

**How leaders can support diversity as a tool for employee  
engagement in Ireland**

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## **Abstract**

The concept of diversity in the workplace has increased over the years, this paper highlights how leaders can support the organisation to increase diversity and use it as a tool for employee engagement in Ireland. The country has been experiencing demographic changes and organisations in the Irish territory need to understand the importance of wisely managing a diverse workforce. This paper chooses two organisations in Ireland with different organisational cultures to show the similarities and differences in how leaders and HRM can impact the workforce through diversity and inclusion. Moreover, the author believes that these organisations cover the characteristics that appear in most companies in the Irish labour market. The objective of the researcher is to present the significance of having a diverse and inclusive workforce and how it can promote employee engagement. This dissertation will explain the challenges, the reasons, and the benefits of why organisations should invest in programmes, policies, and practices that encourage leaders to explore diversity and inclusion through their workforce and use it as competitive advantage. Through the semi-structured interviews, the author was able to gain valuable insight into real procedures and the perspectives of each participant and their organisations. This research used a mono method qualitative research method and included 9 semi-structured interviews with questions that aimed to cover subjects related to diversity & inclusion and employee engagement.

## Declaration

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## **List of Abbreviations**

Diversity and inclusion – D&I

Employee engagement - EE

Human Resources – HR

Human Resources Management – HRM

Irish Company – IC

Leader-Member exchange – LMX

Multinational Company – MNC

Research Question - RQ

## **CHAPTER ONE - Introduction**

### **1.1. Introduction**

The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate how leaders can impact diversity in organisations to promote employee engagement in Ireland. Diversity is a dynamic and fast process of change motivated by the desire of exploring different experiences and ideas (Gibson and Fernandez, 2018), diversity also means to recognise the differences between people and to see the distinctions between them (Johnson, 2011; Miller, 2020). Diversity in the workforce displays different perspectives where both positive and negative outcomes are experienced, as a diverse work group alone does not ensure good results (Jaiswal and Dyaram, 2019; Alcazar et al., 2012).

According to Miller (2020) when discussing diversity, the subject inclusion should be automatically considered. Because while diversity brings the sense of a multi-mixed population or group, inclusion is the effort the organisation makes to enable the diverse workforce to feel valued and accepted, helping them to understand that they fit into the organisation (Morley, 2018; Chen and Tang, 2018); inclusion relates to providing equal access to resources, decision-making and opportunities, and an inclusive workplace also contributes to and cooperates with the disadvantaged individuals or groups in its surrounding community (O'Keefe et al., 2020).

An effective strategy for management of D&I is driven to be in place every day for every employee, the strategy should combine actions to ensure the workplace is inclusive (Silveira and Walters, 2017). This strategy, when aligned with leadership positions, has a higher chance of success, as according to Gotsis and Grimani (2015) leaders committed to diversity can predict practices that may benefit the employees outcomes, they also state that leaders who promote learning at all levels of the organisation increase the benefits of diversity in acquiring sustainable organisational change.

However, these actions have to capture both the minorities and majorities' realities to benefit these groups with the D&I practices (Buengeler et al., 2018). Therefore, Pleasant (2017) states that to enhance employee well-being and engagement the

organisation should undertake initiatives that embrace D&I conversations. For the reason that when the employees feel that they are being heard and treated fairly they will help the organisation to develop its business, per example - market share, opportunities, products and services (Taylor, 2019; Miller, 2020). According to Jin et al. (2016) both diversity policy and inclusive leadership display positive outcomes, nevertheless, the performance amongst the minority groups is higher when the leadership is inclusive when compared to when only the diversity policies are in place.

However, there is an undesired factor that might affect the productiveness of a diverse workplace. Unfortunately, society is still prejudicial against some minorities, and as much as we may like it or not, it is sometimes unconscious and sometimes conscious (Taylor, 2019); unintentional or intentional acts that create a sense of discrimination or rejection among groups with different traits can impact negatively on the organisational performance and can also influence employee turnover, directly impacting on EE (Pleasant, 2017). Engagement is directly linked with the improvement of business performance (Beardwell and Thompson, 2017), because it is comprehended that an engaged employee has an emotional attachment to the business which can drive the employee to spend greater energy on his or her work (Torrington et al., 2014). By knowing the characteristic of its workforce, an organisation will be able to recognise the social differences and then engage with these in order to create connections between employer and employee.

## **1.2. Background of study**

The Irish labour market has experienced several changes, mainly due to the number of immigrants that have moved to the country and the increase in the number of women amongst the workforce (Russel et al, 2009; McGinnity et al, 2018). The last Census in 2016 displays the number of non-Irish amongst a population of just under 4.8 million was over 500 thousand (CSO, 2018) and this figure should continue to increase over the following years as a result of the globalisation wave. As a consequence of growing globalisation and of migrant workers, discussing diversity

can be a synonym of potential growth of business. According to the FitzGerald (2020) there is a significant rise in the number of women in the workforce and an increase in employment of immigrants, especially graduates.

Between 1998 and 2007 the number of female contractors increased significantly by 55 per cent (Russel et al, 2009), and the rate of activity displayed in the labour market in 2017 for non-Irish nationals was 4 per cent higher than for Irish nationals (McGinnity et al, 2018). Many of the immigrants amongst the Irish labour force are engaged in either the low-skill positions that the native Irish no longer want, or the high-skill positions where there is a lack of qualified Irish nationals (Turner, 2010).

These data sets display the rise in employment of minorities that are entering and moving through the Irish labour force. However, the growth of diverse teams can bring unenthusiastic outcomes as some research shows that when compared to other groups, the minorities are more likely to suffer from disadvantages and discrimination in the Irish workforce (Kingston et al, 2015; McGinnity et al, 2018). As an example, and although such images have been decreasing in recent years, in 2015 the Irish labour market had still displayed gender segregation and a difference in working conditions (Russel et al., 2017).

### **1.3. Rationale for this study**

Ireland, similarly to many other countries, has been experiencing an immigration boom in recent years due to the strong economy and plentiful employment opportunities across a variety to sectors. This has directly impacted the Irish labour market to become a multicultural one. Here are some reasons for the relevance of this study:

a) The importance of studying diversity in the workplace is that nowadays the workforce is composed of people that belong to different age groups, ethnicities, races, and genders, have different sexual orientations, come from different backgrounds and may have disabilities (Aquino, 2017; Johnson, 2011).

b) Consequently, at some stage of the professional life, employees will have to deal with diversity (Foma, 2014).

c) Everyday people are being more encouraged to seek experiences and opportunities in countries other than their own (Sharma, 2019), while many countries worldwide are experiencing an increasingly diverse population and labour market (Groschl, 2011).

d) To execute a D&I program requires understanding and support from the managerial leadership as it affects the brand's reputation and business performance (Morley, 2018).

There are several empirical publications about diversity, however, very few are concerning the impact of leaders' roles and perspectives on supporting diversity and how this can impact on EE. This study is focused on adding to the existing literature by dissecting the impact that leadership can have on diversity regarding EE, consequently delivering results on employee performance and motivation.

#### **1.4. Research Objectives and questions**

The objective of this study is to investigate how leaders can support diversity as an instrument for EE in Ireland. As diversity is an extensive subject the researcher will focus mainly on the racial and female groups aiming to give a more specific picture. The study will examine how organisations can use diversity and leadership to increase engagement, and consequently commitment in order to promote competitive advantage for the business. Moreover, to determine if there is a correlation between diversity practices and enhanced levels of employee engagement.

RQ1: How do leaders help the organisation to increase EE through diversity in Ireland?

RQ2: How can HR practices support leaders to increase employee engagement regarding D&I?

RQ3: Can diversity be used as competitive advantage for the organisation?

RQ4: Why is it important for organisations to consider D&I strategies?

RQ5: What impacts can D&I have on engagement in organisations?

RQ6: Identify what diversity strategies (practices, processes etc.) are in place in the organisations?

### **1.5. Research Design and Context**

The research relied heavily on articles, literature and case studies regarding workplace diversity in the current climate in Ireland. To investigate how leaders can support diversity as a tool for EE the researcher will conduct a qualitative research approach to answer the research question, where theories will be compiled, and a conceptual framework will be developed to evaluate the presented topic – classified as non-numerical data (Saunders et al., 2016). With the aim of answering the research questions, interviews will be held to give substantial support for answering the research question based on real experiences. By adapting a qualitative approach, the researcher aims to understand the industry and individuals in more depth which will enable her to discover new insights. According to Saunders et al. (2016) this method is used to develop a conceptual framework and theoretical contribution.

In order to identify relevant research, a structured literature review was carried out by using mainly peer-reviewed articles and journals, case studies and books. The interviews will be held in 2 companies – one Irish and one multinational – to evaluate two different organisational cultures. The interviews will take place with at least 2 leaders and 2 senior HR from each company. Therefore, the qualitative design will use a single data collection technique – mono method qualitative study (Saunders et al., 2016). The objective of this paper is to provide enough arguments to engage the reader to think about the benefits and outcomes of diversity in the workplace, followed by the challenges of employees and managers to face diversity

and develop solutions for inclusion. This topic's objective is to increase engagement amongst the workforce towards the organisation's goals.

## **1.6. Dissertation Structure**

CHAPTER ONE: Consists in the introduction of the topic of the research, providing a brief understanding of the study background, elucidating the objectives and research questions of the study, the context of this study and research design.

