

Leadership practices that promote diversity among sales teams are crucial for creating competitive advantage. The analysis of the European market's electrical industry.

Vaxevanos A., Despoina Dimopoulou

ABSTRACT : This study investigates the role of leadership in fostering diversity within sales teams in the European electrical industry, with an emphasis on the Greek market. Workplace diversity is examined as a strategic asset that enhances innovation, problem-solving, and overall organizational effectiveness. Employing a qualitative methodology, structured interviews were conducted with executives from leading firms to explore how leadership practices influence the development and success of diverse teams. The findings highlight the effectiveness of transformational leadership in promoting inclusive workplace cultures, addressing unconscious bias, and driving employee engagement. Companies that actively integrate diversity into their strategic vision report improvements in employee satisfaction, retention, and team performance. The study underscores that leadership not only shapes diversity outcomes but also facilitates the competitive advantage that inclusive practices provide. Ultimately, diversity is positioned as both a moral obligation and a practical necessity for long-term success in competitive and evolving market environments. Businesses are encouraged to demonstrate a commitment to diversity through inclusive leadership, diverse recruitment strategies, and embedding equity into organizational goals. This research contributes to the broader discourse on diversity management, offering actionable insights for industries seeking to enhance performance and innovation through inclusive leadership.

I. INTRODUCTION

Fostering innovation, creativity, and overall organizational success, diversity plays a crucial role in the workplace, whether it be a startup or a Fortune 500 company. The amalgamation of individuals with distinct perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences within a workforce fosters inclusivity, allowing for the flourishing of diverse ideas and solutions.

A study conducted by McKinsey & Company reveals that organizations with diverse executive teams are 33% more likely to surpass their rivals (Strauss, 2018). However, the presence of diversity without inclusion can yield adverse results. To foster diversity effectively, inclusion is paramount, and inclusive leadership plays a critical role in the growth of any business.

According to the research conducted by Imtiaz et al. (2024), inclusive leadership is an essential strategy in modern organizations. This approach enables companies to leverage the unique abilities and diverse perspectives of all their employees, breaking down barriers associated with various forms of diversity, such as gender, age, sexual orientation, race, language, and more. Diversity in the workplace may constitute a huge asset to businesses and organizations. However, it may be difficult to harness and motivate a team with very different opinions, ideas and perspectives (Roberson and Perry, 2022).

This study examines the formation of sales teams which are characterized by diversity. In the formation of these teams, the practices used by the leadership of the teams of these organizations play an important role. Essentially it examines how leadership practices that promote diversity among sales teams are crucial in the creation of a competitive advantage. The present study investigates the European market in the electrical industry with a special reference to Greece.

The European market's electrical industry is experiencing a decline, with an 8.6% drop in the first quarter of 2024 compared to 2023 (Lampiris, 2024). The Greek market specifically saw an 11% decrease in value and 5% in volume in early 2024, attributed to previous sales boosts from subsidies (Naftemporiki, 2024). Analysts expect a gradual return to normal levels influenced by consumer purchasing power and promotions. Despite this, Europe anticipates a 0.77% annual growth rate until 2029, with the number of companies and employees in the sector also projected to rise (Statista, 2024) (Appendix B). Effective leadership and diversity management will be crucial for companies to navigate these challenges and maintain competitiveness (Lampiris, 2024).

Therefore, the study emphasizes the significance of modern leadership models in forming effective teams, particularly highlighting the role of diversity (Greenberg and Baron, 2013). It connects coaching

leadership with diversity management, suggesting that this integration enhances collaboration, trust, and innovation within diverse sales teams (Mäkelä et al., 2024). The research focuses on the electrical goods sector, aiming to explore how leaders can foster diversity to drive sales and promote innovative ideas. For the purposes of the study, the present issue will be studied theoretically (through secondary research) and through primary research through interviews with employees in the sector.

The main objectives of the present study, which through their achievement will provide data that could be effectively used by businesses in the electrical goods sector, are the following:

- a) To determine the importance of the existence of diversity (gender, age, cultural etc.) in the personnel in the sales departments of the companies,
- b) To demonstrate the significance of leadership in coaching when choosing employees with varying traits for building effective sales teams,
- c) To demonstrate how different leadership styles, especially the most modern ones, and coaching promote diversity in businesses and finally
- d) To demonstrate how the promotion of diversity through leadership in sales departments can provide a competitive advantage for the organization.

All the above opinions - views gave the impetus for the present work to be carried out and examine the subject in question given that it is characterized by originality and by a modern management concept, which makes it attractive especially in the field of sales, which are characterized by intense competition and proper management helps businesses to gain a distinct competitive advantage. The main reason for choosing this topic was the need to demonstrate that leaders who successfully manage diversity among sales teams help them achieve their goals, while also helping the organizations they work for gain a competitive advantage in their markets.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Definition of the term “diversity” and “diversity management”

In the literature, the term “diversity” is interpreted in a narrow but also a wider context. The concept of “diversity” encompasses the variety of individuals’ backgrounds, experiences, and traits, including gender, race, age, religion, and sexual orientation (Kuknor and Bhattacharya, 2022). The reference to personal characteristics constitutes the narrow meaning of diversity, but the concept is broader when other aspects of employees’ personality are included, such as the way of thinking, experience, previous service, way of working, abilities, possible physical or mental peculiarities, different cultural background, religious and sexual orientation. (Rakowska, 2020).

The concept of “diversity management” appeared in the United States of America in the late 1980s as a result of the need to adapt businesses in the context of legislated and forced non-discrimination of personnel, emphasizing the concepts of human rights, of equality and justice, with the ultimate goal of course being the survival within the intensely competitive business environment (Rakowska, 2020). As reported by Mousa et al. (2020), diversity management is related to the mindset, but also the culture of the organization and the different personal aspects that employees bring to the organization through work style, race, physical handicaps or other peculiarities. As Otiye et al. (2022) define diversity management as the voluntary actions of the organization that are designed in such a way as to include employees from different backgrounds and integrate them into its formal and informal structures through policies and programs.

Also, it is an evolution of human resources management practices aiming at social justice, ensuring a working environment that includes all those groups of employees who until then did not have equal treatment, such as women or people of different racial origins, providing equal opportunities to all regarding recruitment, education and training and implementing flexible staffing policies. At the same time, it functions operationally through attempts to maintain the corporate reputation, attracting and retaining the right talents and of course by improving efficiency the goal is the achievement of the strategic goals (Ely and Thomas, 2020).

2.2 The contribution of diversity management to organizations

The different dimensions of diversity influence personality and may enhance creativity and innovation within organizations. Cultural diversity, experiential diversity, and cognitive diversity all play a role in shaping individuals’ perspectives and problem-solving approaches. Organizations need to embrace diversity and explore ways to become inclusive institutions, as diversity has the potential to enhance productivity and provide competitive advantages (Ghran et al., 2019). Embracing diversity as a resource and promoting equal opportunities for all employees can lead to improved organizational performance and employee satisfaction (Croitoru et al., 2022).

Organizations that successfully implement integration strategies can experience advantages such as increased adaptability, a broader range of services, diverse perspectives, and improved operational efficiency. However, maximizing workplace diversity presents challenges, including communication barriers, resistance to change among employees, difficulties in developing diversity-focused employment policies, and the need for

effective organizational diversity training. Addressing these challenges is crucial for organizations to fully realize the potential of a diverse workforce (Raewf and Mahmood, 2021).

Thomas (2011) emphasized the need for diversity management in businesses since diverse workforce is not an obstacle; on the contrary, it may act as the greatest advantage, if of course there is proper management. The activation of each employee to perform to the maximum of their potential enables the company to reap from them not only what is included in the context of one's job, but at the same time what the employee can offer. In this way, the management of diversity now escapes the concept of ethics and justice and acquires an economic impact, since from a heterogeneous workforce now, the same efficiency, commitment and quality can be derived, as before from the corresponding homogeneous one (Rakowska, 2020).

