton St-Loe, Bath, BA2 9BN, UK. Email: v.opara@bathspa.ac.uk.

Leadership and Diversity Blind Spots in Organisations: Are leaders walking the walk?

Abstract

Purpose

Research suggests that senior leaders enact diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) practices through their subjective understanding of what DEI entails. This study investigates whether senior leaders in UK organisations are operating with a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) blind spot, defined as a lack of awareness, understanding, or experiential knowledge necessary to implement meaningful DEI initiatives and perform meaningful DEI change.

Design/methodology/approach

Employing a qualitative, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) methodology, the research explores the practices and perceptions of 25 senior leaders, across a range of sectors including higher education, business, legal, science, information, and technology sectors in the UK. The study focuses on how leaders interpret the presence of DEI within their leadership practice, and whether this exposes any DEI blind spots. The research examines whether knowledge gaps *i.e. blind spots*, persist at senior levels, and how these might be experienced by diverse organisational members, and what consequences they carry for DEI progress and inclusive organisations.

Findings

The findings reveal that leaders with DEI decision making capacity, oftentimes engage with DEI practices through their subjective understanding of it. Therefore, DEI practices and engagement occur most keenly along three realms (1) ideologically, (2) practically, (3) deficiently. We show how leaders move between, (1) '*what they know*' (2) '*what they do*' and (3) '*what they fail to do*'.

Originality/value

This study contributes to the leadership and DEI literature by offering empirically grounded insights into the barriers to effective DEI leadership and highlighting the need for more robust, systems-based engagement from those in decision making positions.

Keywords: Diversity, DEI, Blind Spots, Inclusion, Leadership, Organisations,

Introduction

Leadership remains a multifaceted and contested concept, with ongoing scholarly debate regarding its precise definition and scope (Opara, 2024). At its core, leadership can be understood as the process of guiding and influencing individuals or groups toward the achievement of shared objectives (Benmira and Agboola, 2021). This involves not only inspiring and mobilising people but also navigating intricate power dynamics and formulating visions and policies that serve collective interests (Foldy and Ospina, 2022). Recent developments in leadership theory indicate a noteworthy shift in perspective. Instead of concentrating solely on individual leaders' traits, behaviors, or skills, current research increasingly embraces a more contextual and inclusive approach. (Nishii and Leroy, 2022). This broader approach recognises the situated nature of leadership and the diversity of individuals who enact it. It challenges limiting, essentialist notions by acknowledging that leadership is exercised across varying socio-cultural, gendered, and racialised contexts. As such, leadership cannot be understood through a singular or universal model (Martinez et al., 2024); individuals from diverse cultural, disability, racial, gender, and socio-economic backgrounds bring different strengths, experiences and adopt different styles of leadership in response to their environments (Eagly and Carli, 2007).

Despite this developing understanding, there are persisting structural inequalities in the composition of senior leadership across organisations. Research indicates that women, ethnically diverse individuals and people with disabilities, continue to be underrepresented in senior leadership roles, despite demonstrating equivalent qualifications and exhibiting comparable leadership competencies (Eagly and Carli, 2007; Opara, 2025). In the UK, women occupy fewer than 40% of board positions in FTSE 250 companies, with ethnically diverse representation being even lower (Vinnicombe and Tessaro, 2022). Furthermore, individuals with disabilities (IWD) suffer from extensive labour market discrimination, with this discrimination expressed most keenly within senior and leadership positions. As a result, they are severely underrepresented in economic activity and positions of power and privilege (Özbilgin et al., 2022). While interventions, such as Norway's 2005 gender quota policy mandating 40% female representation on boards of listed companies, and the UK's Parker Review (Parker et al., 2017), aimed at enhancing ethnic diversity, have spurred incremental progress, significant disparities persist, across diverse populations.

Importantly, the lived experiences of minority group members often diverge substantially from those of their majority counterparts (Klatt et al., 2016), and whilst structural barriers, including the gender and ethnicity pay gaps and tokenistic inclusion, continue to inhibit equitable access to and experiences within leadership roles (Shilpzand, et al., 2026). We cannot understate the impact of whiteness and maleness remaining normative and dominant at the highest levels of leadership, raising questions about the authenticity and efficacy of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts in contemporary organisational settings. Furthermore, IWD face lower wage offers for the same position, and have less opportunity for career progression and promotion (Brouwers, 2020). The longstanding barriers faced by IWD in accessing employment opportunities contribute significantly to their underrepresentation in leadership roles (Özbilgin et al., 2022). This limited progress underscores the need to move further towards a deeper engagement with the systemic and cultural dynamics that shape leadership trajectories. Leaders who fail to engage with this reality are likely to develop blind spots in their leadership practice (Atogenzoya et al., 2026).

To contribute to this evolving discourse, this study draws on contemporary organisational, and leadership scholarship (Brown, 2015; Opara, 2024), to explore how leaders understand, navigate, and respond to DEI-related challenges in their organisational roles. Employing an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach, the study seeks to theorise and empirically explore, whether DEI knowledge gaps persist at the senior organisational level, and the perceptions of how these are experienced by ethnically diverse organisational members, and what consequences they carry for DEI progress and inclusive organisations.

This research offers both theoretical and practical contributions to the DEI and leadership literature by highlighting the intersection of diverse identity, leadership, power, representation and knowledge gaps. It aims to illuminate the complex realities of leadership at a time where inclusion is both a moral imperative and a strategic necessity.

Theoretical Framework

Leadership

Leadership remains a complex and contested construct that continues to attract intense scholarly attention across diverse domains, ranging from business and politics to education, governance, and even family systems (Shilpzand, et al., 2026). Despite this breadth of inquiry, achieving conceptual clarity remains elusive. As Stogdill (1974: 259) famously observed,

“there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept.” This persistent ambiguity reflects the diversity of theoretical lenses through which leadership is viewed, ranging from trait-based perspectives to relational and social constructionist approaches (Nishii and Leroy, 2022; Opara, 2025).

Shilpzand and colleagues (2026) highlight that our understanding of leadership is shaped not only by empirical observation but by the epistemological assumptions embedded within these frameworks. Trait-based models focus on inherent qualities of the individual leader, while social process theories emphasise the dynamic interactions between leaders and followers within specific contexts. These differing paradigms contribute to inconsistencies in how leadership is conceptualised and evaluated.