CHAPTER TWO: The literature review will explain the topic and provide an in-depth analysis based on secondary data, including literatures, books and, up to data academic articles and journals about diversity definitions and aspects, where it will be discussed the advantages and disadvantages in the EE in Ireland.

CHAPTER THREE: Methodology chapter will detail the reasons and approaches for the methodology, explain in-depth the relevance of research questions. It will also express the aims and objectives of carrying out this research study.

CHAPTER FOUR: The Analysis and Findings will present the analysis of the primary data/research from the interviews which will lead to the findings of the research.

CHAPTER FIVE: The Discussion chapter will consist in discussing the results found on the chapter four compared to the literature review presented on chapter two.

CHAPTER SIX: Conclusion and Recommendations elaborate the conclusion for the research question.

## **CHAPTER TWO – Literature Review**

### **2.1. Introduction**

This chapter will review scholarly literatures on the organisational concept of diversity and inclusion and their relation with EE. The literature will help to build an understanding of the research and will provide a framework for linking the new findings with the previous findings presented in the discussion section (Randolph, 2009). This chapter also displays how previous studies and different perspectives can add value to the current research, focusing on giving to this paper evidence of how diversity can support the organisation to achieve better levels of engagement in the workforce and what the leader's role in this situation is.

Firstly, this section will discuss in depth the understanding of diversity in the workplace and the importance of diversity in the current climate in Ireland. Subsequently the chapter will present the concept of EE in order to give to the reader substantial background for evaluating the correlation between diversity and EE. Thereafter, in order to assess the weight that leaders have on the employee engagement, the literature review will bring into view the duties of leaders' positions and consequently, the impact that leaders may have on the organisational change for acquiring an engaged diverse team.

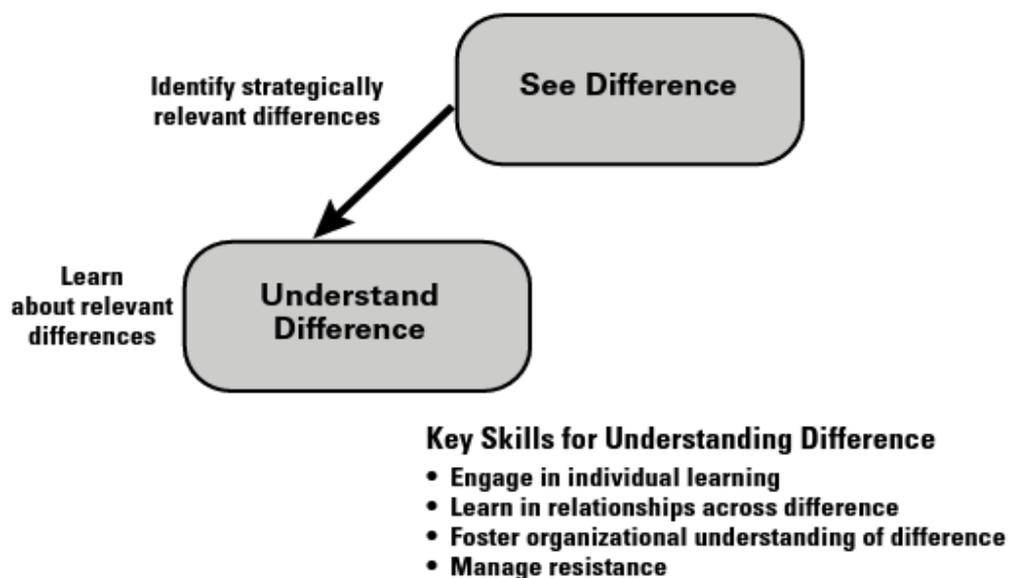
Throughout the literature review, the researcher will establish links between leadership, diversity and EE. Overall, the literature review will provide a basis for supporting the findings displayed in chapter four, which were collected from the primary data via interviews. Enabling the researcher to create a solid understanding for answering the research questions.

### **2.2. Understanding diversity in the workplace**

Many authors define diversity in the workplace as the inclusion of different people in an organisation; and the grounds that define diversity are related to cultural background, gender, religion, age, sexual orientation, marital status, physical disability or political convictions, cognitive style, work experience and more

(Bertelsen, 2011; Sharma, 2019). Bibard (2011) affirms that organisations sometimes operate impulsively and end up not entirely integrating every type of individual difference. Therefore, organisations can face problems with the introduction of diversity policies and practices, since different people or groups will have different views and necessities (Davidson, 2011).

As seen in figure 1 from Davidson (2011) the organisation should identify the relevant differences and learn about these differences to in order to assist the acceptance of D&I in the workplace. It also draws attention to highlight the skills to understand the differences between the workforce, like - engaging in individual learning; learning in relationships across difference; fostering an organisational understanding of difference; and managing resistance. Consequently, these keys skills should be embraced by organisations and enforced in the leaders and activities and traits.



*Figure 1. Understanding Difference (Davidson, 2011)*

While the definition of diversity brings the concept of diverse working teams and an inclusive workplace, there is a need for discussing inclusion in the organisations and how organisations manage D&I amongst their workforce, because you can have diversity but without inclusion taking place. Inclusion is defined by Silveira and Walter (2017) and Miller (2020) as practices that make the workplace an

environment where the workforce is respected and involved, making them feel valued to the organisation. Organisational practices that support D&I are related to recruitment and selection, training and development and social activities that have different groups participating like parties, meals or conventions (Nair and Vohra, 2015). These practices will be examined in the primary research to study how organisations deal with this subject and support in identifying the diversity strategies the organisations have in place.

Yet before examining this topic further and getting deeper into the research to discuss D&I, there is a question that firstly needs to be answered and understood ahead of any other; why has diversity become so important in the workforce in recent years? One of the reasons that discussing diversity in the workplace has become essential these days is due to the fact that globalization has made businesses interconnected and accessible worldwide (Georgiadou et al., 2019). Globalization has happened due to extensive and fast innovations in telecommunications, the increase of affordable international travel and cultural products, development of international economic relations, cross-cultural teams working together and multi-national companies (Georgiadou et al., 2019; Bertelsen, 2011).

Diversity gives access to a larger variety of talent - not only from a particular worldview, enables businesses to acquire and retain talent and, increases EE and business performance (Shemla, 2018; McCausland, 2021); an engaged employee will become more enthusiastic and talk positively about the organisation which will result in a positive public image of the business (Bertelsen, 2011). From the employee's perspective, diversity increases the level of job satisfaction, reduces the level of stress related to work and absenteeism, and enables employees to create a sense of belongingness and loyalty towards the organisation (Sharma, 2019).

Unfortunately, many diversity initiatives fail before achieving any success; as stated by Dobbin and Kalev (2019) a number of solutions are designed with little to no regard for diversity; which is why some organisations fail diversity programme shortly (Davidson, 2011). Diversity also carries with itself the fairness practice where we should see the differences without judgment or evaluating whether the

judgment is relevant (Johnson, 2011). Perhaps, the reason that some diversity programs fail is the fact that the organisations are not prepared to see it without judgment or do not have well established policies regarding fairness; since people from minority groups tend to deal with prejudice, discrimination and stereotyping on a daily basis (Aghazadeh, 2004). To begin thinking about how best to initiate a diversity culture within an organisation it is necessary to develop HR practices to support leaders to engage in the process of increasing the diversity teams, in regard to the RQ2, this will be shown later in the primary data.

There is no standard model of HRM that fits all situations, leaders and workforces, environments, or organisations. Nevertheless, it has been proven that workplace diversity has encouraged companies to provide a favourable environment for attracting and retaining talent (Hapsari et al, 2019). However, delivering a diverse team requires from the organisation time, energy and resources, where the employers need to establish the organisation's needs, opportunities and problems (Morley, 2018). The HR team enters in this case as a facilitator by managing the communication and opportunities and by mapping where there are problems and solutions. Since organisations need to adopt the full mind set within all levels internally to have a truly diverse, inclusive and engaged workforce (Beba and Church, 2020).

Due to the current multicultural society and labour market, diversity initiatives should address minority groups regarding to practices that involve recruitment, retention and promotion of a diverse workforce (Georgiadou et al., 2019). As a matter of fact, HR has to integrate policies and practices that promote diversity through training and development, work design, recruitment and compensation programs (Richard and Johnson, 2001). In addition, it is essential to bring leaders into equal participation in the process of promoting diversity amongst the workforce; as once leaders play a vital role in making diversity succeed, they must be committed to embrace the empowerment of diversity in order to increase the contribution of all employees (Aghazadeh, 2004; ILO, 2014). The primary data will test and examine which practices and policies related to D&I are in place and how these actions are being filtered down to the workforce, addressing the question

raised in RQ4 regarding the importance of having practices and policies regarding D&I strategies.

### **2.3. Importance of diversity in the current climate in Ireland**

Globalisation has a great responsibility for enabling societies and countries to become multicultural. As stated by Bertelsen (2011) demographic trends and globalisation have significant responsibility for the demand of diversity and also people from different parts of the world can work together in virtual workspaces. Some readings state that Ireland has done really well in the era of globalisation and is one of the top countries in the EU in this regard (Fagan, 2002; Munck, 2016); however, Ireland remains very behind in regard to fairness and access on the labour market (Kenny, 2020). Over the course of the Great Recession that Ireland went through the country had an inflow of immigrants, especially from outside the EU, and since then the country has experienced increase and decreases in the number of immigrants, but in 2014 this number had again increased (Kelly et al., 2016).