A study conducted by Harvard Business Review (2016) found that teams with diverse members are more likely to produce creative solutions to complex problems, as they approach challenges from different angles. This creative dynamism makes organizations more appealing to prospective employees, particularly those seeking an environment that values unique contributions. Moreover, an inclusive company culture is essential in appealing to a wider talent pool. Companies that adopt diverse recruitment strategies, such as targeted outreach to underrepresented groups or partnerships with diverse professional organizations, further bolster their brand reputation. For example, tech companies like Google and Microsoft have implemented robust diversity recruitment initiatives, which have not only strengthened their talent pipelines but have also enhanced their public image as employers committed to equity and inclusion (Draup, 2023).

In addition, diversity plays a crucial role in talent retention, as research indicates that representation leads to increased employee satisfaction and engagement. Employees who feel represented are more productive and experience a sense of belonging, which reduces turnover rates (Kane, 2024). Companies with diverse leadership, like Johnson & Johnson, are more successful in retaining top talent, as they are perceived as more trustworthy and competent, fostering employee loyalty and commitment (Vorecol, 2024).

Also, the benefits of a harmonious work environment on business success are profound. Collaboration among diverse teams leads to improved problem-solving capabilities. Diverse groups bring varied experiences and viewpoints to discussions, allowing for more comprehensive analyses and innovative solutions. A study by Deloitte (2022) found that inclusive teams make better business decisions up to 87% of the time. This capacity for collaboration not only enhances problem-solving but also fosters a positive work culture, which significantly boosts employee productivity and morale. When employees feel valued and included, they are more likely to perform at their best, contributing to overall organizational success. Additionally, diverse workplaces are better positioned to understand and serve a global market. With a workforce that reflects the diversity of their customer base, companies can tailor their products and services to meet a broader array of needs. For instance, Coca-Cola has leveraged its diverse workforce to develop marketing strategies that resonate with various cultural identities, resulting in successful campaigns across different regions. The Coca-Cola Company, prioritizes diversity and inclusion through initiatives such as Employee Resource Groups and training sessions, fostering open communication and seeking feedback from employees. The company's policies, such as the "Share a Coke" campaign and support for LGBTQ+ rights, reflect its commitment to inclusion. Coca-Cola promotes a welcoming workplace for all employees, emphasizing diversity and creating a supportive environment. Leadership training, resources, and advocacy are key concepts to its diversity efforts (Foy, 2021). This alignment with a global market not only drives sales but also fortifies customer loyalty.

In the sector under review, namely the electrical industry, the evolution of human resource management practices underlines the growing importance of diversity in the workplace. Perspectives and experiences contribute to a richer working environment. To harness the power of diversity, organizations such as PPC focus on inclusion, which includes respect and appreciation of differences. This requires attention to individual needs and creating conditions that allow all employees to reach their full potential, ultimately benefiting the organization as a whole. More specifically, the PPC Group is committed to fostering a diverse workplace that promotes equality and inclusion, addressing contemporary challenges while promoting economic growth. A key objective is to enhance gender representation at various levels of work (DEI, 2022).

To achieve this, the Group monitors the distribution of women by geographical area, age and job grade. It actively participates in initiatives such as the United Nations' Women's Empowerment Principles and has signed the Diversity Charter for Greek businesses in 2022, with the aim of promoting equal opportunities and diversity in the workplace. At Group level, for the regular staff of the companies, the female representation in the total workforce is as follows: Women employees 27.03% and Women in managerial positions 31.09%. In 2022, female representation on the company's boards of directors was 19%, with 44% of members aged 30-50 and 56% over 50. Still, between 2019 and 2022, DEI hired three relatives of workers who died in workplace accidents and employed 213 children of large families and 76 relatives of people with disabilities (DEI, 2022).

Diversity management systems in organizations include various elements related to both management and employees. Successful diversity management requires interventions at the organizational and employee levels, emphasizing the value of each individual and creating a supportive and inclusive environment. Implementing structures and processes based on a legal framework can help reduce discrimination and prejudice

in the workplace. Proper diversity management includes valuing diversity, changing organizational culture, and promoting awareness and respect among employees (Park, 2020). In addition, Apple, the leading U.S. technology company with around 154,000 employees as of 2021, comprising 34.8% women and 65.2% men. In the tech sector, women represent 24.4% of the workforce. The executive team is predominantly male at 68.6%, with nearly 44% being minorities. The racial composition shows 43.8% white, 27.9% Asian, 14.8% Latino, and 9.4% Black employees. Most employees are aged 20 to 30, with an average tenure of 4.5 years. Salaries typically range from \$100,000 to \$200,000 annually, and 99% of jobs are regular positions (Li and Qiao, 2023). Another example of diversity management and inclusion is Dell Technologies, that in 2022, reported a workforce composition of 33.9% women, marking a 2.1 percentage point increase from 2021. The representation of Asian employees in the US workforce rose to 15%, while Black and African American and Hispanic and Latino employees accounted for 6% and 9.4%, respectively. Dell aims for 50% women representation globally and 25% African American representation in the US workforce by 2030. The company emphasizes diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) as essential for fostering innovation and equality in the workplace, especially in the wake of challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

To sum up, diversity management is a response to non-discrimination laws, emphasizing inclusion and equal opportunities. It enhances corporate reputation, drives innovation, and improves financial performance by fostering creativity and better decision-making. Embracing diversity is essential for attracting talent and achieving strategic goals.

2.3 The relationship between leadership and diversity

The leader plays a key role in the organization and good functioning of businesses. Bouradas (2015), states that leadership is defined as the process of influencing the thinking, feelings, attitudes and behaviors. In today's fast-paced and technology-driven business environment, the role of the leader is even more important and complex, as companies seek leaders who will not only implement their visions and strategies, but also develop the potential of employees, create team spirit, build collective vision, launch shared perspectives and shape dynamic corporate culture. Companies are now realizing that they need to develop leaders with multi-level leadership skills, in relation to increasing employee productivity and efficiency, managing diverse teams, managing macro-environmental contingencies, developing technology and know-how, developing and motivating groups, dealing with national and cultural differences, etc.

Over the years leadership has evolved from the traditional leadership models which are the authoritarian, democratic and the laissez-faire leadership styles to newer and more modern ones such as the charismatic leader, the authentic and empowering leader as well as the transactional, transformational leader, the servant leader etc. (Northouse, 2021). Traditional models cannot be applied in modern work environments that are based on the development of new technologies, promote talent and rely on workers with different abilities. For example, laissez-faire leadership is a style characterized by delegation and minimal supervision, allowing team members significant autonomy in decision-making. Derived from Kurt Lewin's leadership taxonomy, this approach empowers individuals, promoting personal growth and innovation, especially in startups and tech industries. However, it may also lead to a lack of direction for inexperienced teams and may clash with traditional management in larger companies. Balancing this style with elements from other leadership approaches can help address its challenges while maintaining its strengths (Ahsan and Khalid, 2023). Laissez-faire leadership is exemplified by notable figures such as Warren Buffett, Steve Jobs, and Herbert Hoover. Buffett's hands-off management style at Berkshire Hathaway has led to significant success by empowering his managers. In contrast, Steve Jobs combined autonomy with micromanagement, resulting in innovation but also internal conflicts. Hoover's presidency serves as a cautionary tale, as his reluctance to intervene during the Great Depression exacerbated the economic crisis, highlighting the potential downsides of laissez-faire leadership (IMD, 2024).

The modern models in relation to the models of the past, and depending on how they are developed within an organization, manage employees in a different way, recognizing their diversity, understanding that the acceptance of all employees regardless of race, gender, etc. can create more cohesive and competitive groups that, through their good functioning, lead the organizations they are part of to success (Almheiri, 2024). Leaders who embrace inclusivity cultivate an atmosphere where individuals can fully express themselves and share their thoughts and ideas comfortably (Kuknor and Bhattacharya, 2022).

