

# Effective Strategies Human Resource Business Leaders Use to Implement Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Initiatives That Reduce Worker Turnover

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## **Abstract**

Human resource (HR) business leaders prioritizing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) champion a more dynamic and innovative workforce, thereby alleviating labor turnover—a costly hindrance to growth. HR business leaders orchestrate these strategies, promoting an environment where diverse talents are valued and equitable opportunities abound, reducing labor turnover. Rooted in social identity theory (SIT) and the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) framework, this qualitative, pragmatic inquiry sought to identify and explore the practical strategies HR business leaders employ to implement DEI initiatives, thereby reducing employee turnover in the Southeastern United States. The participants were seven HR business leaders in the Southeastern United States who had successfully implemented DEI strategies to reduce labor turnover. Data were collected through semistructured interviews and publicly available documentation, which were analyzed using Braun and Clarke’s thematic coding and analysis approach. The four emerging themes were promoting continuous training and development, cultivating a positive organizational culture, gaining leadership buy-in, and effectively allocating employees. A key recommendation is that HR business leaders continuously promote training and development in unconscious bias, inclusive leadership, and cultural competence, with leadership buy-in essential for fostering an inclusive culture.

## **Introduction/Background**

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) have become integral to the corporate ethos, driving a strategic imperative across organizations in the 21st century. The reality is that some human resource (HR) business leaders lack the knowledge to effectively implement DEI initiatives within their organizations, which may lead to increased employee dissatisfaction and turnover. Brimhall et al. (2016) argued that DEI practices are not ancillary but are central to a company's strategic planning. This perspective frames the discussion on HR leaders' specific challenges in effectively implementing DEI initiatives. Supporting this claim, Al-Suraihi et al. (2021) highlighted that inefficiencies in DEI programming can lead to employee dissatisfaction and increased turnover, with substantial financial costs. The analysis of this evidence suggests that the lack of a comprehensive DEI strategy can undermine employee morale and retention. Furthermore, Marsden (2016) quantified employee turnover costs, revealing significant financial losses resulting from recruitment and training expenses and lost productivity. The conclusion drawn from this evidence is that the absence of effective DEI initiatives harms workforce cohesion and performance and incurs significant costs to the organization. Understanding and addressing the challenges in DEI implementation is critical for HR leaders aiming to cultivate a thriving, innovative, and engaged workforce. HR leaders play a pivotal role in shaping an organization's culture. Failing to apply DEI principles may lead to workplace cultures that marginalize minority groups, resulting in higher turnover rates. Embracing DEI can enhance productivity and reduce turnover. Addressing ineffective DEI implementation is crucial to minimizing its impact on employee retention (Turi et al., 2022).

## **Summary of the Literature**

A literature review was conducted to inform the following research question: What effective strategies do HR business leaders employ to implement DEI initiatives that reduce labor turnover in the Southeast United States? First, I addressed the conceptual framework, including a critical analysis of supporting theories—social identity theory (SIT) and the Equity, Diversity, and Equity (EDI) framework. Second, I critically analyzed and synthesized scholarship on potential themes and phenomena related to the study's purpose: to explore the practical strategies HR business leaders use to implement DEI initiatives that reduce employee turnover in the Southeast United States. Ultimately, I compared various standpoints and evaluated my study concerning previous research and findings. In this section, I provide a comprehensive and substantiated review of professional and academic literature related to my research on the practical strategies HR business leaders employ to implement DEI initiatives to reduce employee turnover in the Southeast United States.

### ***Social Identity Theory***

SIT posits that individuals derive a sense of self from group memberships, influencing intergroup behavior (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Tajfel's early work on categorization and intergroup relations laid the groundwork for SIT, further developed in the 1970s and 1980s (Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel & Turner, 2004). The theory suggests that people categorize themselves and others into various social groups, favoring their group (in-group) over others (out-group), which can lead to prejudice and discrimination (Tajfel, 1974). SIT is crucial for understanding in-group bias and out-group antagonism, offering insights into the psychological underpinnings of group dynamics (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). This framework facilitates a deeper understanding of how individual self-concepts are intertwined with group membership, laying the groundwork for subsequent discussions on intergroup conflict and cohesion.

One of the critical developments in SIT literature is the concept of social creativity. This term refers to strategies individuals use to maintain a positive social identity in the face of negative group status. In the Southeast United States, where cultural and demographic diversity is particularly pronounced, HR business leaders align DEI practices with organizational goals to foster an inclusive culture. These leaders' diverse strategies include redefining the parameters of comparison, choosing alternative dimensions for contrast, or changing the values associated with the group's attributes (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). This detailed explanation of social creativity provides a deeper understanding of how individuals navigate their identities in challenging group dynamics. SIT contends that an individual's self-concept is partly derived from perceived membership in social groups, which can profoundly influence workplace behavior and attitudes. Effective DEI strategies that recognize and celebrate diversity can enhance employees' sense of belonging and identity within the organization, which, according to SIT, should lead to increased organizational commitment and reduced turnover (Feitosa et al., 2022). Conversely, inadequate or misaligned DEI efforts may exacerbate social identity threats, leading to higher turnover rates. A further extension of SIT is the self-categorization theory (SCT), developed by Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, and Wetherell in 1987. SCT delves into the cognitive processes behind group behavior, proposing that social identity is a system of self-categorization that operates at different levels of abstraction, from personal to social identity, depending on situational and contextual factors (Ray et al., 2008). This focused approach promises to enhance the practical application of DEI strategies, potentially setting a precedent for future research to explore regional specificity within the HR field.