Due to these events, the Irish labour market has become an ideal case study regarding diversity. Ireland has also embraced foreign companies that are located in its territory, such as the large global companies Facebook, Google, PayPal, Microsoft, Pfizer – among others (Beard, 2018). Diversity is essential for companies that deal with customers, clients, employees and business all around the world, therefore, this subject is relevant not only concerning multicultural societies, but also for organisations that aim to expand their business globally. In order to promote innovative solutions, products and services; companies should consider important diverse and inclusive teams (McCausland, 2021), consequently, Ireland and the companies that are located in the country should be aware of the importance of good diversity management and should consider applying practices to promote an inclusive environment for employees.

According to CSO (2016) in recent years, Ireland has experienced an increase of several ethnic groups. These minority groups or immigrants are liable to suffer at any point from discrimination (implicit or explicit), disadvantages or less favourable

treatment in the workplace (Kingston et al., 2015). Again, McGinnity (2018) and Turner (2010) state that immigrants tend to have more opportunities among the lower levels and receive lower salaries than Irish nationals mainly due to the education level. Regarding the gender issue, the employment gap between men and women is falling substantially, but the gap is still there in Ireland (Pissarides et al., 2005; Conefrey et al., 2014). The correlation between educational level and employment rate are also connected to the opportunities given to these groups (immigrants and women). Apart from the education levels, qualifications, professional experiences and training, on-the-job training and experiences also have influence on the occupational level (Turner, 2010).

Throughout the picture presented in this section McGinnity et al. (2018) address to the host country or employer the discriminatory behaviour or lack of fairness because they may think that minority groups are less productive, or they may rather employ their own compatriots. In the midst of that thought, leaders have a duty to promote equal and fair treatment and opportunities for learning and development for their team from a moral and ethical point of view (Ng and Sears, 2020); the lack of belongingness in the Irish labour market will impact on EE with the company's objectives. As discussed throughout the literature review, the primary research will assess whether or not the organisations have noticed a significant change in the demographics trends over the last few years.

#### **2.4. Concept of employee engagement**

Employee engagement has a positive and significant effect on organisations, because as stated by CIPD (2012) a higher level of EE usually results in a reduction in both absenteeism and the number of employees leaving the company; EE is practised constantly by HR professional and leaders (Bakker and Albrecht, 2018); with the aim of encouraging each employee to achieve their best and increase their emotional commitment at work, however there are infinitive definitions for EE (Peters, 2019). Engagement is the regular commitment, support, dedication and optional effort that an employee displays in order to strengthen the organisation's

business (Nagar and Srivastava, 2020). In other words, EE is characterised as a physical, cognitive and emotional state of the employee that in some definitions can be misjudged as job satisfaction (Kahn, 1990; Gifford and Young, 2021).

However, work engagement differs from EE as Bakker et al. (2014) states work engagement is related to the relationship between employee and their work and, often this is the cause of most intentions for an employee to leave an organisation. On the other hand, people that are engaged with their work have high levels of energy and desire to perform their work activities (Bakker and Albrecht, 2018). Workforce engagement is another concept that has a relation to EE, it is defined as the process of recruiting, retaining, rewarding and retraining productive and effective employees by organisational attitudes and practices (Hundley and Drizin, 2008); and it is not a one-time intervention, it involves a group of beliefs that improve employee performance (Hundley et al., 2009).

Employee engagement should focus on employee motivation, organisational identification and organisational commitment (Gifford and Young, 2021). To have a sustainable employee engagement CIPD (2012) suggests two basic frames in place – enhancing EE and reducing stress at work; sustainable EE is capable of supporting organisational success and competitive advantage, and it is a powerful tool to increase diversity in the workforce (Albrecht, 2011). Once employees are engaged, they will deliver better outcomes for organisations and display positive behaviours towards organisations, they promote customer loyalty, improve retention of talent and organisational performance (Pahdi and Panda, 2015); engagement is also connected to creativity, job performance and client satisfaction (Bakker et al., 2014).

Engagement can be divided into three different categories as stated by Kahn (1990) and Shuck and Wollard (2010) and they are:

- a) Physical or behavioural engagement is displayed when employees are physically engaged with the organisation and ready to input energy into the organisation's goals and values (Joplin et al., 2019); to make extra efforts and move forward with the organisation (Budriene and Diskiene, 2020).

- b) Cognitive engagement occurs before the other two types, is usually silent, and on a personal level, is the most influential as it can trigger the other types of engagement (Shuck and Wollard, 2010); how employees understand their mission or purpose and the opportunities that are given to them, and how to improve their development can also be included under cognitive engagement (Torrington et al., 2014).
- c) Emotional engagement is linked to beliefs and feelings of satisfaction and belongingness in the organisation (Shuck and Wollard, 2010; Budriene and Diskiene, 2020); in the way that an employee emotionally connects with their managers, feels their opinions are accepted and feels that their managers take interest in their development (Torrington et al., 2014).

These levels of engagement can support an organisation to draw attention to what efforts need to be managed to improve the rates of engagement amongst the workforce with regards to an employee's personal interest and backgrounds, helping to create a connection between employee and employer (Pleasant, 2017); some research in HRM display that skilled employee are looking for challenges, opportunities and conditions to become engaged (Budriene and Diskiene, 2020). On the other hand, Peters (2019) attributes EE to well-being and a sense of community and belonging to a group, for instance, it is commonplace for people to have more interaction with their colleagues, managers and customers than with their own families.

## **2.5. Diversity and employee engagement**

Research has shown that a diverse culture in an organisation result in greater engagement, efficiency, development and innovation (Beba and Church, 2020; Buengeler et al., 2018). In this process, HR will help with the effectiveness, people efficiency and organisational processes by hearing and understanding how the individual and organisation develop, including not only the majorities and those in power, but all members of staff (Pleasant, 2017). With implementations and initiatives that support a) the growth of the representation of the minority groups;

b) the galvanisation of the diverse workforce and their inclusion in the decision-making; c) the guarantee of inclusion (Kosset et al., 2006).

Therefore, it is essential to draw up strategies that help the organisation and HRM to achieve the efficiency desired from the diverse workforce through EE. Assessing the environment and the information required, combining these and planning the directions and needs the organisation will take in order to achieve its objectives (Taylor, 2019). Starting with these four questions that may help to set a strategic plan (Kew and Stredwick, 2016, p. 426) – *‘Where are we? Where do we want to get to? How can we get there? What do we have to do to get there?’*. However, from a diversity and engagement perspective the strategies should follow the understanding of managing diversity, by adapting an attitude that embraces everyone (Taylor, 2019).

Organisations can implement inclusive practices and opportunities for learning from diversity, for instance, diverse work teams, a diverse network, and mentor and mentee relationships (Rabl et al., 2018); organisations may give to employees autonomy and participation, jobs that are satisfying, career development opportunities and knowledgeable leaders and line managers (Torrington et al., 2014). Leaders and HR when aligned can have a positive influence on EE and diversity in the organisations through HRM interventions that can assist organisations to enhance engagement by managing payment and expectations, having family-friendly HR practices, holding training and development programmes, and improving the quality of leaders (Torrington et al., 2014). Generally speaking, all these interventions must follow the fairness and equality principles; because according to Beardwell and Thompson (2017) a discriminatory action or an incident of unfair treatment can happen in every single stage of the organisation process, for example, from the first advertisement of job openings through to training opportunities or dismissal procedures.

The external organisational environment is in constant change (Goswami and Goswami, 2017) and organisations need to coax maximum commitment from the workforce to retain, engage and provide a positive approach to diversity, because employees need to feel valued, respected and also to use it as competitive

advantage (Pilbeam and Corbridge, 2006). For this reason, organisations should shape their policies, thinking, actions and culture to fit into the external environment (Beardwell and Thompson, 2017), once engagement does not happen accidentally. The main factors that might embrace EE and diversity are - a harmonious working environment, fair pay and benefits, clear and accessible HR policies and practices, commitment to employee development, employee voice, and innovation and learning, amongst others (Beardwell and Thompson, 2017; Pilbeam and Corbridge, 2006).

These factors will be assessed in the primary data research such as how leaders help the organisation to increase EE through diversity as presented in the research questions. Organisations that have policies and practices in place that support inclusion in the workplace have experienced outcomes that display organisational commitment, work retention, job satisfaction and improvement of productivity (Goswami and Goswami, 2017) taking fairness as the main characteristic - in the process of communication, recruitment, promotion and development, discriminatory events tend to be lower (Nair and Vohra, 2015). Sharma (2019) states that good diversity practices can motivate employees, increase commitment and loyalty amongst the workforce, and can lead to such outcomes as increased performance and productivity. Also, training initiatives and diversity mindfulness should be undertaken as continuous programs in order to foster positive diversity mindset, rather than as one-time checklist events (Jaiswal and Dyaram, 2019).

## **2.6. Duties of Leaders' positions**

Leadership has an essential duty in the organisation, leaders are responsible for creating and enforcing policies (including D&I policies) that will encourage employees to join and participate in the workplace, such an approach can lead to either positive or negative engagement (Hayes et al., 2020; Richardson, 2015). However, this role is growing more and more difficult to perform efficiently, due to several new interventions like globalisation, technological advancements and diverse workplaces (Rahman, 2019). Among other responsibilities, leaders should

be committed with and focused on the implementation of the organisational goals (McCausland, 2021). Richardson (2015) states that effective leadership usually has a set of 'dos' that imply: to have clear vision for the future, to set directions, to inspire and to enable greatness in others, be able to mobilise teams and to create followership through trust, respect and loyalty; amongst other things.