Diverse models of leadership when operating inclusively are a powerful force for driving positive change and creating more equitable and inclusive workplaces. By prioritizing diversity, equity and belonging, leaders foster environments where all individuals may thrive, innovation can flourish and organizations are able to reach their full potential (Bourke and Dillon, 2018). Specifically, inclusive leadership, as highlighted by Garrido (2024), recognizes the positive impact of diversity in promoting creativity, innovation and overall organizational performance. Hemmett, Cho and Lee (2024) further emphasize the importance of treating all employees equally, particularly in addressing the gender gap in businesses. These leaders demonstrate an approach of openness to new experiences and ideas by understanding that diversity strengthens teams and leads

to better decision-making. In the context of sales departments across industries, Garrido (2024) highlights that contemporary leadership models prioritize impartiality as a crucial aspect, placing it above diversity. Recognizing and embracing diversity acts as a strong motivator for all employees, ensuring that no one feels excluded regardless of individual characteristics.

Among various leadership approaches, coaching leadership stands out as a transformative force that fosters collaboration, supports individual growth, and capitalizes on the diverse strengths of team members. Coaching leadership styles significantly impact team dynamics by emphasizing support, encouragement, and guidance over stringent policies and directives. This approach cultivates an environment where team members feel valued and empowered to contribute their unique perspectives and skills. A qualitative study reveals that coaching leadership fosters a culture of trust and collaboration, allowing individuals to leverage their strengths both personally and collectively (Atlassian, 2023). This nurturing environment is crucial for sales teams, as the ability to work cohesively often translates into improved performance and enhanced customer interactions. Furthermore, project managers who adopt a coaching leadership style are more likely to engage their teams in meaningful discussions that promote creativity and innovation, which are essential for addressing the complex challenges of the sales landscape (Mäkelä et al., 2024). The essence of coaching leadership lies in its capacity to unlock the potential of team members, resulting in a more dynamic and effective sales force that is better equipped to meet the demands of a diverse clientele.

2.4 Diversity in sales teams and its contribution to shaping competitive advantage

In today's competitive business landscape, the interplay between leadership styles and diversity management is pivotal for organizations striving to maintain a competitive edge. A diverse sales team strengthens customer connections and boosts employee engagement, and fosters innovation, creativity and adaptability.

The selling profession is increasingly recognizing the significance of diversity and inclusion, which create environments where individuals from various backgrounds can excel. A LinkedIn/Forrester study found that 60% of respondents believe their sales team's diversity contributes to success, with organizations in the top quartile for gender diversity performing 25% better and 36% better for ethnic diversity (Forrester, 2021). Despite this, a Gartner study reveals that men still outnumber women in sales roles, with women making up only 29.5% of B2B salespeople, despite outperforming men in hitting quotas. Overall, diversity and inclusion is crucial for fostering innovation, expanding market reach, and enhancing customer relationships, ultimately driving organizational success (Kane, 2024). Furthermore, according to the study (Forrester, 2021), the significant advantages of diversity and inclusion in sales teams, revealing that those who actively practice diversity and inclusion achieve a lead-to-conversion rate of 54%, compared to 26% for non-diverse teams. Diverse teams also experience higher sales attainment and customer satisfaction. Diversity fosters innovation by bringing together varied perspectives, enhancing problem-solving, and expanding market reach through cultural competence. It enables sales professionals to build stronger relationships with customers, express empathy, and tailor their approaches. Ultimately, prioritizing diversity and inclusion leads to increased employee engagement, retention, and organizational success, making companies more competitive in a globalized marketplace (Kane, 2024).

On the other hand, effective leadership practices play a critical role in promoting diversity in sales teams. By embracing diversity, sales managers are able to create an inclusive work environment that encourages collaboration and respect among team members. This inclusive culture fosters creativity, problem-solving and adaptability, which are key attributes for sales professionals to cope with the complexity of the current business environment. Therefore, leadership practices that prioritize diversity are key to driving organizational success and growth in the competitive sales landscape (Techtarget, 2023).

According to Chamorro-Premuzic (2018) the sales departments of the companies in their wider operation are basically the tip of the spear and largely determine the competitive advantage. The coaching process by the leader does according to the selected leadership style, largely determines their dynamics and the achievement of their goals. When the leader promotes diversity by hiring employees with different personal characteristics, i.e. when diversity is promoted at the level of gender it strengthens the sales force and promotes the competitiveness of the company. Also, the CIPD (2016) study states that two forces are better than one and when two or more people trying to solve a problem come from different cultures, they tend to be more creative. Therefore, a great way for a leader to help employees reach their full potential is to ensure that the company they lead is made up of teams with members coming from all over the world.

Diversity management is increasingly recognized as a strategic imperative in sales, offering organizations a pathway to connect with evolving customer demographics. (Murphy, 2023). Research suggests that organizations built around diversity not only gain insight into their customers but also enhance their problem-solving capabilities, leading to more innovative solutions tailored to specific market segments (LinkedIn, 2022). The benefits of a diverse sales team extend beyond customer satisfaction; they also contribute to increased revenue and improved customer retention rates. By prioritizing diversity management,

organizations position themselves to tap into new markets and foster customer loyalty, thereby reinforcing their competitive advantage in a saturated marketplace (Murphy, 2023).

In addition, the benefits of diversity in sales teams extend beyond internal dynamics and may have a direct impact on creating competitive advantage. A diverse sales team is able to better understand and connect with a wide range of customers, leading to improved customer relationships and increased sales opportunities (Techtarget, 2023). As businesses target new markets and demographics, having a diverse sales force allows them to authentically resonate with prospects, driving business growth and market expansion (The Sales Connection, 2023). Additionally, diversity in sales teams equips organizations with the cultural intelligence and knowledge needed to succeed in diverse markets, giving them a strategic advantage over competitors (Techtarget, 2023). Therefore, leveraging diversity in sales teams is not just a matter of participation, but a strategic imperative to stay ahead in a competitive market.

In summary, the integration of coaching leadership styles with effective diversity management strategies can significantly enhance an organization's competitive advantage in sales. By fostering supportive team dynamics and leveraging the diverse strengths of team members, organizations can improve productivity, creativity, and customer engagement. The insights drawn from this analysis underscore the importance of adapting leadership approaches to meet the demands of diverse workforces, ultimately paving the way for sustained organizational success in an ever-evolving marketplace. Embracing coaching leadership in conjunction with diversity management is not merely a strategic choice; it is a necessity for companies aiming to thrive in the complexities of modern sales environments.

2.5 Research hypotheses

Based on the analysis of the literature review, the following research hypotheses emerge.

H1. Diversity in corporate sales departments is important to the effectiveness of organizations.

H2. Staff selection based on diversity builds competitive sales departments.

H3. The practices of modern leadership styles (like transformational leadership) help to enhance diversity in business sales departments and contributes to the competitive advance of the organization.

III. Methodology

3.1 Aim

The aim of this study is to investigate the concept of diversity, and the practices used by the management in the sales departments of companies in the electrical goods industry. This study seeks to demonstrate the role of the leader and more specifically the various leadership models in promoting diversity in sales departments and how this relationship leads to the acquisition of a competitive advantage.

3.2 Research method and materials

The method chosen for the study of the research is the qualitative one, as through it qualitative data is collected about the subject under consideration. The type of interview that will be used in this research will be the structured interview. (Saunders, 2009). This approach is considered particularly suitable for obtaining simple fact-based data covering a range of topics, identifying or confirming specific points of control and testing a range of hypotheses. The results of such an interview are offered for comparability purposes and can be coded and analyzed (Hammarberg, Kirkman and De Lacey, 2016).