### ***Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Framework***

The EDI framework is a critical lens through which to view and understand strategic measures in business that will help with issues such as labor turnover. It reflects a commitment to justice and acknowledges the rich tapestry of human experience. EDI frameworks also serve as strategic blueprints to guide the implementation of policies, practices, and cultural norms that seek to foster an environment where every individual can thrive (Landrine, 1995). As such, the EDI framework is not merely a moral imperative but a business strategy that can lead to a more stable and productive workforce, benefiting both employees and employers.

The American Psychological Association (APA) core EDI work, as an institution, is identified in the model as science, practice, education, and advocacy that is inclusive and equitable, responding to the unique challenges and opportunities of social and cultural diversity. Organizations must embed EDI throughout all aspects of the work. Beginning in the 1960s, grassroots activism groups, Black psychologists nationwide, various APA members, and EDI-focused divisions challenged the APA to reflect on and respond to its membership's lack of diversity and improve oppressive structures within the organization and profession (Evans, 2021). In June 2018, Chief Diversity Officer Maysa Akbar, PhD, began developing an EDI framework to guide future EDI planning at the APA (Evans, 2021). This evolving EDI framework draws on the APA's 2005 diversity policy, its 2007 diversity plans and reports, and best practices from the field of organizational EDI. APA's EDI framework reflects the view that equity, diversity, and inclusion are vital to the progress of the Association, the field of psychology, and broader society (Evans, 2021). As the APA evolves, its commitment to EDI will continue to serve as a guiding force for future developments within the field.

### *SIT and EDI Complementarity*

The contemporary workplace is not just a collection of individuals but an amalgamation of diverse backgrounds, each bringing unique experiences, perspectives, and identities to the table. This diversity is not just a fact but a significant aspect that organizations need to understand and leverage. Amidst this diversity, organizations strive to foster a sense of equity and inclusion, not only as a moral imperative but also as a strategic endeavor to reduce worker turnover (Davidescu et al., 2020). The interplay between SIT and EDI frameworks is pivotal in understanding and implementing effective diversity initiatives that can enhance worker retention. Employees' social identities can profoundly impact their sense of belonging, engagement, and, consequently, their intention to stay or leave an organization (Alnehabi & Al-Mekhlafi, 2023). Research shows that EDI initiatives improve job satisfaction, enhance company reputation, and foster more significant innovation, thereby reducing turnover (Roberson, 2019). The EDI framework is not just a set of policies and practices, but a strategic approach aimed at promoting fairness (equity), acknowledging and valuing the richness of diversity, and creating inclusive environments where all employees can thrive. This framework is not just a nice-to-have but a necessity for organizations in today's diverse workplace, offering a promising path to enhance worker retention.

SIT and EDI can be complementary when applied to worker retention strategies. SIT, an influential psychological theory, highlights the importance of group membership and its impact on self-esteem and behavior. By acknowledging and valuing the diversity within social identities, EDI initiatives can strengthen employees' attachment to their organizational identity, enhancing the inclusive nature of group membership (Leroy et al., 2022). This understanding of SIT can provide a profound insight into employee behavior and retention, enlightening organizations on the importance of diversity and inclusion. The relationship between SIT and EDI in the workplace is theoretical and a practical tool for organizations to enhance worker retention. It lies in recognizing that individuals seek environments where their social identities are valued and can maintain a positive self-concept.

By embracing EDI principles, organizations play a crucial role in creating environments where individuals feel valued and included, regardless of their background. These organizations also celebrate and integrate diverse perspectives into decision-making processes. Organizations that adeptly execute EDI initiatives tap into the foundational human yearning for belonging and recognition as postulated by SIT (Kelly et al., 2022). By instituting affinity groups and mentorship programs that respect and celebrate the social identities of employees, organizations can effectively mitigate the alienation that can occur in diverse work settings. The key to this success lies in applying SIT principles through tailored EDI programs, which are designed to meet the psychological needs of all employees, thereby enhancing the organizational culture and promoting a sense of value and belonging among them.

### ***Organizational Dynamics***

Current organizational dynamics rely on achieving a work-life balance, which impacts employee well-being and productivity. Davidescu et al. (2020) investigated the intricate relationship between job flexibility, job satisfaction, and performance. Their research indicates that employee welfare necessitates work-life balance policies and sustainable human resource management. Professional and personal commitments can conflict in fast-paced workplaces. Companies must offer flexible employment arrangements to meet the needs of their employees. More scheduling autonomy may help employees balance work and life. A work-life balance improves job satisfaction, engagement, and overall well-being. Work-life balance attracts top talent, enhances morale and productivity, and succeeds. Thus, work-life balance benefits individuals and firms.