In addition, as leaders deal with people on a daily basis, they need to be ethical towards others and ethical with their decisions (Christina and Fort, 2017), for example, leaders should be capable of providing satisfactory responses and backups in any events of discriminatory incidents that disadvantaged groups may have experienced (Gotsis and Grimani, 2015). In the diversity leadership, leaders are committed with fairness that any kind of inequity or discrimination will not be allowed, consequently reducing the effects of exclusion in the workplace (Gotsis and Grimani, 2015; Hayes et al., 2020). Combining these actions, leaders will deliver to both their employees and the organisation reciprocal trust, loyalty and respect in different levels.

Much has been discussed nowadays about the importance of leadership in D&I. There are many different approaches and practices regarding leadership, however this paper will focus on two practices – inclusive leadership and servant leadership. Inclusive leadership is strongly recommended since this approach develops a great culture of inclusion, open communication, learning environment, flexibility and so on, this leader has as a main characteristic the ability to be sensitive to each employee's needs and performance (Jin et al., 2016, Kuknor and Bhattacharya, 2021). An inclusive leader can build a culture of belonging within which workforce can develop themselves in different ways, this leader is essential especially for those employees that find it difficult to be heard and valued (Brown, 2019).

Servant leadership is another leadership approach that can contribute to D&I as well as inclusive leadership. Servant leaders have similarities with inclusive leaders by promoting collaboration and participation and fostering trust in process and people (Gotsis and Grimani, 2016; Kuknor and Bhattacharya, 2021). These leaders are also communicative, empathic, generally aware and self-aware, persuasive, and committed to peoples developments; among other characteristics (Spears, 2018).

Heyler and Martin (2018) affirm that servant leaders are focused on serving and preparing others to serve well, they see their workforce as the reason to be in the position. This approach is divided by Blanchard (2018) into two parts, which make it possible to observe leaders with strategic vision and direction, and leaders with operational traits, but both roles combine to each other.

These characteristics of inclusive leadership and servant leadership are important because leaders can support the organisation to increase EE and diversity through the strategic contribution and operational influence over the workforce as highlighted in the research questions. The primary data research will examine if the organisations have in their workforce, leaders with traits that can be seen amongst the leadership approaches discussed in this section.

What also implies to leadership is the Leader-Member exchange (LMX) theory that concerns the relationship between employee and leader (Hapsari et al., 2019). LMX focuses or assesses the influence that a leader has on his or her followers based on their relationship and through the quality of this relationship (Glynn and DeJordy, 2010; Erdogan and Bauer, 2015). Kang and Stewart (2007) state that in this theory leaders contributions are regarding trust, empowerment and performance.

Regarding the inclusive and servant approach and the LMX, the primary data will analyse how leaders respond to diversity, fairness, inclusion and belonging, and if these theories are currently in place within the organisations of this case study. Leaders need to think differently to promote new perspectives and take significant actions to make a greater impact on the workplace (Brown, 2019); after all maximising human capital of a diverse workforce is critical to maintain competitiveness in the current climate (Vito and Sethi, 2020).

## **2.7. The impact of leadership on the engagement of diverse teams**

Recently, organisations have displayed more interest in diversity because the characteristics of the workforce and the nature of business has changed globally (Mani and Mishra, 2021), due to a direct impact of the globalisation move

(Georgiadou et al., 2019). However, an organisation should be able to create an environment that welcomes similarities and differences, although sometimes these individual's traits are visible, and in other cases they are invisible (Pleasant, 2017). Workforce relationships are provided through nurturing relationships among diverse employees in order to lead to efficiency (Roosevelt, 2010); the right relationships can provide an opportunity to influence strategies (Frost, 2014). Leaders play an essential role in workforce relationships and have the responsibility of welcoming diversity into their work teams.

According to Goswami and Goswami (2017) leadership support and workplace inclusion are positively connected to each other, as a number of studies have displayed that supportive leaders have higher levels of job satisfaction, work-life balances, organisational loyalty and reduced stress. In addition, leaders have a crucial role in the EE and in the implementation of policies and practices regarding workforce inclusion (Bakker et al., 2014; Goswami and Goswami, 2017; Hayes et al., 2020). Therefore, the leaders and managers should be aligned with the organisational strategy to share with their subordinates the company's values, policies, and goals; consequently, reproducing it to the business' consumers, as leaders have the ability to influence their employees and job resources (Bakker et al., 2014; Bakker et al., 2018).

Regarding leaders activities, they should accentuate the creation of a diversity friendly environment and embrace the inclusion of individuals with differential strengths and capacities (Jaiswal and Dyaram, 2019), leaders who look at diversity through this optic have more chances to focus on fair treatment and recruitment, equal opportunity, and agreement with organisational Equal Employment Opportunity requirements (Thomas and Ely, 2019). Organizational resources like HR practices and senior leadership are related to a positive organizational engagement climate (Bakker et al., 2018; Hayes et al., 2020) and, leaders can boost positive diversity results by creating a respectful climate and ensuring the fair value of their diverse workforce (Gotsis and Grimani, 2016). Furthermore, HRM can support leaders through providing opportunities to learn and training in D&I, diverse work

teams and delivering an environment that greets similarities and differences (Rabl et al., 2018; Pleasant, 2017).

Additionally, LMX also has a significant role on the EE. As defined by various authors, LMX has the ability to build positive relationships between employees and leaders, and employees with high LMX have increased chances to create workspaces with higher opportunities to increase development, EE and job performance (Hapsari et al., 2019). However, studies have displayed that employees and leaders with higher quality relationship have positive attitudes, greater effectiveness and increased engagement, in contrast to employees with poor LMX (Glynn and DeJordy, 2010; Kand and Stewart, 2007). In this picture, some employees can lack engagement because they believe they are receiving unequal treatment and such disengagement causes them to reduce their contribution to the organisation through investing less energy in their work (Joplin et al. 2019). Consequently, the lack of engagement may affect their cognitive, emotional and physical engagement. Another factor that can inhibit engagement is the fact that minorities need to see themselves represented in senior levels or to have mentoring experiences (Davidson, 2011).

Nowadays the majority of organisations have established goals of representation, and policies for D&I (Beba and Church, 2020); and these goals have been adopted as a cultural component to retain and attract talent in the human capital strategy. The primary data will be analysing the impact that leaders are having in the organisation on their daily basis routine and on the implementation of inclusive practices, and how HR assists leaders in this task. Managers and leaders can make the workplace more satisfying for their team through highlighting identity, opportunities and interests (Hundley and Drizin, 2008). Also, leadership when it is shaped to create inclusive environments and have a high level of knowledge of diversity, can increase job satisfaction and positive perceptions of the organisation's performance among the workforce (Gotsis and Grimani, 2016; Jin et al., 2016).

The impact of leaders in the EE of diverse teams will be addressed in the primary research through the RQ1 regarding practices and policies that leaders support and spread over the workforce concerning diversity and EE.

## **2.8. Conclusion**

From what has been presented throughout this literature review, it is obvious that an efficient management of diversity strategy can impact positively on EE and that leaders have a great role in this process. Therefore, the process of implementing a diverse workforce with a focus on EE has to be established with the mindset of fairness, inclusion and transparency amongst the workforce and organisations (Johnson, 2011; Beardwell and Thompson, 2017). In this concern, leaders can play an essential role by strategically managing the influence that they have over the workforce to efficiently operate practices and policies.

The demographics trends in Ireland have changed drastically in recent years and this has impacted the characteristics of the Irish labour market (Kelly et al., 2016; CSO, 2018) being it because of the entrance of women and immigrants into the workforce or because of the arrival of global companies into the country (Beard, 2018). Consequently, organisations are expanding the behaviour of their workforce, and by doing so carefully and wisely with the support of leaders, they will promote competitive advantages for their businesses.

Moving forward from the research itself and focusing on finding the answers for the research questions regarding the impacts of leadership in the EE through diversity and inclusion programs, the next sections will discuss the methodology design that has supported the development of this study and how the methodology approach helped the research to elaborate the primary data research.

## **CHAPTER THREE – Methodology**

### **3.1. Introduction**

The objective of the Methodology and Research Design chapter is to explain the methods used throughout this research, the reasons for undertaking this study, and the research questions that motivated the researcher to develop a study regarding this theme. This chapter will also discuss the main reasons for the research and its objectives. The researcher aims to fill the gap in the current literature regarding diversity and EE, and in doing so, analyse the impact that leaders have in supporting diversity in the workplace as a tool for improving EE in Ireland.

In this section the researcher will clarify in detail how the information was collected and analysed, and why the qualitative approach was chosen over the quantitative approach for answering the research questions. It will include research philosophy, methodology approach, data collection, sample selection and, presentation and analysis while also underlining any potential limitations or ethical considerations.