Nonetheless, the effort to define leadership remains important for both theoretical advancement and practical application. Handy (1992) describes a leader as someone who “shapes and shares a vision,” while Bennis and Townsend (1995) and Drucker (1996) emphasise the leader’s ability to create followership and translate vision into action. Rowe (2007) and Yoshikawa et al. (2024) similarly conceptualise leadership as a process of influence, motivation, and direction toward a collective goal.

Across these definitions, three core dimensions consistently emerge: (a) the articulation of a compelling vision, (b) the presence of followers, and (c) the capacity to motivate others toward achievement or goal attainment. Vision provides direction and coherence to group efforts, fostering alignment and commitment (Martinez et al., 2024). As Shilpzand et al (2026) note, a clearly communicated vision enables decision-making and strategic prioritisation. Importantly, followers play an equally critical role in enacting leadership, serving as the agents through whom the leader’s vision becomes reality (Nishii and Leroy; Tinuoye et al., 2022).

Leadership and DEI Practices

Effective leadership is commonly defined as “a process of influence, motivation, and clear direction toward a collective goal” (Son Hing et al., 2002: 494). However, such a definition assumes a neutral system in which influence, and authority can be exercised free from structural bias, an assumption increasingly challenged by critical diversity theorists. While contemporary leadership theories such as inclusive leadership (Nishii and Leroy, 2022), authentic leadership (Opara, 2024), and transformational leadership (Benmira and Agboola, emphasize relationality, ethical grounding, and the empowerment of others, they often fail to

fully account for the structural inequalities that shape who is afforded leadership legitimacy and who is excluded from leadership pipelines (Ahmad et al., 2025).

DEI theorising consistently highlights that, despite increases in surface-level demographic diversity, organisational systems remain largely unchanged in terms of whose identities are centred and valued (Tasheva and Hillman, 2019). Leadership, while ostensibly open to all, remains disproportionately occupied by individuals from dominant identity groups. (e.g. *white, male, able-bodied*). If influence and direction-setting are shaped (in part) by identity, cultural understanding and credibility in actioning diverse practices, then leadership becomes complicit in sustaining inequity, unless intentionally restructured through equity-driven approaches (Amis et al., 2020).

The leadership function sets the strategic direction of organisations, yet it is effective management behaviour that plays a central role in embedding inclusive practices (Ahmad et al., 2025). The question arises: to what extent are contemporary management cultures aligned with broader societal shifts toward inclusion, equity, and diversity? Recent survey data offer insight into this question, drawing on perspectives from both HR decision-makers and employees without managerial responsibilities. Encouragingly, most HR respondents (81%) report that managers in their organisations are equipped to engage in conversations about inclusivity (CMI, 2024). However, employees are more sceptical, particularly regarding their managers' ability to encourage development opportunities, act on feedback, and challenge inappropriate behaviour, including racial microaggressions and other forms of discrimination, across gender and disability status (CMI, 2024). This finding suggests that a gap might exist between how inclusive management practices are enacted from HR decision makers and leadership, through to how employees perceive and receive such practices, reinforcing the need for evidence-based leadership development strategies that align inclusive values with everyday managerial behaviour and systems.

Reconciling Leadership and Diverse Organisational Experiences

The best leaders are said to be open to considering alternate approaches that still deliver results (Tasheva and Hillman, 2019). Unfortunately, it is not common to find a leader willing to be flexible, as this can be perceived as a vulnerability and a loss of power. Moreover, organisations often fail to consider how leadership 'rigidity' can reinforce inequality, particularly when narrow conceptions of leadership that implicitly centre whiteness, maleness, ability status or elite educational capital are maintained (Ashley, 2022; Beckwith et al., 2016).

Firms might inadvertently harm diverse individuals who are already disproportionately underrepresented in leadership roles (Opara, 2024).

Research shows that for individuals from diverse and historically marginalized backgrounds, leadership success often requires them to adapt or suppress aspects of their identities to fit dominant norms (Fernando et al., 2020). This presents a contradiction within inclusive leadership practice, which professes authenticity and psychological safety for all employees, but often these practices are embedded in systems that reward conformity to dominant (prototypically white and Western, *WEIRD*) cultural and behavioral codes (Opara et al., 2026). The result is what Konrad (2019: 2180) describes as an "identity validation-threat system," where gains in inclusion for some are perceived as threatening to others, creating resistance to change and undermining leadership legitimacy across identity lines.

Although leadership theory has moved beyond purely transactional models, it still lacks integration with critical DEI frameworks that emphasise the role of power, privilege, and systemic exclusion. For example, although organisations might promote leaders from underrepresented groups, little is known about how these individuals become embedded and thrive within leadership structures (Ghosh et al., 2024). This raises key questions about how leadership is defined, performed, and recognized across different identity positions, and despite a growing rhetorical commitment to DEI, the lived experience for many marginalized employees is that the promise of equity remains unmet (Özbilgin and Tatli, 2008).

DEI practices in leadership are often actioned through a leader's subjective lens. Knowledge gaps might still persist at senior level, therefore DEI practices must be re-examined, to practically explore the efficacy of current DEI practices and to further uncover any potential hidden blind spots. Without a critical interrogation of how leadership is constructed and constrained by identity and diversity knowledge and understanding, a gap between DEI initiatives and actual DEI progress within organisations will exist and likely persist. What remains underexplored is how leadership theory, leadership practice, and diversity praxis can be brought into closer alignment, such that organisations not only diversify who leads but also transform how leadership operates in diverse, equitable, and inclusive ways.

Therefore, our study asks:

1. *How do organisational leaders engage with DEI within work organisations?*
2. *How might their approaches introduce or reproduce DEI blind spots within leadership practice?*

Research Design/Method

To explore leaders lived experiences in their roles and examine whether they are able to drive meaningful diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) change, this study adopted a qualitative research design using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Creswell and Poth, 2016; Smith et al., 2021). IPA was selected because it enables an in-depth and nuanced exploration of human experience, allowing participants to articulate how they make sense of their leadership roles and DEI practices within organisational contexts. This approach aligns with the study's aim to understand how leaders can “walk the walk” when implementing DEI initiatives, despite barriers within their institutions.