The implications of organizational policies and practices on workforce diversity and inclusion are examined. Rebbeck et al. (2022) presented the frameworks of genomic and genetic diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). The findings highlighted the need for proactive measures to address systemic inequities and foster more equitable workplaces. This subject emphasizes the growing status of DEI as both a moral obligation and a strategic advantage for organizations across various sectors. Diversity and inclusion bring diverse perspectives, experiences, and skills to firms, enhancing innovation, creativity, and overall performance. Research-based DEI techniques improve organizational performance, sustainability, and stakeholder responsiveness. Rebbeck et al. emphasized evidence-based DEI. Empirical research and stakeholder input can increase diversity and inclusion. DEI techniques that are evidence-based reflect data-driven organizational management, where research drives action and progress.

The extensive literature on organizational dynamics reveals the interplay between HRM, diversity, equity, inclusion, and organizational behavior. Alnehabi and Al-Mekhlafi (2023) found that corporate social responsibility (CSR) impacts employee performance and turnover intentions. Effective corporate strategies, employee attitudes, and context are essential for improving CSR and employee outcomes. Research on CSR has shown that organizational practices, employee attitudes, and outcomes are interconnected. By changing employee perceptions of company values, CSR efforts improve engagement, motivation, and commitment. In their 2023 study, Alnehabi and Al-Mekhlafi emphasized the importance of business identity

and commitment to maximize the positive influence of CSR on employee outcomes. According to this holistic approach, CSR programs must align with a business's culture and strategy. The CSR employee outcomes study emphasizes the importance of comprehensive organizational management. Understanding the complex interplay between corporate social responsibility (CSR), employee attitudes, and company success enhances social responsibility and employee well-being. CSR benefits employees and the community, so companies should investigate.

### ***Staff Turnover***

Staff turnover and retention pose significant challenges within organizational studies, demanding a nuanced understanding of the factors influencing employees' decisions to stay or leave. Huning et al. (2020) provided a comprehensive examination of turnover intentions, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of this issue by incorporating variables such as job embeddedness, managerial support, and job satisfaction. They argued that these factors, individually or in combination, play a crucial role in an employee's likelihood of remaining with an organization. This research enables companies to pinpoint the specific causes of turnover and tailor retention strategies accordingly. Al-Suraihi, et al. (2021) furthered this discussion by advocating for targeted retention initiatives to reduce staff turnover. They proposed that organizations can effectively diminish the intent to leave by strengthening job embeddedness, enhancing job satisfaction, and providing robust managerial support. Importantly, Al-Suraihi et al. stressed that retention efforts must be holistic, addressing employees' diverse expectations and incentives across different levels of the corporate hierarchy. Such comprehensive approaches should integrate human and organizational elements to foster a more cohesive and supportive work environment. The studies by Al-Suraihi et al. and Huning et al. offer valuable insights that can help organizations develop more effective retention strategies. Understanding the factors influencing turnover enables companies to create an environment that retains valuable human capital and mitigates the disruptive effects of high turnover rates.

### **Methods**

Based on the background and literature review, the specific problem addressed in this study is that many HR business leaders in the Southeast United States lack effective strategies for implementing DEI initiatives to realize the benefits in their organizations. A qualitative, pragmatic inquiry design was used to explore HR business leaders' strategies for implementing DEI initiatives that reduce employee turnover.

### ***Research Question***

What practical strategies do HR business leaders use to implement DEI initiatives that reduce labor turnover in the Southeast United States?

### ***Data Collection***

The researchers used semi-structured interviews to collect data from participants in the Southeast United States (N = 7). The study population consisted of HR business leaders in medium- to large-sized organizations in the Southeast United States who have implemented DEI strategies that reduced labor turnover. A member-checking procedure was used to enhance the trustworthiness of the researcher's understanding of the interviews.

### ***Data Analysis***

Once all the interviews had been member-checked, the data were uploaded into NVivo 14, and the transcripts were read multiple times. The researchers used the software to assign meaningful codes, categorize them based on patterns, and ultimately identify the themes. Each identified theme was compared to the existing literature and the conceptual framework. This process helps to ensure that the findings are grounded in theory and contribute to the knowledge of DEI initiatives and employee retention.

### **Results**

After analyzing the data and alignment through the SIT and EDI Framework, each central theme evolves into practical strategies that HR business leaders can use to implement DEI initiatives that may reduce labor turnover.

Four core themes were identified during the data analysis phase and are discussed in more detail below.

Theme 1: Promoting continuous training and development.

Theme 2: Cultivating a positive organizational culture.

Theme 3: Gaining leadership buy-in.

Theme 4: Effectively allocating employee resources and support.

#### ***Theme 1: Promoting continuous training and development.***

The data analysis revealed that promoting continuous training and development is an effective strategy for implementing DEI that reduces labor turnover in the Southeast United States. Promoting constant training and development programs is integral to employees' professional growth. By investing in their workforce development, organizations demonstrate a commitment to their employees' futures, which can lead to increased job satisfaction and loyalty (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020). By applying DEI principles, these programs can enhance employee competencies and foster a culture where everyone is valued and understood. Subthemes encompass inclusive recruiting and talent development, a comprehensive training program, and the efficacy of implemented training programs.