### **3.2. Research Aims and objectives**

The primary purpose of this research is to investigate how leaders can impact diversity in organisations in order to promote EE and define the benefits that diversity can add to an organisations competitive advantage. As Ireland has been experiencing an inflow of immigrants and an increase in the number of women entering the workforce, and as there are a large number of multinational companies located in Ireland (Kelly et al., 2016; FitzGerald, 2020; Beard, 2018); the research aims to examine the characteristics of the Irish labour market, EE and the leaders' roles in the process of D&I. The research has used one multinational organisation and one Irish company for the case study, to best exemplify the whole Irish labour market regarding diversity in the workplace and its relationship with EE.

The research objective is to add knowledge to the existing literature surrounding EE and the impact of leadership regarding D&I from an Irish context, with particular

focus the current situation regarding the entrance of minority groups into the workforce.

### **3.2.1. Research questions**

The research questions were drawn up to assist the researcher in adding to the current literature regarding how leaders can support the organisations to improve diversity and EE in the workplace.

*RQ1: How do leaders help the organisation to increase EE through diversity in Ireland?*

*RQ2: How can HR practices support leaders to increase employee engagement regarding D&I?*

*RQ3: How can diversity be used as competitive advantage for the organisation?*

*RQ4: Why is it important for organisations to consider D&I strategies?*

*RQ5: What impacts can D&I have on engagement in organisations?*

*RQ6: Identify what diversity strategies (practices, processes etc.) are in place in the organisations?*

These research questions also supported the researcher to develop the interview form that was subsequently used in the interviews. The interviews were then held with key employees from the organisations that were the focus of this case study.

### **3.3. Research Framework**

The following subheadings are based on the Research Onion from Saunders et al. (2019) which describes the stages of research as seen in figure 2. Each layer illustrates in detail the methods of research that are used during that stage.

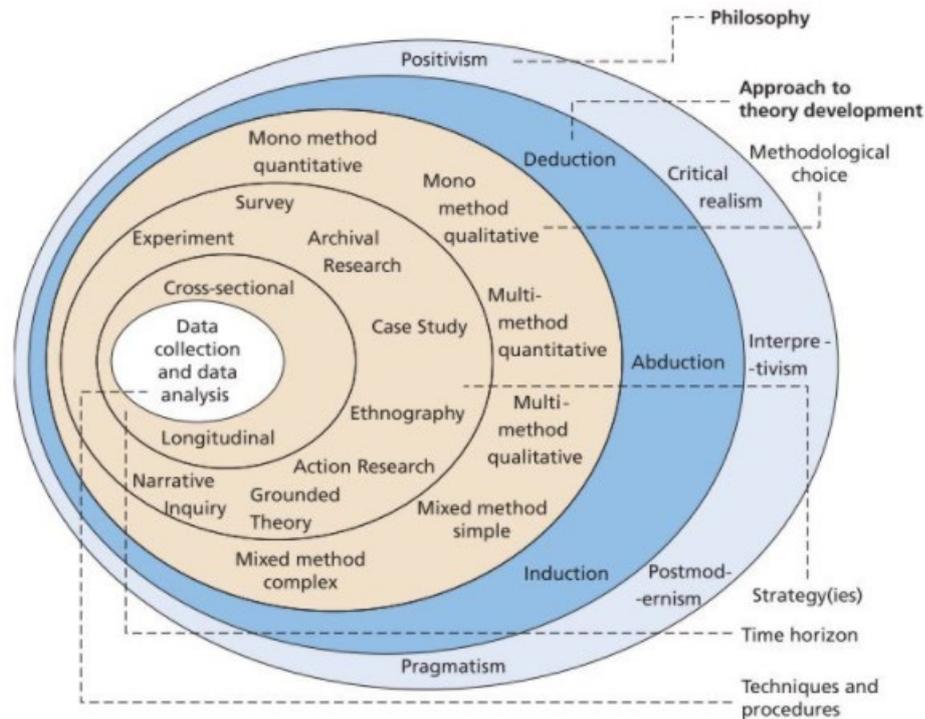


Figure 2. Research Onion (Saunders et al., 2019)

### 3.3.1. Research Philosophy

According to Saunders et al. (2015) research philosophy relates to a system of assumptions and beliefs based on the researcher's knowledge that might influence the research process. Saunders addresses the assumptions as (a) epistemological assumptions: regarding the individual's knowledge; (b) ontological assumptions: regarding the realities of the research; and (c) axiological assumptions: the extent and ways of the person's own values. There are two multidimensional sets that each type of assumption can be classified under - objectivism or subjectivism (Saunders et al., 2015). Objectivism relates to analytical reasoning, logical deduction, facts, realism, etc.; on the other hand, subjectivism guides the research from creating hypotheses, interpreting data, opinions, etc. (Ratner, 2002).

These previously discussed assumptions relate to the five main research philosophies -positivism, critical realism, interpretivism, postmodernism and pragmatism (Saunders et al., 2015). Interpretivism is the most suitable philosophy for business and management research because in interpretivism philosophy, the

researcher tries to collect information that is meaningful for the participants and gather the perspectives from differing groups of people and their social backgrounds (Saunders et al., 2015). Positivism is the other recommended philosophy for qualitative research and this philosophy studies the individual and their environment (Bryman, 2008).

For this study the author has chosen interpretivism philosophy with the multidimensional set of subjectivism, as the researcher believes that both of these “types of research” combined would focus on assessing personal perceptions and understandings of the individual regarding diversity and EE, providing to the reader - and this study – a better understanding and results regarding the current climate.

### **3.3.2. Research Methodology Approach**

According to Adam et al. (2014) research can basically have only two methods of scientific approach - deductive and inductive, and these are not opposing methods, as when conducting a research people tend to use these approaches complementarily. In addition, Saunders et al. (2015) include a third method in this group - the abductive approach. The inductive approach emphasises the empirical verification, in which the reasoning of the problem is likely to be concerning the contexts and more flexible structure of research; the deductive approach explains relationships between concepts and variables and the creation of hypothesis, following scientific values (Saunders et al., 2015; Adams et al., 2014). In the abductive approach both previous approaches are combined and move from back to forward (Saunders et al., 2015).

Having analysed both approaches, the author decided to use the inductive approach, for reasons that (a) the interviews are drawn from a small sample of participants; (b) the research will not be based on hypothesis; (c) the interview process is flexible, allowing the researcher to make observations in order to gain a deep insight from the participants. The decision was taken considering Saunders et al. (2015) who state that the use of small samples is more appropriate with the inductive approach, as is the qualitative data collection (Saunders et al., 2015). In

order to support the inductive approach, an explanatory research method was chosen as the researcher will investigate an existent issue.

Upon discussing the approaches, this research moved forward on deciding the types of research methods that would be used. Saunders et al. (2015) states that the nature of the research can be exploratory, explanatory, descriptive, evaluative or a combination of all four. Thus, for the purpose of this dissertation, explanatory research will be used as it analyses the situation or problem in order to explain and understand the relationship between the variables, and identify possible causes (Saunders et al., 2019).

The other methods would not suit the objectives and purposes of this research, here is why: (a) in exploratory research, the research may use experts in the subject or in-depth interviews to clarify the issues, problems or phenomena; (b) descriptive research seeks for accurate events, persons or situations, however it can be an extension of an exploratory research or antecedent of explanatory research; (c) in evaluative research, the objective is to find out or assess the effectiveness of a particular subject/process etc. These reasons are supported by Saunders et al. (2019).

### **3.3.3. Data Collection Approach**

There are two main options that the researcher could have chosen from to develop and yield the better set results for this study, and they are the quantitative approach and the qualitative approach. Quantitative research is defined by Saunders et al. (2015) as an approach that is associated to variables that are numerically measured, statistically and graphically analysed. Qualitative research is an interpretative, non-quantitative approach that relies on the researcher's interpretation of the subject and social relations (Saunders et al., 2015; Adams et al., 2014).

As discussed previously in chapter 1 where the researcher presented briefly the research design of this study, the qualitative approach was deemed more

appropriate than the quantitative approach due to (a) this research not being concerned with numerical data or analysis; (b) having a small sample of participants; and (c) the author wanted to look at the individuals perceptions of the main subject of this study – how the employees (leaders and HR professionals) feel about the organisation’s policies and practices regarding diversity and the impact that those policies and practices have on EE.

The qualitative approach entails two methods for collecting data –mono method qualitative study and multi-method qualitative study (Figure 2), which mono method corresponds to only one method of data collection, for example, a semi-structured interview with a qualitative analytical procedure, and multiple method refers to more than one method of data collection while also using a qualitative analytical procedure (Saunders et al., 2015).

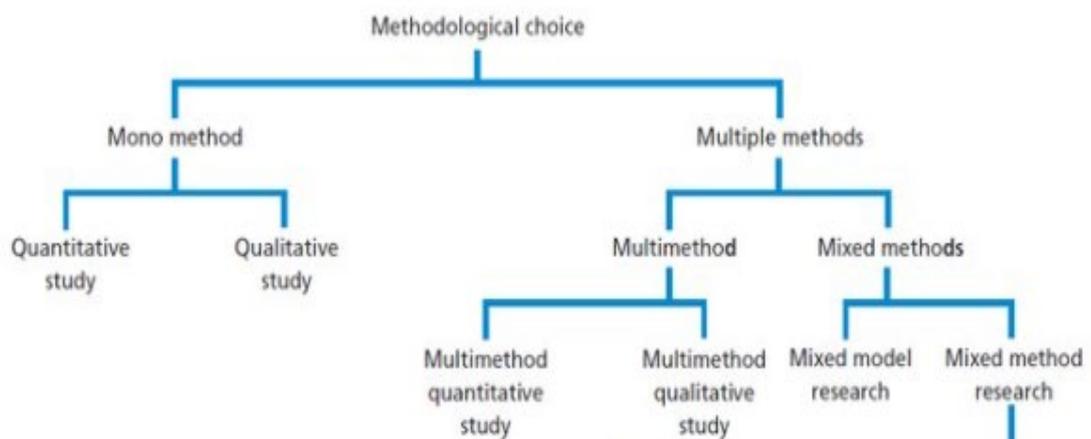


Figure 3. Methodological choice (Saunders et al., 2015)

Therefore, aiming to reach the main objective of this, the researcher opted to use the mono method qualitative study because the primary data collection is made through semi-structured interviews, as the multiple methods would not reach the objectives of this dissertation. In the semi-structured interview, the researcher elaborated the questions according to the objective of this research study - that is to investigate how leaders can support diversity as an instrument for EE – which

enabled the researcher to obtain a deeper understanding of the participants perspective of the subject.