3.3 Participants - Process

The sample was composed of executives (managers, directors) of large companies in the electronic market that may provide relevant information. The number of the final sample was 6 people, i.e. a satisfactory number based on potential experts in the said field of interest of the future study under development. The participants were approached closely. All interviews were carried out at places and times suggested by the participants to ensure a friendly and quiet atmosphere. Before each meeting the researcher informed the interviewees with the interview questions so that they could approve them and at the same time informed the companies they work for. In addition, participants also completed the consent form upon request. The time limit of each interview was around 60 minutes.

3.4 Ethics

Informed consent is a crucial ethical principle in research, requiring researchers to provide participants with detailed information about the study, ensuring voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any time. Communication must be clear, and researchers should avoid coercion. Anonymity and confidentiality are essential, necessitating the use of pseudonyms and compliance with data protection laws. Trust is vital for open sharing, though achieving complete anonymity can be challenging, particularly in qualitative research. Researchers must address confidentiality concerns, especially in focus groups, and communicate these clearly to participants (Traianou, 2014; Hesse et al., 2019).

Therefore, in this research the respondents will be informed of the content of the survey in order to agree to participate, they will be given the questions for approval before being asked and will be asked if they allow their responses to be tape recorded. Also, the participants will not be paid.

3.5 Analysis

Finally, the results will be analyzed through thematic analysis and always guided by the theory of the study in question. Specifically, the thematic analysis will include the existing leadership style and its relation to strategic vision and job satisfaction, diversity management, the advantages and disadvantages of diverse teams, the cooperation of the members of these teams, the contribution of diversity to the competitive advantage of the organization and finally coaching or other leadership styles can enhance the potential of human resources.

Based on the theory and the findings of the study, the final conclusions will be drawn which will respond to the set objectives and will lead to broader findings on the subject under consideration, laying the foundations for further research in the near future.

IV. Presentation of Research findings

4.1 Demographics

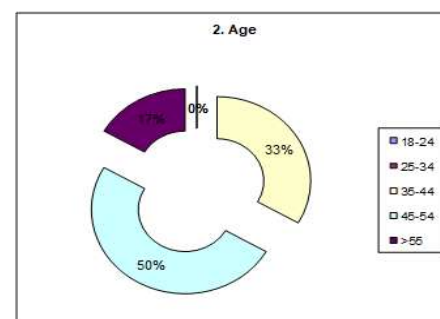
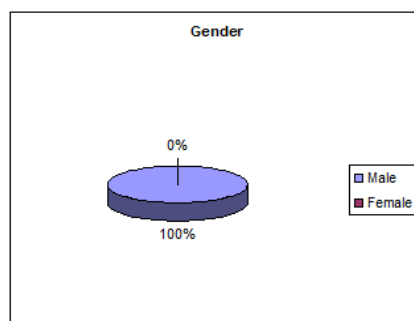
1. Gender: In the current question regarding the gender of the respondents, all of them with a percentage of 100% declared that they were men

2. Age: In a related question about the age range of the research participants, a percentage of 33% is between 35 and 44 years old. The majority with a percentage of 50% are between 45 and 54 years old having the majority. Finally, the remaining 17% are between 25 and 34 years old. No other answers were given

3. Level of education: In this question, and regarding the level of education of the respondents, the majority with a percentage of 83% hold a master's degree while the remaining 17% are graduates of higher education. No other responses were reported.

4. Previous experience in the specific position (in years): The specific question has to do with the professional experience of the research participants. A percentage of 17% stated that they were a sales manager, 32% with the most answers, said a CEO, a 17% stated that they were a technical director. Another 17% reported having experience as a key account manager and finally, the remaining 17% reported having experience in sales.

5. Position you hold: Regarding the work position of the respondents, it seems that the answers were equally divided. Half of them, with a percentage of 50% reported that they are General Manager/Director and the remaining 50% are in the position of head of department. No other responses were reported.



Results

Thematic Analysis

Leadership (Question 1-2)

The first question attempted to clarify the leadership model followed by the organizations surveyed through the interviews conducted. As found based on Respondent A's response in a company where the owner holds 100% ownership, decision-making and management are primarily under the owner's control. The organization is structured with various management levels, including team managers, departmental managers, and a board of directors, all of which are influenced by the owner. While the general manager and board contribute to decisions, the owner maintains the final authority, exhibiting a blend of democratic and authoritarian leadership styles.

The organization studied employs a transformational leadership model, as highlighted by Respondent B. This model promotes inspiration, motivation, and open communication among team members, fostering continuous learning and personal development. It creates a diverse and inclusive work environment, particularly in sales, where innovation is essential. Unlike authoritarian and democratic models, the transformational approach encourages employee expression and values diversity, offering a competitive edge.

The negative aspect of the research is that while given the technological progress and changes in markets, especially in more technological markets such as the industry under study, more modern leadership models should be promoted, some of the organizations in the research are found to rely on more conventional, old, authoritarian leadership models. Respondent C states that: "The existing leadership style we use is top-down 'old school' and we are currently in a transition to a more up-to-date flexible leadership style".

The research on leadership models reveals a paradox in effectiveness. Respondent D notes that transactional leadership, characterized by clear goals and performance-based rewards, is less effective in sales environments where a fear-free atmosphere is preferred. Additionally, small family businesses, as described by Respondent E, often follow authoritarian models but are gradually shifting towards more democratic styles. This transition fosters trust and may eventually enhance creativity and innovation, particularly in sales departments.

The leadership landscape in the industry is evolving from traditional authoritarian models, particularly in small and family-owned businesses, towards more democratic and transformational approaches. This shift is driven by younger generations who prioritize innovation, diversity, and collaboration. As organizations adopt progressive leadership styles, they foster open communication and employee empowerment, enhancing competitiveness and adaptability in the market. However, many still cling to outdated models that hinder creativity.

In question No2, Respondents provided insight into how their leadership styles align with their organization's strategic vision and employee needs.

Respondent A argues that Autocratic Leadership, commonly used by older generations of CEOs, is outdated and suggests that a Democratic Leadership style would be more modern and effective for private companies. This approach involves employees in decision-making, promotes open communication, and values team input. In contrast, Respondent B emphasizes the benefits of Transformational Leadership, which aligns with their strategic vision by fostering innovation, collaboration, and employee engagement, ultimately enhancing satisfaction and retention.

Respondent C answered that now the leadership style is a hybrid due to the transition carrying on and he would not state that currently fits the strategic vision of our organization. When the new leadership style is finally established, they will be on track.

Respondent D mentioned that transactional leadership style at LEDVANCE SA has contributed to high efficiency and productivity by establishing clear performance objectives and reward systems. However, this approach may hinder innovation and creativity, which are essential for the company's strategic vision of introducing new products in new markets. The pressure to meet performance targets can lead to employee stress and dissatisfaction, particularly among those who value personal development and creative input, potentially resulting in talent loss.

Respondent E believes that the company's current participative leadership style is the most suitable for its profile and team dynamics. This approach aligns well with both micro and macro management needs. As the company plans for expansion, it is crucial to decentralize responsibilities, allowing team members to manage daily tasks while leaders focus on larger decisions and more complex projects. Embracing this style will support the company's growth effectively.

Respondent F said "Yes, our collaborative and transformational approach aligns well with our strategic vision and meets the needs of our employees by fostering a supportive and motivating work environment".

Diversity management (Question 3-5)

Regarding the question on diversity the responses of the participants highlighted the different approaches in managing diversity within organizations.

Respondent A emphasizes the importance of creating an inclusive environment where individuals from diverse backgrounds feel valued, suggesting that managing diversity should focus on treating everyone equally rather than on their differences. In contrast, Respondent B highlights a structured approach to diversity management, implementing policies that promote equal opportunities and continuous education to foster an inclusive culture.