### *Subtheme 1: Inclusive Recruitment and Talent Development*

Inclusive recruitment and talent development emerge as a strong subtheme in the interviews, primarily focusing on policies such as candidate advocates, removing outdated or insensitive language, and multiple pool outsourcing. Several interviewees emphasized the importance of creating candidate advocacy systems, where instead of discussing why a candidate might not be a good fit, the conversation is shifted toward why they should be hired. IP002 and IP007 stated that they were used to encourage a positive recruitment environment and help build connections for candidates within the organization, fostering a sense of belonging from the outset. It also helps when job postings use inclusive language, which is vital to promoting diversity. IP002 and IP007 highlighted initiatives to continuously review and update language that may be outdated or exclusive to specific groups, thereby creating a more inclusive and welcoming environment for all employees. IP007 emphasized the importance of updating language when recruiting and throughout the talent development process as a key element in implementing the DEI initiative.

Finally, multiple interviewees said that by tapping into diverse sourcing pools, such as historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) or professional organizations that cater to underrepresented groups. IP006 also indicated that maintaining a strong recruiting and hiring pool was one of the practices employed. Maintaining a robust recruiting and hiring pool ensures the talent pipeline remains inclusive, addressing both recruitment diversity and long-term retention, as noted in IP002. These findings demonstrate that implementing these strategies leads to a diverse and inclusive workforce and reduces turnover by fostering a culture where all employees feel valued and included, from recruitment through talent development within the organization.

### *Subtheme 2: Comprehensive Training Program*

The analysis revealed that comprehensive training programs are vital in implementing DEI initiatives and reducing employee turnover. Successfully implementing comprehensive training programs requires HR business leaders to commit to integrating DEI into the organization's strategic objectives. According to Minghua (2022), this involves continuously assessing and customizing the training programs to meet the employees' needs. It was consistently emphasized that structured and ongoing training increases awareness, fosters inclusivity, and enhances employee retention. Several comprehensive training programs were identified throughout the interview, including Inclusive language training, unconscious bias training, sexual harassment training, and allyship or bespoke training.

IP007 emphasizes that words matter, and that implementing inclusive language training ensures that associates can navigate the evolving social landscape and feel a sense of belonging. IP002 shared the same strategies and referred to this as an initiative focusing on inclusive language to ensure employees feel included and respected in the workplace. During the study, unconscious bias training was identified by numerous HR business leaders as comprehensive and essential for fostering a fair and inclusive culture. IP007 and IP006 emphasize that this training helps leaders

and employees understand bias, make more balanced decisions, and create a more inclusive work environment, which directly correlates with reducing turnover. IP005 further supported this by stating that unconscious bias training opened awareness across the organization and positively impacted retention rates. The findings suggest comprehensive diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training programs promote inclusivity, enhance employee retention, and reduce turnover.

### *Subtheme 3: Efficacy of Training Program*

While analyzing the data, the efficacy of the training programs on retention appears positive across different organizations. Training programs designed to promote DEI are among the most direct methods for influencing workplace culture and employee behavior. The results garnered by such programs measure their effectiveness. Research conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) showed that employees who perceive their workplace as inclusive and fair are more likely to be engaged and less likely to leave (Gonzales, 2023). Research supports the efficacy of training programs as a strategy for implementing DEI to reduce labor turnover. When thoughtfully designed, inclusively delivered, and continuously reinforced, such programs can positively transform organizational culture, reduce turnover, and enhance overall business performance. Several participants reported significant improvements in retention rates after implementing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)- related training programs. For instance, IP004 experienced a retention increase from 17.2% to 24.3% following the introduction of DEI training, which is an 80% increase overall. IP002 reported a 75% retention rate among participants in their organization. On the other hand, IP003, IP005, and IP006 had retention rates of 90%, 75%, and 20%, respectively.

The study found that the effectiveness of the comprehensive training program used by each HR Business leader, coupled with both pay equity analysis and accessibility analysis, plays a significant role in helping to lower labor turnover rates by addressing key issues that affect employee retention. IP006, IP007, and IP001 agreed that conducting a pay equity analysis ensures that employees are compensated fairly for their work, regardless of gender, race, or other demographic factors. Fair compensation reduces the likelihood of employees feeling undervalued or discriminated against, leading to higher retention rates. The findings indicate that financial fairness is crucial to job satisfaction and loyalty. Employees who perceive themselves as being paid equitably are likelier to remain with an organization.

## **Theme 2: Cultivating a positive organizational culture**

Upon reviewing the data, a positive organizational culture is a theme tied to several key strategies and initiatives that enhance inclusivity, diversity, and employee retention. The interviews highlight the following practices that contribute to cultivating a positive organizational culture. Kim and Jung (2022) suggested that departments that adopt a positive culture characterized by openness, respect, and support for diversity experience notably lower turnover rates than those with a less inclusive culture. Lowering the turnover rates is a pivotal role of HR leaders in integrating DEI principles into organizational culture. The participants who contributed to this theme identified several tools to cultivate a positive organizational culture. These were subthemes: transparent and effective communication, secure feedback mechanisms, and organizational cultural competency.