#### **3.3.4. Data Collection Methods**

The researcher utilised interviews for collecting the primary data and every piece of viable information available on the organisation's website. The main process of interviewing the participants occurred through the asynchronous electronic interview which is described by Saunders et al. (2019) as an interview that is conducted through e-mail or messaging exchange involving gaps of time in between the questions and answers. However, for suitability for a couple of participants, the data collection process was via email questionnaire, in which the method consists of sending an email with a list of all questions to the interviewee (Saunders et al., 2019). The researcher adopted the semi-structured interview approach. In the semi-structured interview, the interviewer has the questions and themes pre-established to guide him/her through the interview (Adam et al., 2014).

The interview questions were divided in 3 sections, with each section addressing a specific subject of this study regarding employee engagement, diversity and inclusion, and the connection between diversity and EE (see Appendix A) from the leader and HR professional perspectives. The researcher aimed to gain a deeper comprehension from the themes before creating a connection between them. The first section is focused on establishing the interviewee's perception of D&I in the organisation and how the organisation manages those throughout the different levels. Following that, is the EE section which covers the assessment and maintenance of the employee's engagement by leaders and HR. The last section is a combination of the two previous ones and is regarding how the diversity and inclusion practices can result in EE.

The questions were elaborated focusing on the objectives of this study. They are (a) to investigate how leaders can support diversity as an instrument for employee engagement; (b) to answer the research questions displayed in chapter 1; and (c) to fill the main gaps and issues discussed throughout the literature review.

### **3.3.5. Pilot Interview**

A pilot interview was conducted with two participants from different companies and separate from the main sample, these participants were a HR practitioner and a senior manager. Both participants answered the interview questions once the final draft was complete so as to assess the relevance of the questions, the time disposable for answering the questions, and evaluating if the interview covered all sections presented in this study. Adam et al. (2014) state the importance of having a pilot interview (pre-testing) is to ensure the process of data collection is appropriate and to assist the researcher in minimising errors.

The main reason that the researcher held the pilot interview was to understand the relevance of the questions, to ensure the interview was adequate regarding lexis for the interviewees and to evaluate the semi-structured interview questions. Upon conclusion of the pilot interviews, the researcher was able to pinpoint which sections of the interview needed adaptations in order to make the interview wholly suitable for the interviewees and this research.

### **3.3.6. Sample Selection**

The population selected to participate in the interviews must be able to relate with the objectives and research questions constructed for the study (Saunders et al., 2019), It is for this reason that the participants selected for this research are leaders and HR practitioners from the organisations that are the subjects of this research. The process of selecting individuals to participate should follow one of the following two techniques of sampling – probability sampling or non-probability sampling. The objective of probability sampling is to generalise the population by selecting participants using theories from the mathematics of probability (Quinlan, 2011).

Non-probability sampling is recommended to illustrate through a relatively small number of participants, the case under investigation (Quinlan, 2011). According to Saunders et al. (2019) the size of the sample field will depend on the objectives and research questions, what the researcher needs to find out, and what would give

credibility to the research. In addition, the nature of the interview's questions will determine whom will be best qualified to answer the questions in depth, and in order to acquire the most accurate information the researcher has to select the most adequate candidate (Adams et al., 2014).

This justifies the researcher's decision to use the non-probability sampling, although this sampling method does have several sample techniques that the researcher considered using. The purposive sampling is a non-probability technique that selects the best qualified persons to answer the questions so as to ensure that the research objectives can be met (Saunders et al., 2015). The methods of snowball sampling and haphazard sampling would not suit this research and its objectives because those methods do not follow the criteria of selecting participants according to the research's need - snowball sampling is a volunteer method and haphazard sampling selects a population that are not necessarily related to the research questions (Quinlan, 2011; Saunders et al., 2019).

After analysing the methods of sampling, the author decided to collect the primary data from two companies (one Irish and one multinational), with the participants coming from HR and leadership positions. This way the researcher will have the experiences and views from two different organisational cultures and from some key employees in both (3 participants from amongst leadership roles and 2 from HR in each organisation). The participants were selected using the purposive technique in the non-probability sampling method.

### **3.3.7. Data Presentation and Analysis**

The researcher has decided to use a thematic analysis method which is one of the most recommended processes for analysing qualitative data. This process - commonly used alongside the interview method of data collection - gathers the different and similar perspectives of the participant and captures the relevant data in relation to the research question(s) (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The transcriptions and recorded audio files from the interviews were stored securely on an encrypted device to ensure that their data remained confidential. The author, subsequently, used the thematic analysis to analyse the interviews following the six phases recommended by Braun and Clarke in order to capture the perspectives of the participants. The following is how the six phases were applied: *familiarising one's self with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.*

There are many other methods of data analysis, amongst them the author could have made use of the grounded analysis, as this method discusses social interactions and processes including business and management (Saunders et al., 2019). However, according to Azulai (2021), one of the characteristics of this method is the technique of analysing data and taking notes as it is being collected – such as, before collecting more data – and this process was deemed inappropriate for this dissertation.

Therefore, the researcher believes that the thematic analysis method is the most suitable for this research, because according to Braun and Clarke (2006), it can generate unforeseen insights and can also be used in conjunction with textual interviews. As this study aims to investigate how leaders can use diversity and inclusion to improve EE, the data will be analysed from the perspectives of leaders and HR practitioner's.

### **3.3.8. Ethical Considerations**

The study is carried out with the voluntary participation of employees of the organisations that the researcher believed to be the best options to carry this research. Regarding the relevance of the material collected, the researcher used the information displayed on the companies' respective website. Therefore, no ethical issues or risks of harm or distress are anticipated. The researcher completed and submitted a signed NCI Ethics Form and received no hesitation or issues towards conducting the research. All participants received the consent form regarding the use of the material used in this study.

The researcher ensured that all data collected was handled with the highest responsibility and professionalism. Any details that can possibly reveal the interviewee's identity or people they referred was disguised. All identifiable data was stored securely using a separate ID code. General data protection regulation was followed at all times.

### **3.3.9. Limitations**

The researcher held the interviews via Microsoft Teams or phone calls, due to the restrictions regarding the current climate of Covid-19 pandemic.

### **3.4. Conclusion**

In order to enable the reader to understand the process of developing this paper, the chapter displayed and explained in detail the objectives, the rationale, the methods and approaches that supported the researcher to foster this research. The chapter also clarified the underpinnings behind the research questions and how the data collected will answer these questions.

To summarise, the researcher opted to conduct qualitative, inductive research with an interpretivism philosophical and subjectivism approach. Furthermore, the nature of this study is explanatory research as the author will investigate an existent issue which is discussed throughout the literature review. In addition, semi-structured interviews were held with the participants as it was assessed to be the most suitable method for data collection, whilst the participants selected were chosen through the non-probability method under the purposive technique of sampling.

The next section will analyse and present the data collected in these interviews with the purpose of answering the research questions and reaching the objectives that were discussed previously.

## **CHAPTER FOUR – Findings and Analysis**

### **4.1. Introduction**

This chapter aims to present and evaluate the information that was collected through the semi-structured interviews. The questions' objective is to extract the understanding and knowledge that leaders and HR practitioners have of D&I, employee engagement and the link between D&I and employee engagement within their companies. However, the results of this analysis will be discussed further in the "discussion chapter".

Throughout 11 questions, the participants gave their understanding of the organisation's policies and practices regarding D&I, and the impacts that leaders have on employee engagement through the utilisation of these policies and practices. The questions were elaborate to enable the researcher to gather the necessary information from the interviewee's answers, which then allowed the researcher to reach the objectives of this research. In order to extract the information without the influence of any third parties, all interviews were held individually.

As mentioned in the introduction chapter, the objective of this study is to investigate how leaders can support diversity as an instrument for employee engagement; with that goal in mind, the researcher focused on the analysis of the practices displayed in two organisations with different organisational cultures to understand if organisational culture would interfere in the findings and results. One of the organisations has Irish roots and thus has a very Irish-centric culture, whilst the other organisation is multinational and is much more multicultural.

Thematic analysis will be used to analyse the data as the author will gather the different and similar perspectives from the participants so as to capture the relevant information for this research. This method - as mentioned previously - is one of the most recommended processes for analysing qualitative data.

Here are the interviewees identification: Interviewees A, B and C – Leaders/Managers, and Interviewees D and E – HR practitioners.