A qualitative approach was therefore deemed appropriate to capture rich, first-person accounts of leaders' experiences through semi-structured interviews conducted via Google Docs (see Opara et al., 2023). Sixteen open-ended questions guided the interviews, providing sufficient flexibility for participants to reflect on their experiences while ensuring consistency across interviews. All participants provided informed consent prior to participation.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained to ensure compliance with the University's ethics procedures and to omit any risk of harm to participants. The data collection process began with a clear introduction outlining the purpose of the study and the intended use of the data. Anonymity was maintained by avoiding identifying questions, and all participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point prior to final submission of their interview responses.

Participants and Sampling

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to identify suitable participants. Leaders were recruited through referral networks and personal contacts across a range of organisations, with snowball sampling used to supplement participant numbers (Eisenhardt et al., 2016; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990). This approach enabled the identification of leaders with at least five years' experience in their roles, including middle managers, and senior managers, who were actively involved in driving DEI initiatives within their organisations.

The final sample comprised twenty five participants drawn from a variety of UK sectors, including higher education, general business, science, and technology. The sample included both women and men in leadership positions; however, a disproportionately higher number of

women were found to occupy leadership roles with responsibility for DEI initiatives within some of the participating organisations. The study sample comprised 44% men (11 participants), and 56% women (14 participants). Participants' ages range from 38 to 60. The younger person is a woman in the education sector (38 years of age), and the oldest person is a male (60 years of age) in the technology sector. Participants' demographic characteristics, such as ethnicity, gender, level of seniority, and sector of employment, are summarised in Table 1, (see table 1).

Consistent with IPA methodology, a sample size of twenty five was considered appropriate given the study's focus on developing a deep and detailed understanding of leaders lived experiences. IPA prioritises depth over breadth, enabling close examination of individual narratives while still allowing for the identification of shared patterns and variations across cases, which is ideal for uncovering insights in this intricate research area (Smith et al., 2021).

Data Collection Process

Data collection took place over a three-month period. We started by recruiting suitable participants through sending them an initial email, with approximately 40 leaders and employers across UK organisations approached to obtain referrals through personal networks. Twenty-five leaders from different organisations ultimately agreed to participate and were included in the final sample. All participants were assigned pseudonyms, and any sensitive or potentially identifying information was excluded from the dataset.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews to elicit in-depth, reflective, and contemporaneous accounts of participants' experiences (Creswell and Poth, 2016). The interview script was administered via Google Forms and was accompanied by an interview guide that elaborated on each question and included potential probing prompts. This structure supported a thorough exploration of the study's aims and research questions. In addition, a laddering interview technique was employed to develop an initial understanding of participants' organisational roles before focusing more explicitly on DEI-related issues (Veludo-de-Oliveira et al., 2006).

Participants were encouraged to reflect on both past and present experiences, enabling them to construct meaning around DEI challenges and leadership practices. Interviews lasted an average of 45 minutes, with some extending beyond 90 minutes. Due to the written format of data collection, interviews were transcribed in real time. Observations of participants' responses were recorded through interview notes to complement the transcripts and to

minimise bias and enhance reliability, this additional measure verified the accuracy of participants' accounts (Gioia et al., 2013). All data were subsequently coded for analysis.

TABLE 1: *Demographic Information, Sector of Employment, Level of Seniority*

Ref	Gender	Ethnicity (self-description)	Sector of Employment	Job Role	Level of Seniority	Transcript word count
P01	Female	Black British	Education	Programme Lead	Senior Manager	833
P02	Female	African	Healthcare	Facility Manager	Senior Leader	664
P03	Female	African	Higher Education	Senior Lecturer	Head of Department	888
P04	Male	Indian	Medicine	Radiologist	Middle Manager	2904
P05	Male	White British	Higher Education	University Centre Deputy Director	Senior Manager	1984
P06	Female	Black British	Healthcare	Lead Clinical Practice Educator	Middle Manager	1069
P07	Male	White British	Education	Campus Operations Manager	Middle Manager	1716
P08	Male	White Irish	Communications and Research	Managing Director	Executive	688
P09	Male	Black-British African	Higher Education	Academic Director	Senior	1628
P10	Male	Mixed Other	Professional Services	Client Services Leader	Team Leader	1500
P11	Female	Caribbean	Healthcare	Project Manager	Team Leadership	786
P12	Female	Black British, African	Higher Education	Senior Lecturer	Team Leader	909
P13	Male	Black British	Construction Industry	Operations and Human Relations Manager	Senior Manager	870
P14	Male	White British	Higher Education	Senior Lecturer	Senior	1264
P15	Female	North African/ Arab	Tele-communication, Finance	IT Project Manager	Team Leader	1088

P16	Female	Asian	Telehealth Pharmaceutical	Clinical Operations Lead	Team Leader	1144
P17	Male	White British	Higher Education	Assistant Dean	Senior	870
P18	Male	White British	Legal	CEO	Executive	818
P19	Female	Mixed	Sustainability and Environmental	Sustainability Management Consultant	Executive	955
P20	Female	Mixed	Property Management	Leasing Manager	Executive	888
P21	Male	Asian British	Health and Social Care Education	Operations Director	Executive	1204
P22	Female	Mixed Filipino American and White American	Education	Senior Instructional Designer	Senior	3774
P23	Female	British Kenyan Asian	Education	Equalities Project Officer	Team Leader	989
P24	Female	Arab	Higher Education	Academic Skills Manager	Middle Manager	1060
P25	Male	British Pakistani	Higher Education/Cons ultancy	Director	Executive	907

Data Analysis: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach was used for data analysis. This approach is suitable for a DEI-based study as it aims to explore individuals' understanding, interpretation, and the meaning they assign to their lived experiences through their narratives within a specific context (Luft and Overgaard, 2012; Creswell and Poth, 2016; Smith et al., 2021). Particularly, like other contemporary leadership behaviour and DEI practice studies (see CMI, 2024; Son Hing et al., 2002: 494; Tasheva and Hillman, 2019; Konrad, 2019: 2180; Ghosh et al., 2024), relevant literature in the field was reviewed prior to the data analysis process to establish the literature/theoretical foundation and enhance the quality of the analysis.