Respondent C advocates for eliminating stereotypes and promoting diversity as a core business principle, providing training to shift mindsets towards organizational benefits.

Also, managing diversity at Respondent's D company presents significant challenges, particularly due to the company's historical reliance on homogenous teams. While this has fostered cohesion and quick decision-making, embracing diversity is essential for innovation and market expansion. Key hurdles include shifting organizational mindsets and adapting recruitment practices to attract a diverse candidate pool. Overcoming resistance to change and ensuring inclusive hiring processes are crucial for creating a dynamic organization that can meet diverse customer needs and achieve long-term success.

Respondent E's company embraces diversity without viewing it as a barrier or privilege, treating all team members equally regardless of their background. They actively hire women for warehousing roles and employ individuals from five different countries, fostering an environment that maximizes each person's skills.

Respondent F emphasizes the importance of an inclusive culture, diversity training, and unbiased recruitment processes to manage diversity effectively.

In addition, regarding the management of diversity or valuing diversity, Respondent A mentioned that managing diversity is not difficult if you use the right style of leadership. But if it is in the focus then for sure the valuing diversity is more difficult/important. To value diversity at first you must recognize and see the diversity and the potential of the divers' individuals. You must take time and understand the potential of each team member and show them their value. After valuing you must create space for each team member so they can contribute the full potential to the project/department/company.

Respondent B answered that both managing and valuing diversity are essential but present different challenges, with valuing diversity being more complex. Managing diversity involves implementing policies and practices for a diverse workforce, which is operational and systematic. In contrast, valuing diversity requires a cultural and psychological shift, demanding genuine appreciation for individual differences and overcoming biases. This transformation necessitates ongoing commitment from all organizational levels, fostering an inclusive culture through leadership and open dialogue.

Managing diversity is not as hard as it used to be, for Respondent C. In the beginning as there are a lot of team members that values the benefits, and they try to spread the same principle. Valuing diversity on the other hand is a different story altogether. There are a lot of things to be learned in the way to value diversity without over or underestimating the true value.

Respondent D emphasizes that valuing diversity is fundamentally about mindset and recognizing individual differences, which can be enhanced through education and awareness. In contrast, managing diversity is a more complex task that necessitates continuous effort and structural changes within organizations, such as inclusive recruitment and training programs.

Respondent E, however, views diversity management as straightforward, arguing that it is not a primary consideration in team selection. He believes that valuing diversity requires deeper engagement to understand each individual's contributions and avoid misjudgments based on diversity, ultimately transforming it into a team advantage.

Lastly, Respondent F said, "Valuing diversity is more difficult because it requires changing mindsets and fostering genuine appreciation and respect for differences, which is a deeper, more cultural challenge".

Furthermore, in the question referred to advantages and disadvantages of diverse teams, most of the responses were common. Respondent A highlights the advantages of having a diverse team, particularly in the Export Department, where understanding different market mentalities fosters creativity and innovation. However, challenges such as communication misunderstandings and conflicts arising from differing backgrounds, beliefs, or political views can occur. To manage these dynamics effectively, a common language is essential, and strong leadership is required to balance the advantages and disadvantages within the team.

For Respondent B, being part of a diverse team offers numerous benefits, such as enhanced creativity and innovative problem-solving due to varied perspectives and experiences. This diversity fosters a positive work environment, increasing employee engagement and job satisfaction, which can lead to higher productivity and lower turnover. However, it can also lead to conflicts and challenges related to unconscious biases. A fact that respondent C agrees with, saying that as a disadvantage in a diverse group there can be a lot of disagreements and therefore conflicts within the group to the extent that it can break up the group. Therefore, a stable manager with a clear understanding of the team is required in order to maintain balance and make the team work. To maximize the advantages of diversity, strong conflict resolution skills and a commitment to continuous education and equality are essential.

The answer of Respondent D is in line with the above answers, being part of a diverse team offers numerous advantages, such as a variety of perspectives that foster creativity and enhance problem-solving. It also promotes personal growth through exposure to different skills and experiences. However, challenges like communication barriers and conflict resolution can arise due to differing cultural norms. Successfully managing these challenges requires openness, respect, and continuous learning, ultimately making the benefits of diversity in teams outweigh the drawbacks.

Respondent E and F said diversity in teams presents both advantages and disadvantages. On the downside, not everyone is tolerant of diversity, which can lead to challenges in team interactions and potential conflicts. Some may view diversity as a weakness, using it to undermine coworkers. Conversely, for those open to it, diversity offers valuable opportunities to gain new perspectives, enhance creativity, and improve problem-solving abilities.

Diversity and competitive advantage (Question 6-8)

Regarding whether diverse teams provide a competitive advantage in the corporate environment, all respondents answered positively.

Respondent A said "Yes, for sure! As already mentioned, collaborating with a diverse Team with lot of different Backgrounds/Experience and good Leadership you have access to Creativity Innovations Different approaches to Problems so better Decision-Making Fast adaptation to the different International Markets so more successful and increasing Sales. Also, the Company getting a better international Image/Branding, so you attract new divers potential Employees".

Respondent B answered that diverse teams offer a significant competitive advantage in the corporate world by bringing together varied perspectives, experiences, and ideas that enhance creativity and innovation. This diversity allows companies to better understand and serve diverse customer bases, leading to improved products and marketing strategies. Additionally, an inclusive environment fosters higher employee engagement and adaptability, enabling teams to navigate changes effectively in a fast-paced business landscape.

Respondent C answered “Yes, it can clearly provide an advantage otherwise we wouldn’t have this interview. As stated above the biggest advantage of a diverse group is that can generate diverse ideas to any problem and helps to create a more spherical view of any problem. As any kind of business is created from the people to serve the people, and the reality of the planet is a diverse group, then a diverse team fits the project”.

Respondent D emphasizes that diverse teams provide a competitive advantage in the corporate environment by bringing varied perspectives and experiences, which enhance creativity and innovation. Such teams can develop more effective solutions by integrating insights from different backgrounds, leading to products that appeal to broader markets. However, the benefits of diversity are not automatic; they require a supportive culture that values collaboration and inclusivity. Respondent E agrees, stating that when organizations view diversity as an asset, it can lead to remarkable results. Leaders must strategically embrace diversity to foster creativity and efficiency within teams.

Respondent F answered “Yes, diverse teams provide a competitive advantage by bringing varied perspectives and ideas, which can lead to more innovative solutions and better decision-making”.

Also, as for the question about working with employees from different socio-economic and political backgrounds and whether this can benefit the organization, all of the responses indicated that working with employees from different socio-economic and political backgrounds may significantly benefit organizations by promoting a richer inclusive work environment.

Respondent B mentioned that cooperating with employees from diverse socio-economic and political backgrounds can greatly benefit organizations by creating a more inclusive work environment. This diversity enhances problem-solving capabilities through a variety of perspectives, leading to innovative solutions. Additionally, organizations that embrace this diversity often build a stronger reputation and are perceived as socially responsible, which can improve relationships with customers and partners, ultimately contributing to long-term success.

Respondents emphasized the importance of diversity in the workplace, particularly regarding socio-economic and political backgrounds. Respondent C highlighted that a diverse team is essential for serving a varied society, benefiting organizations by representing different societal segments. Respondent D elaborated on how such diversity enhances creativity, problem-solving, and innovation, while also improving decision-making and fostering inclusiveness, which boosts employee morale and attracts top talent. In contrast, Respondent E noted that while background can influence team dynamics, its impact is not always clear, as personal data is often kept private. Overall, diversity is seen as a key factor for organizational success.

Also, Respondent F said “Yes, it can benefit the organization by bringing diverse viewpoints and experiences that can enhance creativity, problem-solving, and understanding of different markets and customer bases”.