### *Subtheme 1: Transparent and Effective Communication*

Having the necessary channels, such as transparent and effective communication, improves a positive organizational culture. Several participants highlighted this subtheme throughout the data collection process, using town halls, one-on-one meetings, Zoom calls, and staff meetings. IP001 emphasized the importance of fostering open dialogue through town halls, one-on-one discussions, and team meetings to encourage employees to express their concerns more comfortably. As a result, there was a deeper understanding of employee needs, leading to enhanced retention rates. IP001 also noted that employees felt empowered to approach leadership without fearing reprisal, substantially contributing to their sense of ease and commitment to the organization. While open communication is beneficial, not all employees may feel at ease sharing despite efforts to create a safe environment. Regardless, the study revealed that clear and open communication within a company is essential for reducing turnover rates, as it fosters trust and demonstrates that the organization values its employees. However, it is essential to acknowledge the potential obstacles, such as the fear of retaliation and difficulties in meeting the diverse communication needs of various employee groups.

### *Subtheme 2: Secure Feedback Mechanisms*

Secure feedback mechanisms, identified as a subtheme, enable employees to share their thoughts, experiences, and concerns anonymously without fear of retaliation. These systems are pivotal for successfully implementing DEI strategies as they provide insights into employee sentiment and help identify areas of improvement within any organization, promising progress and growth (Huebner & Zacher, 2021). IP001 discussed the use of anonymous prospective surveys to gather honest employee feedback. It was noted that some employees, particularly those in lower positions, hesitated to answer specific questions due to fear of retaliation. IP001 engaged in open dialogue to address this concern, ensuring that employees felt comfortable sharing their thoughts directly, knowing their feedback would remain confidential. Additionally, IP003 mentioned the regular use of employee surveys, focus groups, and performance evaluations to assess the impact of DEI programs on retention. These mechanisms enabled anonymous feedback, which helped the organization make informed decisions and continually improve its initiatives.

IP005 also emphasized using quick surveys and polls, such as those offered by SurveyMonkey, as an effective tool for gathering immediate feedback on DEI initiatives. This allowed for real-time feedback and adjustments to ensure alignment with employee expectations and needs.

### *Subtheme 3: Organizational Culture Competency*

Some participants addressed organizational culture (competency) as a theme to reduce labor turnover, mainly focusing on creating a sense of belonging and connection with other employees, involving employees in decision-making, Empowerment, and amplifying voices. IP002 and

IP007 contributed to creating a sense of belonging, helping employees feel connected, and increasing their tenure with the organization.

IP005 also emphasized the importance of creating spaces for transparent communication and fostering a sense of belonging through clear messaging and active involvement during one-on-one interactions with team members. This enhances employee buy-in and commitment to the organization. Involving employees in decision-making was also discovered in this study by IP003, which explained that their DEI task force included employees from diverse backgrounds in decision-making, thereby helping to create a more inclusive workplace. This engagement resulted in positive outcomes for employee retention and organizational culture. Finally, it was noted that allowing employees to empower and amplify their voices contributes to developing an excellent organizational culture. IP007 echoed this by emphasizing how their focus on “Belonging” prioritized empowering and amplifying employee voices.

The findings indicate that all participants employed effective strategies to implement DEI and reduce labor turnover within their organization. One of the mediums used to promote a positive organizational culture was transparent and effective communication between leadership and subordinates, which involved selecting the most suitable method of communication, whether via email, Zoom call, or town hall meeting, to convey information in a way that would ultimately help lower labor costs. Secure feedback mechanisms and organizational culture competency added positivity to the organization. All participants echoed that it serves as a vehicle to reduce labor turnover and establish a diverse workspace where all employees feel valued and belong.

The current study findings, which include a positive organizational culture characterized by transparent and effective communication, secure feedback mechanisms, and cultural competency, are consistent with the SIT and EDI framework. The need to understand and integrate DEI initiatives is particularly acute in addressing labor turnover, which remains a persistent challenge for business leaders in the Southeast United States. In an organizational context, employees’ social identity is shaped by their affiliation with the company and its culture. A positive organizational culture that promotes inclusivity and diversity can enhance employees’ sense of belonging and reduce turnover (Sokler, 2024). HR leaders who understand the dynamics of SIT can leverage this knowledge to foster a work environment that supports diverse identities and cultivates a strong, unified organizational identity. Implementing DEI initiatives aligned with the EDI framework can lead to a more positive organizational culture directly linked to increased employee retention.

### **Theme 3: Gaining leadership buy-in.**

To effectively mitigate turnover, HR business leaders must execute plans that receive top management endorsement, also known as securing leader buy-in. Several participants explained

that this is one of the most crucial strategies for reducing labor turnover. Leadership buy-in refers to the dedication and proactive endorsement from an organization's senior leaders for a specific plan or initiative (Viterouli et al., 2024). When executives authentically participate in DEI initiatives, their presence can significantly impact an organization's culture, making it more inclusive and equitable. According to the Society for Human Resource Management, employees who view their workplace as diverse and equitable are more inclined to be job-satisfied, less prone to turnover, and more likely to endorse their organization as an exemplary workplace (Navarra, 2023). The individuals involved in this theme mentioned that they utilized two strategies. Under Subtheme 1, the first strategy involved addressing DEI through leadership training. The second strategy, categorized under Subtheme 2, focused on mentorship and sponsorship. Table 4 provides a breakdown of the participants who reported using each specific strategy and the frequency of each strategy mentioned in the data. Following this, a comprehensive discussion of each strategy will be presented.