## 4.2. Findings - Research Questions

The data collected from the interviews will be presented and analysed under this subheading in such a way to answer the research questions as discussed previously in this project. The objective of these questions is to help the researcher to gather relevant data from the interviews that can relate to the outlined subjects discussed in the literature review.

*RQ1: How do leaders help the organisation to increase EE through diversity in Ireland?*

Multinational Company: By being open-minded, inclusive & supportive, building relationships based on trust, and allowing employees to be part of the decision-making. This was supported by Interviewees B and C who stated “by calling them to be part of the decision-making, meetings, allowing them to speak and give ideas, and having events that embrace the differences”, Interviewee A pointed “locally there are a few leaders that are more supportive and open-minded than others”. The HR interviewees D and E believed that these kinds of characteristics displayed by the leaders are the main factors that support the outcomes shown in the regular global surveys and tailored surveys which delivered high levels of engagement. As outlined Interviewee D “the regular global surveys have shown that leaders who are flexible to the diversity initiatives had delivered higher levels of engagement”.

Irish Company: Inclusive leaders can make their teams walk together with the organisation’s goals and objectives. According to Interviewee C “having an inclusive leadership, the employee feels heard, valued and respected and it results in them doing the best work”, Interviewee D referred “employees who have inclusive leaders perform without thinking of what others are thinking about them”. Interviewee B outlined “leaders with empathy to see other people’s perspectives and stories, a strategic mindset to understand that diversity will also bring benefits to the company”.

The interviewees from both organisations have similar opinions regarding the impact that leaders have on the increase of engagement through their behaviour and people management. This was noticeable when the interviewees highlighted

the inclusiveness and supporting characteristics displayed by leaders. As mentioned by Jin et al. (2016) inclusive leaders can promote a learning and communicative environment and a culture of inclusion.

*RQ2: How can HR practices support leaders to increase employee engagement regarding D&I?*

MNC: According to the interviewee C “the amount of information circulated by the HR team is essential for leaders to perform better”, and the Interviewee D “the huge amount of communication regarding this topic from all levels of the organisation - both locally and globally - is perceived positively among the workforce”. Another factor pointed out by Interviewee A is “the fact that there is a junior position that was created specifically to focus on D&I which leads the programme, sends the information to different levels and from different angles”. They all mentioned that the company’s intranet also contains all information regarding the issues, company values, clients, policies and practices.

IC: The organisation has succession planning for leaders and employees. This is supported by Interviewee D who said “Leaders have reviews, career planning, development planning and opportunity planning” and Interviewee E “there are few processes that HR undertakes to facilitate the communication and encourages leaders to spread the information”. Interviewee A referred “Leaders also have access to an app that enables them to behave like a business partner, giving the leaders security in the process and business”. Coaching for leaders is another practice mentioned by the participants, such as Interviewees A and C mentioned “the HR practitioner coaches leaders that have difficult situations, questions and issues; teaching us how to think differently and in a more inclusive way.

HR has the role of supporting and providing information regarding D&I that consequently results in more employee engagement in both organisations. As mentioned by Torrington et al. (2014) leaders and HR when aligned can have a positive influence on employee engagement and diversity in the organisations.

*RQ3: Can diversity be used as competitive advantage for the organisation?*

MNC: Yes, in this case because of the customers, suppliers, partners that are based all around the world and Interviewee A “There is pressure about inclusiveness coming from every section of the business”. According to Interviewee B “Locally, it is not as ethnically diverse as in other countries that are part of the business, but the organisation is still overhauling its culture to adapt the demographic changes”.

IC: Yes, as diversity brings benefits to the company and society is calling for more equal opportunities for all. This is supported by Interviewee B who outlined “diversity is more than the right thing to do, as it will also bring benefits to the company”

*RQ4: Why is it important for organisations to consider D&I strategies?*

MNC: According to Interviewee B “because of these strategies, the organisation rarely experiences arguments amongst the workforce and clients, as issues are covered, ideas are aligned and suggestions that benefit the relationship between partners, clients, suppliers, etc are taken onboard”. For example, Interviewee D outlined “the firm has a vision and policies that encourage people to speak up and submit ideas”. Interviewee A also stated “there is a blog where employees can share their ideas and opinions; this medium has delivered an incredible level of engagement”.

IC: Because of the difference in the demographic aspects, especially with the entrance of women into the company, the mix of nationalities and mixed team. However, the interviewee A and E believe that the organisation needs to dedicate more effort to make it more diverse, because the workforce is still mostly Irish-UK white men. The strategies regarding D&I let the employees know that they can ask for support, the Interviewee D outlined “these strategies can help to minimise episodes of anxiety and can result in people being more engaged”.

The organisations experienced similarities in demographic changes, which was expected due to the information presented in the literature review regarding the

increase of minority groups in Ireland. Nonetheless, the companies take different approaches to apply these strategies.

*RQ5: What impacts can D&I have on engagement in organisations?*

MNC: The organisation believes that the policies of D&I can bring to the organisation and the workforce a better relationship and trust in the overall process, new opportunities, assessments and surveys, and so on.

IC: It can reduce similarity bias and evolve innovative thinking to become a better organisation for the future. Interviewees A and C agreed that employees know they can thrive because they experience a sense of belonging, are respected, and can bring their whole selves to work.

Although it seems the organisations do not share the same ideas, the thematic analysis understands the similarities on the impacts of diversity and inclusion on EE, as addressed in the literature review.

*RQ6: Identify what diversity strategies (practices, processes etc.) are in place in the organisations?*

MNC: Regular calls, meetings, practical advice and activities that reinforce the applicability of inclusive actions, covering issues related to D&I. Interviewee A cited “Leaders are regularly exposed to material that reminds them to practice inclusivity and fairness as that consequently will result in more employees engaged”. The organisation has a ‘shadow management committee’ that regularly meets with senior and junior employees where they give their views of the issues, this practice was presented by Interviewee C. Communication regarding this topic is shared from different levels of the organisation locally and around the world, and as earlier mentioned, there is a junior position specifically for D&I.

IC: The organisation has several policies regarding dignity and respect in work, that supports people that suffer from any discrimination or situation to make a

complaint and these complaints are taken very seriously (investigation and actions). The Interviewee E mentioned that the organisation also has free counselling which employees feel supported by the organisation and consequently reflects on the employee engagement. According to Interviewee D “There are some leaders that play a pivotal role in the D&I initiatives and practices – from direct sponsorship to active involvement”. They would also champion inclusion, diversity and belonging in their day to day and keep these to the fore. The organisation has 2 distinct populations – manufacturing site population and office/remote population – where differing practices and strategies are employed to get the same result.

Similarities between the organisations can be seen regarding practices and strategies, but the differences in some processes and objectives of D&I strategies are also noticeable. For example, MNC does not have a policy regarding respect and dignity, nor does it have different workforces that require different approaches, however, leaders are constantly exposed to material concerning inclusive practices, and information is delivered to all levels of the organisation.

### **4.3. Findings - Research Objective**

The data below will be presented with the purpose of addressing the objective of this research - that is to investigate how leaders can support the organisation to increase employee engagement in the workforce through practices of D&I - and the questioning outlined in the literature review.

#### **4.3.1. Multinational Company**

Globally speaking, the organisation has a greater number of people involved in the diversity practices as there are more diverse teams in UK, Australia, America, and Asia. Locally there are a few leaders that are more supportive and open-minded than others. And although the local jurisdiction is ahead of their competitors, they are still behind the other jurisdictions as they are influenced by those countries’ practices. This is supported by Interviewee B who outlined “the organisation has

resources to invest in the development of the diversity programmes, and the influences from other jurisdictions; the interviewees believe that their company is ahead of other Irish firms that are in the same sector”.

There is a blog in place that is used for employees to detail their experiences regarding the diversity theme, and employees that have taken part in this blog have displayed an increase in engagement. The organisation also holds regular meetings with employees and leaders to discuss subjects that have the possibility of escalating to a conflict. These meetings are also used to discuss any other issues, or solutions to solve any other problems regarding any matter in the organisation. Nonetheless, the participants highlighted that everyone has equal opportunity to participate and opine, which in their point of view results in employees being more engaged as they can see themselves represented and heard at the same level as everybody else in the organisation. For example, interviewee A mentioned “the secretary on his team is usually starts each meeting to show that she is equally as important as the managers or CEO’s”

The organisation holds regular global surveys which cover a wide range of topics/areas in the company including employee engagement. Interviewee B and D stated that “the organisation does not have evidence that the results are exclusively from D&I practices”. In other words, the interviewees could not guarantee that the engagement levels were entirely resultant of the diversity programmes or other practices that are in place, as these other programmes and practices may have influenced the results seen in employee engagement.

#### **4.3.2. Irish Company**

Leaders and HR practitioners believe that there are a lot of leaders that significantly support the diversity programmes, as stated by Interviewee D “There are some leaders that play a pivotal role in the D&I initiatives and practices etc – from direct sponsorship to active involvement” and Interviewee B “there are lots of leaders who are into the diversity programmes and who have a really inclusive behaviour”, but that there are also a few people who do not understand the importance of such

programmes, as mentioned by Interviewee A “there are few people that do not understand the importance of such a programme and are not supportive”. This does not mean that they block the progress, they simply do not support it. The leaders that are taking part in the programme in terms of everyday practice are inclusive with the language the organisation uses, they do not make assumptions based on the individuals background, gender and home life, they offer time flexibility, are mindful in the recruiting process and are open mind with regards to diversity.