The analysis followed the six-step IPA process outlined by Smith et al. (2021): (1) reading the transcript, (2) re-reading and initial noting, (3) developing emergent themes, (4) identifying connections among themes, (5) moving to the next case clusters, and (6) identifying patterns across cases. This iterative framework supports a systematic examination of participants' claims, interpretations, and concerns (Larkin et al., 2006). The analysis emphasised both convergence and divergence across accounts, enabling the identification of the final shared themes as well as distinctive experiences (Smith and Eatough, 2019).

IPA's cyclical and inductive nature facilitated movement from detailed individual accounts to broader interpretative insights, rather than a linear or static mode of analysis (Smith et al., 2021). Through this process, central and final themes were identified. The outcomes of the analytical coding structure are illustrated in the diagram below, demonstrating the coding and interpretative iterations used to address the study's research questions (see table 2).

TABLE 2: Initial Codes, Aggregate Clusters and Theoretical Themes

Coding Layer 1: Initial Codes	Coding Layer 2: Aggregate Clusters	Coding Layer 3: Superordinate Themes
DEI Ideologically	DEI Normative Beliefs	(1) Ideological Commitment to DEI (<i>'what they ought to do'</i>)
DEI as Inclusion	Inclusive Mindsets	
DEI as Regarding Difference	Awareness of Difference	
DEI as Respect	Respectful Engagement	
DEI as Fairness	Equity & Justice Orientation	
DEI as Authenticity	DEI as Substantive rather than Tokenistic Inclusion	
DEI Practically	Applied DEI Practices	(2) Practice of DEI (<i>'what they actually do'</i>)
Representation	Workforce Representation & Visibility	
Opportunities	Access & Advancement	
Role Model	Leadership Behaviour & Advocacy	
DEI Deficiently	DEI Contradictions and Deficiencies	(3) Deficient DEI (<i>'what they fail to do'</i>)
DEI Blind Spots	Structural & Cognitive Blind Spots	
Inclusive leadership not been taught or trained	Lack of DEI Capability Development	
Assumption of DEI knowledge	Overconfidence / Complacency in DEI Knowledge	

Findings and Discussion

In this section we consider how our study both addresses our research question and contributes to the extant literature in various ways. Our research questions ask, *‘how do organisational leaders engage with DEI within work organisations? And ‘how might their approaches introduce or reproduce DEI blind spots within leadership practice?’*

We evidence the case of UK leaders, who have engaged with DEI initiatives and decision making within UK professional environments. We have evidenced that leaders with DEI decision making capacity, experience and engage with DEI practices most keenly along three realms (1) ideologically, (2) practically, (3) deficiently, we show how leaders move between, ‘what they know they should do’, ‘what they actually do’, and ‘what they fail do’.

Theme: DEI ideological Commitment - (*‘what they ought to do’*)

A dominant pattern across interviews was participants’ articulation of Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI), as an ideological commitment, grounded in normative beliefs about appropriate conduct. The study participants consistently framed DEI in terms of what they *ought* to do, or what *they know is right* to do, referring to values such as acceptance, tolerance, respect, and fairness. These accounts suggest that these leaders possess a well-rehearsed moral vocabulary of inclusion, representing a generalized awareness of DEI principles rather than an operationalized understanding of how such principles are enacted in practice.

To illustrate, participant 3 (**P3: Senior Lecturer**) mentions:

“DEI means accepting all employees together regardless of race, colour, disability or gender differences.”

Equally, participant 6 (**P6: Lead Clinical Practice Educator**) emphasises:

“For me being inclusive of individuals with different backgrounds, abilities, race etc. is what DEI is about. It’s important to ensure that I am mindful of my unconscious bias and I take steps to ensure that people are supported according to their needs however I also recognise that this may not always be easy.”

Such narratives foreground inclusivity in as an individual mindset, positioning DEI as a predominantly attitudinal orientation, rooted in personal awareness and personal moral responsibility. Notably, Participant 6 also introduces a degree of reflexivity by acknowledging the difficulty of consistently enacting these ideals, hinting at the limits of individual-level

awareness alone. These were not the only instantiations of DEI either being framed or alluded to, as an individual moral mindset. For instance, Participant 7 mentions:

“I think from a personal perspective, I would say I have a good ability to lead different people from all walks of life. I am fortunate to have worked with a diverse group of people, which has allowed me to develop a mindset of exploring options that meet both business needs and individual characteristics.” (P7: Campus Operations Manager)

However, these accounts rest on an implicit assumption that awareness of difference naturally translates into equitable decision-making and therefore equitable outcomes. This assumption warrants critical scrutiny. Awareness, in certain instances, might constitute a necessary prerequisite condition for inclusive practice; however, it is insufficient in isolation. The findings indicate that participants’ reliance on ideals can obscure the mechanisms through which inequities are reproduced or challenged. In this sense, DEI is frequently conceptualised as a cognitive or moral stance rather than as a set of embedded organisational practices.

This ideological framing aligns with broader critiques in the literature. For example, Ballakrishnen (2023) argues that identity functions as a form of non-economic capital, shaping differential access to professional opportunities and influencing how individuals navigate organisational contexts. From this perspective, inequities are structurally embedded rather than merely perceptual, suggesting that DEI cannot be reduced to individual awareness or intention. Instead, it must be understood as operating through institutionalized processes and power relations.

The distinction between mindset and structure was explicitly articulated by Participant 8 (P8), a Managing Director, who critiqued the superficiality of prevailing DEI interpretations, he states:

“DEI is often considered in terms of quotas and gender, racial and ethnic identity rather than from a justice lens” (P8: Managing Director).