As for the factors that reinforce the unequal treatment of employees, according to Respondent’s A response, the workplace environment is adversely affected by factors such as team leaders who do not support all members equally, limited career advancement opportunities, and a lack of access to education and coaching. There is also an unequal pay system that discriminates against women and individuals from diverse backgrounds. Additionally, for Respondent B inconsistent enforcement of guidelines, insufficient diversity training, and a culture favoring certain groups contribute to ongoing discrimination, while limited feedback mechanisms hinder employees from raising concerns.

Respondent C said that unequal treatment of employees is primarily driven by a lack of knowledge and fear of the unknown, which hinders understanding of diversity. Respondent D adds that systemic issues and individual biases contribute to these injustices, emphasizing the need for awareness and reduction of these factors. Unconscious bias, lack of diversity in leadership, cultural stereotypes, and inadequate HR policies further perpetuate inequality. To combat these challenges, organizations should implement bias training, promote diversity, and foster an inclusive culture with open communication and accountability.

Respondent E said “The major factor which is responsible of the mistreatment of the team members, is mainly the perceptions of a past period when diversity was a disadvantage, woman’s position in the market was different and equality between a team’s members was not a subject. The big majority of team leaders continues to be men and women are often supposed to be able to do only specific tasks. Moreover, in many cases, the different cultural and national background, is used to keep the demands of the expats/immigrants on lower levels. Of course, it always depends of the country, the market and the corporate mentality and approach to diversity”.

Respondent E answered, “Factors include unconscious bias, lack of diversity in leadership, and insufficient policies or practices to promote equality and inclusion”.

Communication (Question 9-11)

On the question that refers to communication in the organizations, the opinions differed from company to company. Respondent A emphasized the importance of open and direct communication within a private company, even under an autocratic CEO. While the CEO may not engage with every employee, communication flows through the General Manager to the Board and departments. Respondent B described a multi-faceted communication process aimed at transparency and engagement, utilizing various channels like town hall meetings, departmental discussions, and team-building activities to foster collaboration and trust among employees, with leadership playing a key role in maintaining clear and consistent messaging.

Respondent C emphasized the importance of direct verbal communication in overcoming barriers created by standard email communication, especially in diverse teams.

Respondent D highlighted their organization's commitment to clarity and openness, though they face challenges with inconsistent information flow and ineffective feedback mechanisms.

Respondent E noted that while communication is typically fast in their small company, delays occur during the dissemination of new strategies, often due to a lack of meetings, though personal communication helps mitigate this issue.

Respondent F answered, "Communication occurs through various channels, including regular team meetings, email updates, internal messaging platforms, and face-to-face interactions".

Along with the assessment of communication between team members within businesses, Respondent A said that his company had always good communication with open and fair way of communication. It starts from Management and practiced by the Team Manager to keep a professional communication. Respondent B said "I would rate the communication among team members as generally strong, though there is always room for continuous improvement. Effective communication is a cornerstone of our collaborative culture, and we actively foster an environment where open, transparent, and constructive dialogue is encouraged" and Respondent C answered, "I would rate it adequate, but there is always space for improvement".

Respondent D mentioned that communication within their organization is generally effective, with regular meetings and open discussions, but noted challenges in cross-departmental communication due to information silos. To improve this, they plan to adopt integrated project management tools and hold inter-departmental meetings. Respondent E emphasized the importance of communication for efficiency and a positive work environment, mentioning that their small team structure allows for quick problem-solving, though major issues require well-timed meetings, which can cause delays.

Respondent F said "I would rate it as highly effective. We emphasize open and transparent communication to ensure everyone is aligned and informed".

As well as the preventive measures for conflict management, in the organization described by Respondent A, there are no proactive measures in place to manage internal conflicts, relying instead on respectful communication from management to team members. When conflicts arise, the Team Manager facilitates discussions to listen to all arguments and seek solutions. In contrast, Respondent B's organization employs several proactive strategies, including formal grievance procedures, open communication, regular meetings, and access to mediators, to effectively address and resolve conflicts, fostering a positive work environment.

For Respondent C the team aims to enhance communication and understanding among members to prevent non-business conflicts, while providing clear direction to minimize potential disputes. Also, at Respondent's D company, the current approach to conflict management is largely reactive and informal, lacking a systematic framework. Employees typically address conflicts only as they arise, without formal guidelines or tools to manage them constructively. To improve this situation, there is a need for a proactive conflict resolution system. Implementing comprehensive training programs on conflict resolution skills, including effective communication and role-playing practice, is a crucial first step towards fostering a more systematic approach to conflict management within the organization.

In addition, Respondent E said that the importance of clarity in defining the responsibilities and duties of each team member to prevent conflicts within the company. By ensuring that everyone understands their roles, individuals can take responsibility for their actions and the outcomes. In complex situations that may have future repercussions, the final decision rests with the Commercial Manager or General Director. Conflicts may arise due to differing tactics influenced by individual perspectives and experiences, despite a shared strategy. Lastly, Respondent F said "Yes, we have conflict resolution protocols in place, provide training on effective communication and conflict management, and encourage open dialogue to address issues early".

Coaching / leadership (Question 12)

In discussing the importance of coaching and leadership styles in developing human capital, Respondent A emphasized the need for effective team management, likening it to a football team where players must be positioned correctly to reach their potential. Respondents B and D echoed this sentiment, highlighting that coaching provides tailored support and fosters a culture of learning, while transformational leadership inspires

teams by recognizing individual strengths. Together, these approaches enhance productivity, innovation, and job satisfaction, aligning with organizational culture and employee needs.

Respondent C answered “In most case is all a matter of knowledge, education and direction of the leaders to allow us to develop in any field. The managers have to have any possible help to expand their own qualities so that they will be able to develop and “unlock” the full potential of the human capital”.

Respondent E referred that effective leadership is crucial in harnessing the limitless potential of team members within a company. A good leader should recognize each member as an asset, focusing not only on overarching goals but also on individual strengths and personal development.

Finally, Respondent F said that continuous improvement and supportive leadership styles, such as coaching, can significantly enhance team growth by providing guidance, feedback, and opportunities for development.

V. Discussion

The research findings indicate a significant evolution in leadership styles within organizations, which deviates from the traditional authoritarian models towards more democratic and transformational approaches. Leadership, according to Northouse (2021), has moved away from traditional models - i.e. authoritarian, democratic and laissez-faire styles - to more modern approaches such as charismatic, authentic, empowering, transactional, transformational, servant and ethical leadership.

From the responses of the interviewees, it appears that transformational leaders play a critical role in inspiring and motivating employees, creating an inclusive environment that promotes creativity and adaptability. Inclusion refers to valuing and integrating the contributions and views of diverse teams in the workplace, while equity focuses on providing equal access to opportunities while recognizing existing inequalities (Roberson and Perry, 2022). Creating a fair work environment allows an organization to identify barriers and biases that employees may face. Understanding the concept of equality is necessary to promote justice and provides equal opportunities, regardless of differences in race, sexual orientation, age, gender, ethnicity, religion, education or other factors (Kuknor and Bhattacharya, 2022).

Study participants noted that modern leadership styles are more aligned with organizational goals and employee needs, emphasizing the necessity of open communication and collaboration. Compared to older models, these modern frameworks manage employees in different ways depending on their implementation in an organization. They recognize diversity and emphasize that embracing all employees, regardless of race, gender, and other factors, can promote the development of cohesive and competitive teams that may lead their organizations to success through effective collaboration (Almheiri, 2024). Another opinion that is in line to the above result is from Fatin and Mazlan (2023), who mentioned that transformational leadership is crucial for fostering innovation and growth in today's workplace by creating an inspiring and collaborative environment. Leaders who utilize visionary guidance, emotional intelligence, and active engagement empower their teams to adapt and seek creative solutions. To enhance this leadership style's effectiveness, organizations must address its challenges, ensuring employees feel supported. By embracing transformational leadership principles, companies can cultivate a dynamic culture that drives performance and ensures long-term success.