### *Subtheme 1: Addressing DEI Through Leadership Training*

Four participants contributed to this theme by highlighting the importance of leadership training in achieving organizational goals. IP002 addressed the need for leadership training and education, focusing on unconscious bias training and anti-harassment training for leaders and managers. This participant illustrates the correlation between leadership training and the retention of early talent, highlighting the connection between diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, leadership education, and decreased turnover. IP005 emphasized the role of training and development for leaders and associates, explicitly focusing on unconscious bias training, by stating, "We offered a series of training and development opportunities for our executive leaders, middle management leaders, and associates." IP005 connects leadership buy-in to the overall DEI strategy and highlights how leadership education helps address employee turnover. IP006 noted that leadership buy-in is one of the most significant challenges in implementing DEI. To address this, IP006 focuses on educating leaders about the business case for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), emphasizing the return on investment, and utilizing communication strategies to align leadership with DEI goals. Participants emphasized the importance of leadership education and training in securing buy-in and ensuring the successful implementation of DEI initiatives to reduce labor turnover.

### *Subtheme 2: Mentorship and Sponsorship*

It is essential to have leadership support for successful DEI initiatives, especially those aimed at reducing employee turnover. Through mentorship and sponsorship, leaders actively develop talent and an inclusive environment where employees feel appreciated and empowered. Mentorship and sponsorship, which are critical components of leadership support, significantly contribute to reducing turnover. Several participants highlighted how these strategies directly contribute to this goal by promoting personal and professional growth, increasing employee engagement, and fostering a more inclusive work environment. IP004 highlighted the importance of mentorship and sponsorship as a key component of their DEI program. IP003 emphasized the significance of mentorship as a crucial component of their organization's diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) strategy. In conjunction with other strategies, such as training and development efforts, mentorship programs have played a pivotal role in reducing turnover rates by equipping

employees with essential resources and support. By establishing structured mentorship programs, organizations can provide personalized support to help employees navigate their career paths, increasing job satisfaction and retention.

Mentorship is centered on providing guidance and fostering growth, while sponsorship entails leaders proactively supporting their protégés and helping them obtain promotions and leadership roles. Participants who contributed also highlighted sponsorship as a crucial tactic for retaining top talent and minimizing turnover. IP002 discussed the role of peer mentoring and sponsorship in retaining early-career talent. Participant IP002 described how the organization's early talent program aimed to assist young professionals in honing their skills and fostering a stronger connection to the company through mentorship and sponsorship. Consequently, the company witnessed a notable increase in retention rates, achieving a 75% retention rate 3 years after the program was introduced.

IP005 expressed a similar viewpoint, emphasizing the profound impact of leadership engagement in mentorship and sponsorship programs. IP005 highlighted the establishment of a strong rapport between leaders and employees through mentorship programs as a critical element of their DEI strategy. These programs are pivotal in cultivating trust and communication between staff and leadership, which is indispensable for reducing turnover. The results indicate that these approaches play a crucial role in fostering a sense of inclusion and commitment within the company by providing avenues for career development and ensuring that employees have supporters at the leadership level. In essence, mentorship and sponsorship are vital elements of practical DEI efforts, positively impacting not just employee retention but also the overall prosperity of the organization.

#### **Theme 4: Effectively allocating employee resources and support.**

Several participants identified the effective allocation of employee resources and support as an emerging theme from data collected through interviews with HR business leaders. Employee Resource Support plays a crucial role in sustaining DEI efforts and, by extension, reducing labor turnover. It encompasses a range of programs and policies designed to provide employees with the necessary tools, guidance, and support networks to thrive in the workplace. (Catalino et al., 2022). Some participants recognized the theme of employee resource and support as a salient theme derived from data gathered via interviews with HR business leaders. Employee Resource Support is essential for sustaining DEI initiatives and reducing employee turnover. It encompasses various programs and policies designed to equip employees with the tools, guidance, and support systems necessary for workplace excellence. Catalino et al. (2022). Several participants recognized the theme of Employee Resource and Support as a salient theme derived from data gathered via interviews with HR business leaders. Employee resource support is essential for sustaining DEI initiatives and reducing employee turnover. It encompasses various programs and policies designed to equip employees with essential tools, guidance, and

support systems, enabling them to excel in the workplace (Catalino et al., 2022). Participants who contributed to this theme employed two primary strategies, also known as subthemes, to enhance this across the organization: (a) business engagement groups and (b) voluntary self-identification instruments.

### *Subtheme 1: Business Engagement Groups*

Three participants reported implementing a Business Engagement Group (BEG), a Business Resource Group (BRG), or similar support groups to reduce labor turnover. Data collected from all three participants suggested that BEGs and BRGs are voluntary, employee-led groups that promote a diverse and inclusive workplace. All participants who contributed to this subtheme explained that BEG and BRG support employees from diverse backgrounds, serving as a forum for dialogue and promoting understanding across various dimensions of diversity. IP002 highlighted their active involvement in employee resource groups, underscoring their early initiative in launching a network at one of their companies. IP002 also emphasized how peer mentoring programs cultivate a sense of belonging, ultimately reducing turnover. IP003 also emphasized that employee resource groups are vital to their DEI strategy, underscoring their pivotal role in fostering an inclusive and equitable workplace.