This critique highlights a perceived disconnect between tokenistic or superficial representations of DEI (e.g. demographic targets) and more substantive concerns with equity and justice at the core of practice. It also suggests that organisational enactments of DEI may remain at the level of compliance or optics, rather than engaging with deeper systemic inequities. According to Opara and colleagues (2023), this is especially important, as one cannot disentangle him or herself from the power-related systemic aspects of organisational

membership, this means that we are either directly benefitting from it or directly being injured by the system within which we work. The findings suggest that participants' ideological framing of DEI aligns more closely with a generalized fairness heuristic than with evidence-based practices. This creates a potential misalignment: initiatives designed to promote DEI may inadvertently conflict with employees' perceptions of fairness. In fact, recent scholarship has begun to highlight this gap (e.g., Nishii and Leroy, 2022; Randel, 2023), noting that such tensions may contribute to resistance or backlash against DEI efforts.

Taken together, these findings suggest that DEI, as understood by participants, is predominantly constructed as an ideological 'ought', a set of internalised norms about appropriate moral comportment, evidence by one's attitude and behaviours. While this moral framing may be necessary for fostering initial engagement, it risks limiting the transformative potential of DEI if not accompanied by a more explicit focus on structural conditions. Notwithstanding, there were several instantiations of DEI in practice. These looked like accountability mechanisms, and initiatives to ensure representation and equal access to opportunities. The challenge for organisations, therefore, lies in moving beyond abstract commitments toward a more integrated approach that aligns individual mindsets with systemic interventions.

Theme: DEI practically - (*'what they actually do'*)

The findings indicate that for many participants, DEI is largely constructed as an ideological 'ought', which sees DEI conceptualised predominantly as an individual mindset, rather than as a collective, system-wide effort. Though participants frequently articulated DEI in terms of personal values, i.e. fairness, respect, awareness of bias, there is a growing recognition that individual intent alone is insufficient to drive meaningful or sustained change. DEI not just as a moral mindset or epistemology but should be an active mechanism to eradicate workplace discrimination, inequity and to foster fair systems, where all are represented and have equal access to opportunity and advancement (Ashley, 2022; Illingworth and Hiddleston-Mumford, 2025). When DEI remains at the level of subjective mindset, its impact is inherently uneven, dependent on individual motivation, and therefore difficult to scale.

Nonetheless, what begins to surface in contrast is a nascent shift toward collective ownership, where DEI is understood not just as '*how I perceive it, and therefore, how I behave,*' but '*how we design and run systems together.*' This shift marks the first significant blind spot identified in the findings, the gap or blind spot between transitioning from individualised DEI

to collective, embedded practice. Participants' examples of DEI in action illustrate what bridging the gap can look like when it begins to take hold.

At the operational level, one participant demonstrated how fairness can be collectively enacted through shared processes:

“When organising the rota, I aimed to ensure workloads and on-call commitments were distributed fairly... The aim was not necessarily to make everything identical for everyone, but to ensure that people felt the system was fair and that individual circumstances were considered where possible.” (P4: Radiologist).

Here, DEI moves beyond personal goodwill into structured and systematic decision-making, where fairness is embedded into how work is allocated across a team. Similarly, the introduction of simple, transparent data-driven practices reflects an emerging collective approach, where measurement and review are possible:

“I started to keep simple statistics on how much service each person had provided over time. This allowed discussions about workload to be based on objective data rather than perceptions or feelings [...] In practice, this often-reassured team members that work was broadly fairly distributed and that any imbalances could be identified and corrected” (P4: Radiologist).

This example is particularly instructive. It shows how shared visibility and accountability mechanisms can shift DEI from subjective interpretation to collective understanding. Fairness is no longer *assumed*, it is evidenced, discussed, potentially measured and adjusted as a group. From a more strategic perspective, participants were also able to explicitly challenge the limitations of individualised (*assumed*) DEI:

“DEI means designing and maintaining fair systems, not relying on individual goodwill. It includes how we recruit and develop staff, how we respond to complaints or conflict, and being alert to what gets labelled as ‘difficult’ or ‘not a good fit’ because those labels can often hide bias or discomfort with difference.” (P5: University Centre Deputy Director).

DEI is further challenged, due to the emerging blind spot between individual mindset and collective data-driven systems:

“I’ve also argued that inclusion should be treated as a data-driven, quality issue (and not only an HR issue), because the way we design services and standards directly shapes who thrives. sometimes the inclusive move is to slow down, listen longer, and co-design rather than decide alone. (P5: University Centre Deputy Director).

This framing positions DEI as a collective organisational responsibility, embedded in systems, policies, and shared norms, not left to discretionary effort. The above narratives of participant 4 and 5, demonstrates the importance of DEI to them and their willingness to apply DEI policies and strategies as part of their leadership roles within their organisations. They also reflect on their individual understanding of the organisation's DEI culture and its importance to employees' well-being. In particular, ‘Participant 4’ outlined practical steps taken, such as discussing, listening, and offering reassurance, for team-members, to ensure fairness and inclusivity when organising and leading the team.

Despite these promising examples, the broader pattern remains, that across the leaders in this study reports of promoting inclusive mindsets were given more often than embedding collective (evidence-based) mechanisms to sustain teams and organisations. This first blind spot between individual mindset and collective effort reflects a key developmental issue. Many organisational leaders express that they have successfully built awareness and moral alignment around DEI, but this is only one piece of the DEI puzzle. The next phase requires bridging the gap towards intentional system-building and practice adoption. Furthermore, this requires a nuanced approach that regards the quality of systems and practices, and doesn’t simply implement ‘systems for systems sake’, as a sort of tick box endeavour, as expressed by Participant 7:

“I think it’s important to measure DEI, but not superficially as a tick box, as in ‘how many people of colour are there?’ but rather ‘why are we not attracting individuals from particular backgrounds?’ (in a more holistic sense)” (P7: Campus Operations Manager).

In this sense, DEI must evolve from something people believe in, to something organisations deliberately design and enact together, through systems, within which quality, integrity and consistency determine impact. This should not be reduced to a tick-box exercise or symbolic displays of compliance (Ashley, 2022). Furthermore, narratives show mixed opinions on how DEI should be implemented, measured and monitored, highlighting uncertainties, or knowledge gaps, about how leaders in organisations should engage with DEI strategies in the

workplace. For instance, Participant 18, a Chief Executive Officer within the legal industry states:

“I consciously integrate DEI principles into leadership practice, in developing the website I ensure that DEI comes through [...] In reviewing the programme to offer places for trainees, I pushed to give weighting to candidates who had to really stretch themselves, and overcome obstacles to get where they were [...] As for any blind spots, possibly they are there – but as it’s a blind spot, I would not know about it!”)” (P18: Chief Executive Officer).