In addition, diversity management strategies differed among organizations, where some promoted an inclusive culture that valued individual contributions while others adopted comprehensive diversity initiatives. According to Gross-Golacka et al. (2022), companies must navigate different cultural and legislative environments in their diversity initiatives, recognizing that diversity may become a competitive advantage rather than a legal constraint. Also, the challenge of truly valuing diversity was highlighted, as it requires a cultural change and an honest appreciation of differences rather than superficial management practices.

Regarding the benefits of diverse teams, participants recognized them, including improved creativity and problem-solving abilities, although they also recognized potential communication barriers, a view with which Raewf and Mahmood (2021) also agree. Diversity and inclusion in the workplace are essential since they drive innovation, attract and retain talent, and improve employee performance. Teams with diverse backgrounds generate more creative solutions, while inclusive environments make employees feel valued, leading to higher retention rates. Companies with a diverse workforce are more likely to outperform their counterparts, and inclusive organizations experience significant financial benefits, generating more cash flow per employee (Bourke, Titus and Espedido, 2020; Techtargat, 2023). Also, the paper of Cletus et al. (2018) that explored the critical issues surrounding workplace diversity in modern organizations, identifying both its benefits and challenges, they concluded that while diversity fosters critical thinking, employee development, and innovation, it is hindered by factors such as discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, and generational differences, leading to hostility and reduced productivity. To address these challenges, Cletus et al. (2018) recommended diversity training and orientation programs to enhance understanding and communication among employees, ultimately aiming to improve workplace dynamics and organizational success.

There was also consensus that diverse teams provide a competitive advantage by driving innovation and enhancing understanding of diverse customer demographics. Additionally, working with employees from different socio-economic and political backgrounds enriches the workplace and fosters empathy. As with Raewf

and Mahmood's (2021) report, having a diverse sales force offers many advantages, though this alone is not sufficient to enhance profitability or promote a productive work environment. It is important for a company to embrace both equality and inclusion.

However, according to the research participants, issues such as unconscious bias and inadequate HR policies need to be addressed to promote a fair and inclusive environment. In order to enhance diversity in the workplace, companies can use recruiting tools to reduce unconscious biases and make data-driven hiring decisions. Prioritizing diversity not only strengthens corporate culture, but also leads to increased revenue (Ely and Thomas, 2020).

Regarding communication, communication practices within organizations vary, with some prioritizing open and direct communication to facilitate decision-making and collaboration. Although many companies value effective communication as a cultural cornerstone, challenges such as information silos and misunderstandings, particularly in cross-departmental interactions, remain prevalent. Leadership teams prioritize employee retention, recognizing that satisfied employees are more likely to remain within a company and perform better. Studies show that satisfied employees can be more productive, which equates to extra hours worked each month. To attract and retain top talents, leaders are shifting from traditional management styles to inclusive leadership, which emphasizes strong relationships, employee well-being, and effective communication (Northouse, 2021).

Approaches to proactive conflict management vary, with some organizations lacking formal guidelines, while others have established comprehensive policies to encourage open dialogue. As Vakola and Nikolaou (2012) report, diversity in the workplace is a valuable asset that enriches perspectives and ideas, but it can also lead to conflicts due to different cultural patterns and communication styles. To effectively resolve such conflicts, organizations must prioritize cultural awareness, effective communication, and a respectful environment. Adopting cultural awareness includes educating employees about different cultures and promoting open dialogues to enhance understanding. Effective communication, especially through active listening and inclusive language, is vital to prevent misunderstandings. In addition, celebrating diversity, implementing clear diversity policies and demonstrating inclusive leadership contribute to a positive workplace culture. Organizations should invest in conflict resolution training and mediation services to equip employees with the skills to manage conflict constructively. By encouraging collaboration and creating accessible conflict resolution channels, organizations may turn conflicts into growth opportunities, ultimately fostering a harmonious and innovative work environment.

Ultimately the responses from the above interviews summarize that effective leadership, particularly through coaching and transformational styles, is necessary to maximize team potential and ensure organizational success by recognizing and valuing the contributions of each employee. Transformational leadership is effective in promoting diversity and changing organizational culture by enhancing ethics and standards among leaders and their followers. This leadership style includes clear goal setting, ethical example, and the ability to inspire and support followers through cultural change. Transformational leaders encourage individuals to confront their prejudices and promote a nonjudgmental environment for growth. While some research studies suggest that charismatic traits of transformational leaders may be innate, if these characteristics can be developed, this leadership approach could significantly promote diversity and inclusion, aiming for equity and fairness within organizations (Northouse, 2021).

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We live in a global community that stands out for its rich cultural and ethnic diversity. To stay relevant in this ever-changing society, organizations, especially those related to the sale of goods, must prioritize and promote diversity. This study explored the leadership styles and approaches that individuals may adopt to enhance cultural diversity in their organizations.

According to the findings of the qualitative research and the preceding discussion, all three research hypotheses were confirmed.

More specifically, diversity in organizations' sales departments is important for organizational effectiveness. Investing in diversity, equality and inclusion is vital for companies aiming to strengthen their competitiveness and profitability. Study results also show that diverse companies are significantly more profitable, while diverse sales teams promote employee engagement, retention and innovation. A diverse workforce promotes an inclusive environment, leading to improved employee satisfaction and lower turnover costs. In addition, diverse teams offer unique perspectives that may improve problem solving and customer understanding, ultimately increasing market share and profits. Companies must prioritize fair practices to ensure that all employees have equal opportunities, aligning company values with those of their workforce to foster a thriving work environment.

Inclusive companies offer significant advantages over exclusionary companies by fostering a work environment where employees can be their authentic selves. This openness enhances mental and physical well-being, leading

to increased job satisfaction and productivity. Employees in inclusive organizations are more likely to stay with the company. In addition, companies with high racial diversity generate almost more revenue from their sales than those with low diversity. Overall, inclusive workplaces not only promote employee well-being but also lead to superior company performance.

Furthermore, staff selection based on diversity certainly creates competitive sales departments. Building a diverse sales force requires deliberate strategies that focus on recruiting, company culture and ongoing development. Companies need to create inclusive job descriptions, use a variety of recruiting methods, and expand the talent search to attract underrepresented groups. Retaining diverse talents includes fostering a supportive culture through employee resource groups and flexible work policies. Ongoing training, including training on diversity and leadership development, empowers team members and enhances collaboration. Real-life success stories prove that diversity leads to improved customer engagement and increased sales. Despite challenges such as resistance to change and unconscious bias, strong leadership and targeted training can help overcome these barriers, positioning companies for sustained innovation and success in a competitive marketplace.

Finally, the practices of modern leadership styles (such as transformational leadership) help managers to enhance diversity in business sales departments and contribute to the organization's competitive progress. Effective leadership plays a vital role in fostering an inclusive culture, enhancing cultural competence and addressing implicit biases. Leaders must collaborate and adopt inclusive practices and commit to lifelong learning, while being prepared to face conflict and evaluate their leadership style to pursue diversity. In addition, leaders are encouraged to balance directive and supportive behaviors to enhance cultural competence and inclusion. However, this approach has its limitations, such as neglecting demographics and potentially misaligning leadership styles with individual needs. Transformational leadership, which is defined by ethical standards and inspirational guidance, has the potential to effectively promote diversity, fostering self-reflection and growth among followers.

To effectively manage diversity and gain a competitive advantage, organizations should adopt various best practices. First, the top management must demonstrate a commitment to diversity, as its support is vital to the successful implementation of the policy. Second, companies should explore new talent pools beyond traditional sources, such as veterans and minority groups, to reinforce their workforce. Creating safe spaces for discussion about diversity-related issues can help engage employees and reduce employee turnover. In addition, organizations should integrate diversity into their goals and actively promote their commitment to it. Finally, it is important to distinguish between diversity and affirmative action, recognizing that diversity is a proactive approach that promotes creativity and effectiveness through diverse perspectives.