IP003 emphasized the significance of employee resource groups within its DEI strategy. These groups offer valuable support and resources to employees, resulting in enhanced employee retention and lower turnover rates. IP007 recounted how Business Resource Groups (BRGs) are a cornerstone of many organizations, serving as a key component of the organization's inclusion and belonging strategy. This approach promotes a greater sense of connection and support among associates, enhancing employee retention. All three participants ascribed the weight of support groups and resource networks in enhancing inclusivity and reducing labor turnover.

### *Subtheme 2: Voluntary Self-Identification Instruments*

Four out of seven participants used self-identifying tools as a DEI strategy to reduce labor turnover. Participants emphasized allowing employees to self-identify across various diversity dimensions, including gender, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. IP001 explained how surveys were used to collect demographic information, such as nationality and ethnic background, to better understand the representation of different groups within the company. The data gathered from these surveys was then used to ensure that employees had the necessary resources and opportunities to succeed. Additionally, IP002 and IP006 emphasized the importance of acknowledging employees' diverse identities to provide tailored support through mentorship and peer advocacy programs. Both agreed that by incorporating self-identification into their DEI strategies, organizations could reduce turnover by addressing employees' unique needs and cultivating a more inclusive and supportive environment.

Based on the information gathered through this study, it is concluded that utilizing employee resource groups (ERGs) and support systems, in conjunction with self-identified tools, creates an environment where all employees feel valued and included. These ERGs (BEG or BRG) serve as platforms for minority groups to voice their concerns, raise a sense of belonging, and directly contribute to the company's DEI goals by working with HR leaders to identify areas of improvement (Hays-Thomas, 2017). Additionally, these groups can provide valuable support through mentoring and networking, which not only aids personal development but also reduces labor turnover. HR business leaders leverage self-identified tools, such as surveys and feedback mechanisms, to measure the effectiveness of DEI initiatives, ensuring that programs are responsive to the evolving needs of the workforce (Mor Barak et al., 2016). This responsiveness is crucial as it demonstrates an organization's commitment to its employees, reducing feelings of alienation and the likelihood of turnover. Empirical studies corroborate that a supportive workplace culture that values diversity and practices inclusion significantly correlate with employee retention (Kim & Jung, 2022). In essence, by integrating ERGs and self-identified tools into their DEI strategies, HR leaders can enhance employee engagement and reduce labor turnover, which can be costly.

## **Summary of Findings and Conclusion**

This qualitative pragmatic inquiry identifies and explores effective strategies HR business leaders use to implement DEI initiatives that reduce employee turnover in the Southeast United States. The study population consisted of HR business leaders in the Southeast United States who have implemented DEI strategies that reduced labor turnover. However, several limitations of the current research warrant further investigation to enhance the generalizability and depth of our understanding. The limitations of this study were (1) potential selection bias, (2) reliance on self-reporting by HR leaders, (3) business size, and (4) number of participants and geographical location. Future researchers should continue exploring effective strategies HR business leaders use to implement DEI initiatives that reduce employee turnover and expand to garner more insight. The present study identified four key themes that HR business leaders arrayed to implement successful DEI strategies that reduce labor turnover: (a) promoting continuous training and development, (b) cultivating a positive organizational culture, (c) gaining leadership buy-in, and (d) effectively allocating resources. Findings indicate that when employees feel that their workplace is fair and welcoming, they have access to the resources they need and the freedom to express their identity. They are likelier to form a strong attachment to the organization and less likely to seek opportunities elsewhere. This phenomenon can directly influence employee turnover. Therefore, this study's findings support the idea that providing employees with resources and support is an effective strategy for implementing DEI and reducing employee turnover. The applications to professional practice and future research are discussed below.

### ***Applications to Professional Practice***

The results of this research study could be valuable for HR business leaders who need effective strategies to execute DEI initiatives aimed at decreasing employee turnover and should be used as recommendations to help their business reduce labor turnover. A strong recommendation that

HR business leaders should adopt is promoting ongoing or continuous training and development in unconscious bias, inclusive leadership, and cultural competence. This approach increases awareness among employees and leaders, fostering a more inclusive work environment. Unconscious bias workshops and inclusive leadership sessions significantly improved employee retention by enhancing diversity and inclusion. These training programs equip employees with the skills needed to contribute fully and equitably, creating a sense of belonging that motivates them to stay.

Leadership buy-in is not just another recommendation that all HR business leaders should adopt, as it is seen as an essential element in promoting an inclusive culture. Leaders who actively champion DEI initiatives by participating in these efforts build trust among employees. When leadership and employees establish trust, it helps cultivate a positive organizational culture. Town hall meetings, employee resource groups, and direct conversations with leadership allowed employees to express their concerns and feel included in decision-making. As a result, companies saw increased engagement and retention, particularly among minority groups, as employees felt their voices were being amplified and respected. Therefore, leadership buy-in is crucial in raising an inclusive culture that encourages employee loyalty, ultimately lowering labor turnover.