Again, it shows a clear ideological mindset, and a good attempt to integrate and monitor DEI initiatives; whilst simultaneously identifying that this engagement might be limited or underdeveloped. The participant's narrative aligns with the work of Bowe et al (2023) on a practical approach to monitoring and measuring DEI in the workplace.

These findings suggest that, as participants narrate, the measurement and monitoring of DEI strategies and policies is predominantly a set of individual leaders' plans rather than a laid-down protocol to be followed. This is evidenced by each leader's willingness and zeal to use different tactics to measure DEI practice in the workplace through their initiatives and approaches. Furthermore participant 18 introduces another potential issue, that being where DEI initiatives are being engaged, leaders are only doing this in part, based on their existing knowledge, therefore in a deficient manner.

Theme: DEI deficiently - (‘what they fail to do’)

Building on the first gap, the shift from ‘individual mindset to collective effort’ the findings point to a second, more operational blind spot, DEI deficiencies. Even where leaders attempt to engage with DEI in practice, this engagement is often partial, inconsistent, or underdeveloped. In effect, DEI is being *done* but not yet being done *well*. Our study findings highlight that many leaders are failing to fully understand what diversity and equality should look like, not just as an ideological commitment, but practically, and when steps are taken to implement DEI in a practical sense, these attempts are likely lacking, this is therefore informing a second blind spot.

This creates a pattern of ‘incomplete operationalisation’, where DEI initiatives exist, but lack the coherence, depth, or quality required to drive meaningful change.

For instance, one participant explicitly referred to this disconnect, asserting:

“I can see that at the organisational level; there are steps that the organisation is taking to address DEI. However, I am unsure of how effective this is, and whether at the local team level and individual level, it is evident.” (P6: Lead Clinical Practice Educator).

This observation reinforces a critical insight, that is, visibility at the organisational level does not guarantee translation into effective everyday practices. When feedback mechanisms signal responsiveness, but do not lead to visible and appropriate action, then these systems are lacking; furthermore, they risk becoming performative systems and structures that demonstrate compliance without delivering substantive change. Over time, this disconnect can erode trust, particularly among those already marginalised, reinforcing a perception that participation will not meaningfully influence decisions or outcomes (Opara et al., 2023). Furthermore, research shows that where trust and authenticity is eroded, this creates negative situations, contributing to increased emotional exhaustion and diminished well-being for those affected (Ofori and Bell, 2020). This dynamic also reveals the subjective nature of DEI blind spots, as often times a tailored approach is required when leaders seek to inform equality and diversity initiatives in meaningful ways. As one participant noted:

“It is not enough to gather feedback through surveys or formal procedures; people must feel assured that their concerns have really been heard, and will be taken seriously, i.e. put into practice” (P4: Radiologist)

This narrative suggests the existence of “tick-box” behaviours, and a potential gap between what leaders and managers say in principle, and what they actually do. The “say-do gap” is all around us, and this should be a cause of real concern. Formal mechanisms for inclusion exist in principle but might fail to translate into lived experiences of psychological safety or meaningful organisational change, this reinforces the subtle messaging that participation of diverse group members may not meaningfully alter decisions or behaviours around DEI.

For instance, Participant 4 continues:

“Another challenge is that those who feel most disengaged or unheard are often the least likely to participate in surveys or feedback processes, leaving leadership with an incomplete picture” (P4: Radiologist)

Here, the limitations of DEI systems are not only operational but epistemic: organisational leaders may rely on data that systematically excludes the voices of those most affected by

inequity. This creates a cycle in which gaps remain hidden, and leaders overestimate the effectiveness of their DEI efforts. For instance:

“I think there are gaps, particularly as inclusive leadership can be interpreted as being “nice” or avoiding difficult conversations, rather than combining respect and psychological safety with clear measurable standards and accountability. I also think there is sometimes a blind spot around subtle behaviours, such as who gets visibility, who is heard in meetings, and how opportunities are allocated informally” (P10: Client Services Lead)

Importantly, this second blind spot cannot be understood in isolation. It is structurally linked to the earlier gap between individualised and collective understandings of DEI. Taken together, the findings expose a persistent tension between *what organisations say they are doing* and *what is actually experienced in practice*, a phenomenon widely described in the literature as the “say–do gap” (Nishii, 2013). This gap is particularly salient in DEI contexts, where symbolic commitments can proliferate without corresponding changes in organisational systems or outcomes.

Creating an inclusive culture requires more than intent; it demands deliberate action, strong leadership, and sustained accountability. Leaders should commit to designing policies and practices in consultation with colleagues who have lived experience of discrimination, while ensuring that they as leaders and managers actively role-model inclusive behaviours throughout the organisation. Organisations that successfully foster inclusion benefit from higher levels of employee engagement, stronger performance, and a greater ability to attract and retain talent (Özbilgin and Tatli, 2008).

Critically, a distinction must be made between *doing DEI*, the introduction of initiatives, policies, and communications that signal commitment (Iyer, 2022) and *doing DEI well*, which requires the design and maintenance of fair, transparent, and accountable systems that function consistently across organisational levels (Nishii and Leroy, 2022; Gagnon et al., 2022). Without this distinction, organisations risk drifting into a tick-box mode of engagement, where the presence of DEI activity is mistaken for evidence of progress. As Gagnon and colleagues (2022) caution, diversity work can become institutionalised as “performative,” where declarations of commitment are widely expressed but do not consistently translate into the lived experiences they are intended to support.

Contribution and implications

This study contributes to the growing literature on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) by demonstrating that the effectiveness of inclusion efforts depends not only on individual commitment but also on the quality and coherence of collective organisational systems that support equitable practice. The findings suggest that while many organisations have achieved broad consensus regarding the importance of DEI, significant challenges remain in translating this commitment into consistent and effective implementation.