In summary, diversity in the workplace offers numerous benefits that enhance both employee and organizational performance. When people feel respected and accepted for their differences, they can reach their full potential, leading to increased employee satisfaction, productivity and retention. Diverse teams offer broader perspectives that drive innovation and improve customer service by better understanding diverse needs. Additionally, fair workplace practices boost employee morale and performance and reduce absenteeism and employee turnover. Embracing diversity also helps attract top talents, minimizes discrimination risks, improves corporate image, and promotes creativity and effective problem-solving through diverse viewpoints. Also, effective leadership is critical in guiding an organization through resistance and barriers in order to achieve diversity goals and promote inclusion. Overall, diversity is not just a moral imperative but a strategic advantage for any company.

In conclusion, this study provides a comprehensive examination of the various factors that affect different groups of employees and more specifically in the sales departments, resulting in enhancing the competitive advantage of organizations. Along with an analysis of the practices in managing different teams and the role that leadership plays in this, the necessity of modernizing leadership styles is established. The researcher argues that this information can be beneficial to any sales department manager seeking to work with a diverse team. To adequately supervise a diverse team, managers must possess key characteristics such as respect for different cultures, dependability, adaptability, effective communication skills, proactivity, consistency, active listening, approachability, courtesy, and an open mind.

Still, a primary limitation identified in this research concerns the sample size, which was largely limited by time constraints. The researcher recommends that this concern be corrected in any future research on this topic. As highlighted throughout this study, organizations and team leaders face significant challenges when managing diversity within multicultural teams. The range of skills required of leaders is extensive. Although it is not easy to identify leaders who possess this skill set, a promising avenue for further development lies in using the findings of this research to enhance the recruitment process for team leaders. In addition, an in-depth examination of the communication strategies used by a wider range of international companies is recommended. This research could explore how these organizations conduct their periodic meetings and the frequency of such gatherings. In addition, it would be beneficial to ascertain whether they have established guidelines for informal communication. Collecting and disseminating best practices could prove beneficial.

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Appendix B – Figures

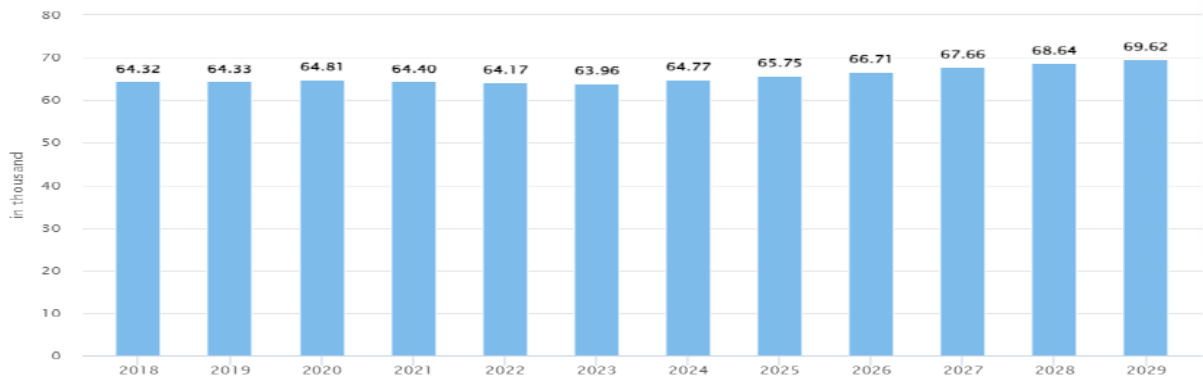


Figure 1. Number of Enterprises. Source: Statista, 2024

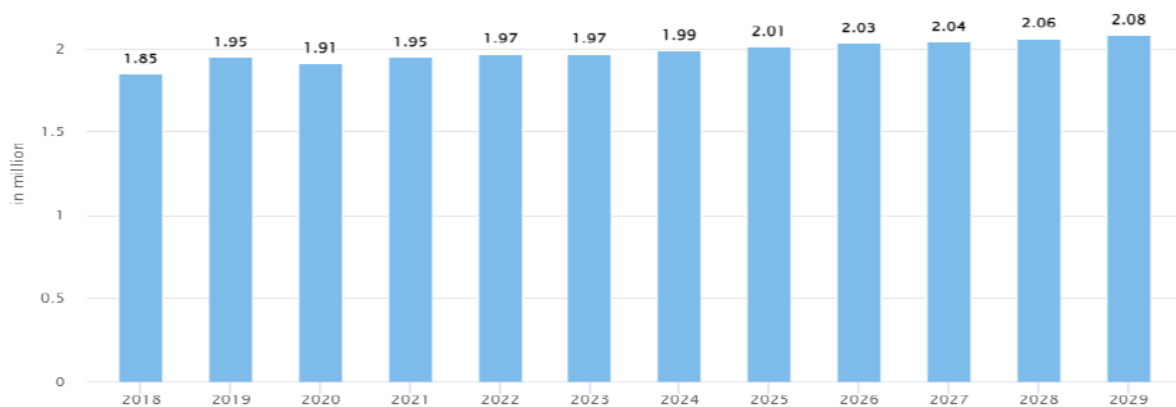


Figure 2. Number of Employees. Source: Statista, 2024

Appendix D - Demographics

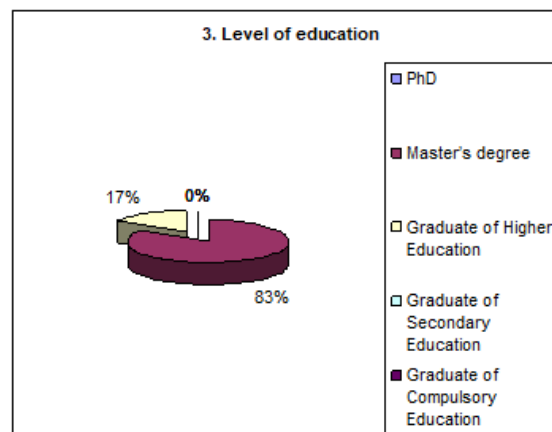


Figure 3. Gender

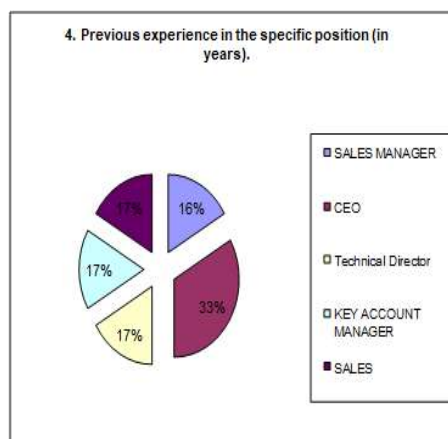


Figure 4. Age

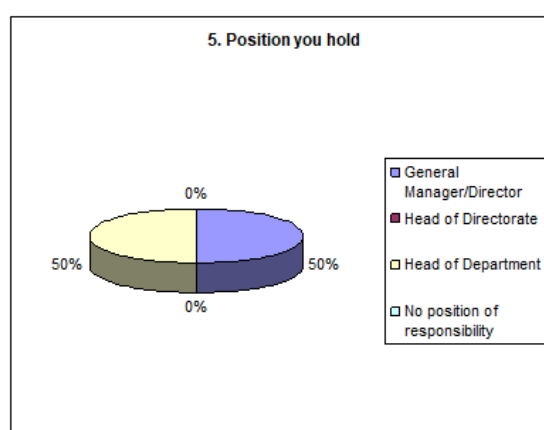


Figure 5. Level of education

Figure 6. Previous experience in the specific position (in years)