HR business leaders can tackle high turnover resulting from ineffective DEI strategies by providing a positive organizational culture. Regular employee surveys and feedback mechanisms can help leaders monitor the effectiveness of their DEI initiatives and make necessary adjustments. By incorporating these strategies and cultivating a positive organizational culture, HR leaders can improve retention and create a more diverse and inclusive workplace, leading to long-term business success. The research community should focus on further exploring these interventions to develop scalable, evidence-based solutions for DEI challenges across industries. For the research-scholar community, these findings present an opportunity to explore further how DEI initiatives can positively impact employee retention when tailored to specific organizational and regional contexts. Scholars should focus on refining metrics for measuring the effectiveness of DEI strategies, such as employee engagement surveys, performance evaluations, and DEI dashboards that track diversity-related outcomes, as stressed by IP001. Disseminating this knowledge through literature, conferences, and training sessions can help bridge the gap between academic research and practical business application. Such endeavors will solidify the role of DEI as a cornerstone of modern HR management. Furthermore, there is a need to continue evaluating the long-term impact of DEI initiatives, particularly in industries and regions with higher turnover rates, to ensure that HR leaders are equipped with strategies that adapt to changing workforce dynamics and contribute to sustainable DEI efforts.

### ***Recommendations for Further Research***

Future research should strive for a more representative sample to mitigate potential selection bias. This could be achieved by stratifying the sample to encompass HR leaders from diverse industries, organizations of varying sizes, and differing levels of DEI maturity. Utilizing stratified random sampling would enable the capture of a wide range of perspectives, offering a more comprehensive understanding of DEI practices across the business landscape. Furthermore, HR leaders' dependence on self-reported data presents another limitation. Validity can be improved by cross-referencing information from multiple sources. Subsequent research could integrate employee surveys, turnover records, and third-party evaluations of organizational culture to support the self-reported impact of DEI initiatives. Objective metrics enable a more comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness and obstacles associated with DEI strategies. The third limitation pertains to the emphasis on medium-sized businesses with established HR practices, possibly neglecting the intricacies of smaller companies or those with less formal HR frameworks.

Future research should encompass small and large businesses and non-traditional organizations like startups and nonprofits, which might adopt innovative DEI strategies because of their flexibility and mission-oriented approach. Finally, the current study's participant pool is limited to the Southeast United States, which may need to represent the DEI landscape fully. Future research should consider expanding the geographical scope to include organizations from different regions, thus enabling a comparison of regional differences in the effectiveness of DEI strategies. Moreover, increasing the number of participants would bolster the reliability of the findings and permit more comprehensive statistical analyses. Although the current study has established the necessary foundations, additional research is essential to comprehend how DEI initiatives can mitigate employee turnover comprehensively. By enhancing sample representation, integrating multiple data sources, expanding the scope to encompass various organization types and sizes, and broadening the geographic reach, forthcoming research can offer invaluable insights for HR business leaders striving to cultivate inclusive and stable work environments.

### ***Conclusion***

DEI initiatives encompass a range of policies and practices designed to promote a diverse workforce, ensure equitable treatment, and reduce labor turnover. This qualitative pragmatic inquiry identified and explored effective strategies HR business leaders use to implement DEI initiatives that reduce employee turnover in the Southeast United States. The study was grounded in SIT and EDI frameworks. Seven HR business leaders in the Southeast United States who have implemented successful DEI initiatives that reduce labor turnover participated. Data were collected using semistructured interviews and publicly available documentation, which were analyzed using thematic coding and analysis.

Thematic analysis is a research method used to identify and interpret patterns or themes in a data set; it often leads to new insights and understanding (Naeem et al., 2023). Four major themes were identified and presented as strategies: (a) promoting continuous training and development, (b) cultivating a positive organizational culture, (c) gaining leadership buy-in, and (d) effectively allocating employee resources and support. A key recommendation that HR business leaders should adopt is promoting ongoing or continuous training and development in unconscious bias, inclusive leadership, and cultural competence. By investing in their workforce development, organizations demonstrate a commitment to their employees' futures, which can lead to increased job satisfaction and loyalty (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020).

Another recommendation is having leadership buy-in, which is not just another recommendation that all HR business leaders should adopt, as it is seen as an essential element in promoting an inclusive culture. Leadership buy-in denotes the dedication and proactive endorsement from an organization's senior leaders for a specific plan or endeavor (Viterouli et al., 2024). As a result, companies saw increased engagement and retention, particularly among minority groups, as employees felt their voices were being amplified and respected.

Other implications include economic outcomes that can result in more significant investment in local services and infrastructure, stimulating local economies and providing more opportunities for community development. Moreover, when businesses champion DEI, they often attract a diverse customer base and tap into new markets, further expanding economic growth and creating a more inclusive marketplace that reflects the community's demographics. These changes may allow employees to make long-term plans, invest in their development and families, and contribute to the economy through consistent consumer behavior. Future researchers should continue exploring effective strategies HR business leaders use to implement DEI initiatives that reduce employee turnover and expand to garner more insight. Although HR business leaders have arduous tasks in implementing DEI initiatives, adopting the practical strategies from this research will help reduce labor turnover in the Southeast and other regions.

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