For leadership, key implications are twofold. First, DEI cannot be reduced to ideology, awareness, or mindfully signalling intent; equally, the existence of policies and initiatives does not necessarily constitute meaningful change. Second, the effectiveness of DEI initiatives once implemented, depends on whether systems are trusted, operationally robust, and experienced as consequential in everyday practice. This requires a shift from DEI as an aspirational or reputational concern toward DEI as a matter of system design, culture, evaluation, and continuous refinement (Roberts and Nkomo, 2025). Without this shift, DEI risks remaining performative, highly visible in organisational discourse, yet limited in transformational impact. With it, organisations have the potential to move beyond aspiration toward embedded practice, where fairness is not merely articulated, but consistently produced through the structures and systems of organisational life (Gagnon et al., 2022; Roberts and Nkomo, 2025).

For policymakers, HR practitioners, and organisational leaders, the study highlights the importance of bridging this ‘say-do’ gap, through a shift in focus toward the *quality of DEI systems themselves*. Therefore, adopting a systems-based approach to DEI must include strengthening accountability mechanisms, improve the consistency of implementation, and regularly evaluate the effectiveness of policies and practices. By integrating inclusion into everyday organisational processes rather than treating it as a standalone initiative, organisations are more likely to achieve sustainable improvements in employee experience, organisational performance, and long-term adaptability. Crucially, leaders must also reach those least likely to engage through formal mechanisms, as these voices are reported to be the most critical for identifying structural inequities (Nishii, 2013).

Conclusion

The first gap identified in this study, between individual mindset and collective effort, highlights the limits of relying on personal commitment, goodwill, or interpersonal competence as the primary vehicle for inclusion. While such orientations are necessary for engagement, they are insufficient in the absence of shared systems that structure decision-making, accountability, and fairness. The second gap, between partial and effective practice extends this critique further, showing that even where systems are introduced, they are often inconsistently implemented, unevenly understood, or insufficiently robust to generate equitable outcomes.

Taken together, these gaps suggest that many organisations are occupying a transitional and unstable phase in their DEI journey. They have broadly achieved *why DEI matters*, reflected in moral and ideological alignment across leadership narratives. They are increasingly developing *how DEI is enacted*, through policies, initiatives, and procedural mechanisms. However, they have not yet consistently addressed *how well DEI functions in practice*, particularly in terms of system quality, coherence, and impact across organisational levels (Nishii and Leroy, 2022; Roberts and Nkomo, 2025).

The study, therefore, effectively shifts attention from the presence of a DEI agenda and DEI initiatives to the conditions under which they become effective. It suggests that meaningful progress depends not simply on organisational commitment or activity, but on the extent to which inclusion is embedded within coherent systems, consistently enacted across organisational levels, and experienced as fair and equitable by employees. Understanding and addressing this implementation challenge remains central to advancing both theory and practice in organisational inclusion.

References

- Ahmad, I., Abdelhay, S.M., and Saif, N. (2025). Impact of visionary leadership on employee's psychological wellbeing: mediating role of job autonomy and moderating role of perceived organisational support, *Strategy & Leadership*, pp.1-22.
- Amis, J.M., Mair, J., and Munir, K.A. (2020). The organisational reproduction of inequality. *Academy of Management Annals*, Vol 14 No. 1, pp. 195-230.
- Ashley L. (2022). Organisational Social Mobility Programmes as Mechanisms of Power and Control. *Work, Employment and Society* Vol. 36 No. 3 pp. 427–444.
- Atogenzoya, C.A., Alhassan, A.R., Salifu, I., and Akologo, I.G. (2026). Bridging the gap? Explicating the coping hybrid strategies used by social enterprises to manage institutional voids. *Strategy & Leadership*, pp.1-33.
- Ballakrishnen S.S. (2023). Rethinking Inclusion: Ideal Minorities, Inclusion Cultures, and Identity Capitals in the Legal Profession. *Law and Society Inquiry* Vol. 48 No. 4, pp.1157–1180.
- Beckwith A.L., Carter D.R. and Peters, T. (2016). The Underrepresentation of African American Women in Executive Leadership: What's Getting in the Way? *Journal of Business Studies Quarterly* Vol. 7 No. 4, pp.115-134.
- Benmira, S., and Agboola, M. (2021). Evolution of leadership theory. *BMJ leader*, Vol. 5 No. 1, pp. 3-5.
- Bennis, W.G., and Townsend, R. (1995). *Reinventing Leadership*. Collins Business Essential: New York.
- Bowe, A., Drame, E., Duval-Diop, D., Mawhinney, L. and Melaco, C., (2023). Measuring DEI within workplaces: questioning the theoretical, empirical, and practical models. *Bulletin of Sociological Methodology/Bulletin de Méthodologie Sociologique*, Vol. 159 No. 1, pp.75-89.

Brown, A.D (2015). Identities and identity work in organizations. *International Journal of Management Reviews* Vol. 17 No. 1, pp. 20–40.

Brouwers, E.P. (2020). Social stigma is an underestimated contributing factor to unemployment in people with mental illness or mental health issues: position paper and future directions. *BMC psychology*, Vol. 8 No. 1, pp. 1-7.

Chartered Management Institute (2024). Walking the Walk: Managers Inclusivity and Organisational Success, available at: <https://managers.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Walking-The-Walk-Report.pdf>

Creswell, J.W. and Poth, C.N. (2016). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage Publications.

Drucker, P. (1996). Your leadership is unique. *Christianity Today International/Leadership Journal*. Fall 1996, Vol. XVII, No. 4, pp. 54.

Eagly, A.H., and Carli, L.L. (2007). Through the labyrinth: The truth about how women become leaders. *Gender in Management*, Vol. 24 No. 1, ISSN: 1754-2413.

Eisenhardt, K.M., Graebner, M.E. and Sonenshein, S. (2016). Grand challenges and inductive methods: Rigor without rigor mortis. *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 59 No. 4, pp.1113-1123.

Fernando, M., Reveley, J. and Learmouth, M. (2020). Identity work by non-white immigrant business scholar: Autoethnographic vignettes of covering and accenting. *Human Relations*, Vol. 73 No. 6, pp.765-788.

Foldy, E.G., and Ospina, S.M. (2022). Contestation, negotiation and resolution: The relationship between power and collective leadership. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, Vol. 25 No. 3, pp. 546-563.

Gagnon, S., Augustin, T., and Cukier, W. (2022). Interplay for change in equality, diversity and inclusion studies. *Human Relations*, Vol. 75 No. 7, pp. 1327-1353.

Gioia, D.A., Corley, K.G. and Hamilton, A.L. (2013). Seeking Qualitative Rigor in Inductive Research: Notes on the Gioia methodology. *Organizational research methods*, Vol. 16 No. 1, pp.15-31.

Handy, C. (1992). *The language of leadership. Frontiers of Leadership*. Eds. Syrett and Hogg. Oxford: Blackwell.

Iyer, A. (2022). Understanding advantaged groups' opposition to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies: The role of perceived threat. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, Vol. 16 No. 5, p.e12666.

Klatt, J., Eimler, S.C, Kramer, N.C. (2016). Makeup your mind: The impact of styling on perceived competence and warmth of female leaders. *The journal of social psychology*, Vol. 156 No. 5, pp. 483-497.

Konrad, J.R. (2019). Defining the Broken Rung: The Return on Investment of Gender Equity *Harvard Business Review*.

Larkin, M., Watts, S. and Clifton, E. (2006). Giving voice and making sense in interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Qualitative research in psychology*, Vol. 3 No. 2, pp.102-120.

Luft, S. and Overgaard, S. (2012). *The Routledge companion to phenomenology* (p. 71). New York: Routledge.

Martinez, L.R., Smith, N.A., Ortiz, S.D., Korsak, M., and Day, T. (2024). Minding the gap: Mindful inclusion of opposing perspectives to protect DEI initiatives. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, Vol. 17 No. 4, pp. 490-494. Minding the gap: Mindful inclusion of

opposing perspectives to protect DEI initiatives, *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, Cambridge Core.

Miles, M.B. and Huberman, A.M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. sage.

Nishii, L.H. (2013). The benefits of climate for inclusion for gender-diverse groups. *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 56 No. 6, pp.1754-1774.

Nishii, L.H. and Leroy, H. (2022). A Multi-Level Framework of Inclusive Leadership in Organizations. *Group & Organization Management*, Vol. 47 No. 4.

Ofori, D.W and Bell, J. (2020). Societal expectations and well-being of academics: views from university lecturers in Ghana. *Journal of Education, Society and Behavioural Science*, Vol. 33 No. 10, pp. 74-84.

Opara, V., Ryan, M.K., Sealy, R., and Begeny, C.T. (2023). Fitting in whilst standing out: Identity flexing strategies of professional British women of African, Asian, and Caribbean ethnicities. *Frontiers in Sociology*, Vol. 8.

Opara, V. (2024), Women's Leadership Experiences: Examining the Intersectionality of Race and Gender, Akande, A. (Ed.) *Leadership and Politics. Springer Studies on Populism, Identity Politics and Social Justice*. Springer, Cham.

Opara, V. (2025), Women, Management and Globalization: Leadership, Barriers, and Opportunities, Akande, A, (Ed.) *Organizational Behavior: Current Science, Models, and Applications*. Springer.

Opara, V., Sealy, R, Ryan, M.K and Begeny, C.T (2026). 'Resistance modification vacillation: revealing intersectional responses to identity imposition in professional work settings.' *Frontiers in Organizational Psychology*, Vol. 4.

Özbilgin, M. F., and Tatli, A. (2008). *Global Diversity Management: An Evidence Based Approach*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Özbilgin, M., Erbil, C. and Odabasi, E. (2022). Leaders with disabilities: a boardroom challenge, Beatty, J., Hennekam, S. and Kulkarni, M. (Eds) De Gruyter, *Handbook of Disability and Management*, De Gruyter

Parker, J. (2017). A report into the ethnic diversity of UK boards. *Independent Report*.

Patton, M.Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. SAGE Publications, inc.

Randel, A.E. (2023). Inclusion in the workplace: A Review and Research Agenda. *Group & Organization Management*, Vol. 50 No. 1, pp.119-162.

Roberts, L.M. and Nkomo, S. (2025). Navigating marginalized identities in diverse organizations. *Current Opinion in Psychology* Vol. 62: 101983.

Rowe, W.G., (2007). *Cases in Leadership*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Shilpzand, P., Nerona, R., Li, Y., Restubog, S.L.D., and Rofcanin, Y. (2026). Leadership in layers: An integrative review on skip-level leadership and an agenda for future research. *The Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 37 No. 1, 101930.

Smith, J.A., Larkin, M. and Flowers, P. (2021). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research*.

Smith, J.A. and Eatough, V. (2019). Looking Forward: Conceptual and Methodological

Developments in Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Introduction to the Special Issue.

Qualitative Research in Psychology, Vol. 16 No. 2, pp.163-165.

Son Hing, L.S., Ramona, B.D., and Zanna, M.P. (2002). Meritocracy and opposition to

affirmative action: Making concessions in the face of discrimination. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 83 No. 3, pp. 493–509.

Stogdill, R.M. (1974). *Handbook of leadership: A survey of theory and research*. New York: The Free Press.

Tasheva, S. and Hillman, A.J. (2019). Integrating Diversity at Different Levels: Multilevel Human Capital, Social Capital and Demographic Diversity and Their Implications for Team Effectiveness. *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 44 No. 4, pp. 1930-3807.

Tinuoye, A.T., Adamade, S.S., Ogharanduku, V.I. (2022). Leadership and Followership in the Context of Trade Unionism, Khan, S.N. (Ed) *Leadership and Followership in an Organizational Change Context*. IGI Global. Doi 10.4018/978-1-7998-2807-5

Veludo-de-Oliveira, T.M., Ikeda, A.A. and Campomar, M.C. (2006). Discussing ladder application by the means-end chain theory. *The Qualitative Report*, Vol. 11 No. 4, pp.626-642.

Vinnicombe, S. and Tessaro, M. (2022). *The Female FTSE Board Report 2022*: What works?

Yoshikawa, T., Uchida, D., and Smith, R.R. (2024). Female CHRO appointments: A crack in the glass ceiling? *The Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 35.