Leaders are essential tools for the acceptance and success of diversity programmes, as mentioned in the literature review by Hayes et al. (2020) leaders are the ones that will enforce and encourage the employees to work according to the policies. And having their support is beneficial for both the organisation and workforce.

As the organisation has 2 different workplace populations (manufacturing site population and the office/remote population) the main tools used to spread the D&I practices are through Facebook where people share their personal stories and experiences regarding the themes related to diversity, and through the intranet which details all the policies and practices and is easily accessible for consultation. In addition, for the population on the manufacturing sites they also have posters on display that keep the workforce up to date, and the leaders are well informed and receive training to enable them to share the information in their team meetings.

The company also has annual international engagement surveys that assess engagement and leadership and wherein each leader is given a score that measures their team engagement. The survey target’s themes that evaluate the employees’ sense of belonging, inclusiveness and engagement, but they cannot guarantee that the increase in employee engagement is related exclusively to the programme of D&I. As mentioned in the literature review, organisations should have several programmes in place that support employees and build successful relationships between employees and organisation.

All participants believe that the organisation is moving in the right direction as outlined by Interviewee E “the organisation is moving in the right direction”,

Interviewee A “I believe there is positive perception that we have a greater focus on D&I”, and Interviewee C “there is room to improve so as to align with best practice benchmarks”.

#### **4.4. Findings – Literature Review**

This section will discuss the issues outlined throughout the literature review and the primary data will be displayed so as to address these subjects. Using the thematic analysis method, the author will highlight the main similarities and differences in each theme.

##### **4.4.1. Theme 1: HR practices**

As HR are responsible for integrating policies and practices that support diversity, in the modern diverse society these initiatives should cover practices that include recruitment, retention, and promotion of diverse workforces, work design, training and development, and reward programs (Richard and Johnson, 2001; Georgiadou et al., 2019). Comparing past literature with the primary research regarding these practices, the author identified that:

The MNC does not have specific policies or practices regarding recruitment; however, they strive to give opportunities to employees based on their professional experiences and knowledge. As stated by Interviewee C “Even with no diversity policy in recruitment, the organisation is always pushing its leaders to achieve the same level of quality, balance of work and opportunities amongst their teams”.

Concerning the practices around training and development, the organisation is constantly providing workshops and training to all employees, sharing information, and embracing differences through social events; for example, in June there was a communication which celebrated the LGBTIQ+ pride, and in November the company celebrated Diwali (Indian culture) which Interviewee A pointed out.

As earlier mentioned, the IC has 2 distinct populations, where the practices and strategies are developed separately to reach these groups as effectively as possible. The processes of recruitment, training and development are drawn to welcome diversity, as Interviewee D said, “the company is being mindful in the recruitment process and has an open mind to diversity” and Interviewee B mentioned “different nationalities are mixed together in order to have more diverse teams”. Communications are made through banners that are displayed in the manufacturing sites, emails are sent to employees, Facebook posts are managed to cover diversity matters, etc.

The strategies to make the organisation more diverse are similar in both organisations, as they are introducing more diverse teams, greater information, training and, social events (which are not currently happening due to the Covid-19 pandemic). Organisations should adopt approaches that embrace everyone under diversity and inclusion strategies (Taylor, 2019).

#### **4.4.2. Theme 2: How they support leaders**

In regard to the RQ2, the findings from the primary research indicated the practices that support leaders to engage in the process of increasing diversity begins with communication, learning, understanding and development. Leaders have an essential role in implementing diversity, they must be committed to increasing the commitment of all employees (Aghazadeh, 2004; ILO, 2014).

Thus, MNC has policies that enable leaders to encourage people to speak up and share ideas, with the objective of tackling issues before they become harder to manage as addressed by Interviewee B “regular meetings with leaders to give their view of the issues and that results in getting their messages across and avoiding the build-up of problems”. Due to the nature of the business, these practices involve employees, leaders, managers, partners, suppliers, and clients. And there is a vast amount of communication regarding this theme.

In addition, the participants address the importance that these practices have in embracing the different groups and enabling the business to run smoothly at all levels, this is supported by Interviewee A “the practices enable the information to be delivered among different levels and from different angles”. The MNC has inserted several practices to enable the organisation and leaders to deal fairly and responsibly with D&I, as mentioned by Interviewee A “Leaders are constantly developing and evolving to learn how to deal wisely with hard situations and in reason to minimise negative experiences with employees, clients, partners, etc”.

Moving on to the IC, the organisation has implemented leaders’ reviews, career planning, development planning and opportunity planning which are all processes that enable leaders to deal with diversity in a fair and professional manner. Moreover, HR has the role of coaching leaders to empower them to manage situations and issues in a more inclusive way. An example given by the interviewees is that the company has been creating opportunities to enhance their leaders involvement and is running a series of learning interventions which will help leaders to understand the importance of D&I and belonging in the workplace. This is supported by Interviewee D who stated “we are running a series of learning interventions to help leaders to understand the importance of D&I and belonging in any organisation”.

#### **4.4.3. Theme 3: Demographics changes**

Globalisation has a great responsibility in the change of the demographics and Ireland had an inflow of immigrants (Bertelsen, 2011; Kelly et al., 2016). By interpreting the perspectives of the interviewees, it could be deduced that organisations need to adapt their workforces and organisational cultures to embrace these changes.

In their process of creating a diverse workforce, the MNC has been greatly influenced by the other jurisdictions in which the company operates. However, both interviewees A and C mentioned that when compared to Irish society, there is room

for improvement, and Interviewee B mentioned “it is not as great as in the other jurisdictions that have more multicultural aspects”.

Specifically, with the increasing number of women and different nationalities in the workforce, the IC has noticed the need to improve the quality of support from leaders. As Interviewee E outlined “my team has lots of nationalities and this is growing” and Interviewee A “the organisation needs to put more effort into increasing diversity”.

#### **4.4.4. Theme 4: Increasing employee engagement through diversity**

There are several factors which may lead to an increase in employee engagement and diversity. These are: a friendly working environment, clear and accessible HR policies and practices, commitment to employee development, employee voice, and innovation & learning, amongst others (Beardwell and Thompson, 2017). Both organisations displayed a significant intention of implementing practices that increase engagement and diversity. These have produced some interesting and insightful results.

In MNC, the benefits of having programmes of D&I are noticeable as they have achieved increased levels of engagement through communication and learning as Interviewee B affirmed “the junior position leads the programme, sends the information to different levels and from different angles, making everyone aware of the actions and create a favourable environment for D&I”, whilst Interviewee D stated “the tool has expressed a high level of usage and the participants have displayed an increase in engagement”.

Likewise, the IC has several programmes in place that support the employees and help build a successful relationship between employees and organisation. One such example is their communication programme, that gives a voice to the employees as Interviewee A affirmed “Our engagement score through the ‘OurVoice’ survey has increased in relation to the specific area of D&I and displayed a positive perception”. And the result of the survey is also used to build engagement plans for

the next year, to support colleagues to be allied and to make the organisation more inclusive, as Interviewee E mentioned “the engagement plan helps us to think broadly about our team expectation and ideas for the future of the organisation”.

The communication practice is common in both organisations shows the importance of having an open space for dialogue and how this can deliver great results. Furthermore, the IC has engagement plans that gives more substantial perspectives to the employees. The MNC does not have such plans, however they still have high employee engagement levels. These similarities and differences between the organisations show that more than one method can deliver to the organisations desired results.

#### **4.5. Conclusion**

Although the concise sampling, through the 9 semi-structured interviews the author could gain a deeper insight into D&I programmes and practices. The author was also able to find the trends and patterns in both organisations as highlighted by Braun & Clarke (2006) through the thematic analysis. Leaders and HR perspectives, practices and policies, workforce behaviours, and organisation’s objectives are the key similarities and differences discovered throughout the analysis concerning D&I and employee engagement.

This process enabled the researcher to realise that having a diversity friendly work environment and atmosphere is important for the participants of this study and for employees from different groups in the organisations. Both organisations have worked to create an ethical environment concerning D&I in the workforce, and both organisations also understand the importance of having a team to oversee this.

As many authors like Pleasant (2017), Beardwell and Thompson (2017) and Goswami and Goswami (2017) have said, EE has a direct connection with the increase of employee performance, belongingness, and results. Saying that, the following chapter will further discuss the findings examined in this when comparing these to the literature review presented in chapter two.

## **CHAPTER FIVE – Discussion**

### **5.1. Introduction**

This chapter aims to create a connection between the responses obtained from the participants of the semi-structured interviews, and the data that was gathered through the literature review. The author will discuss the implications of the collected data regarding the themes covered throughout this study. This chapter also presents how former studies and different perspectives are relatable. This will be accomplished by covering the main subjects discussed in the research objectives and the research questions to fill the gaps in the existing literature surrounding the impact of leadership on EE and diversity and inclusion.

The purpose of this research was to investigate how leaders can impact diversity in organisations to promote EE, specifically in the Irish labour market and workforce. With the objective of providing to this study evidence of how diversity can support the organisation to achieve better levels of engagement and the importance of leaders in this matter, the researcher will divide the discussion topics under three sections - employee engagement, diversity and inclusion, and the impact of leadership on this process.

### **5.2. Diversity and inclusion**

According to several works of literature, investing in diversity is becoming an essential venture for organisations that aim to expand their business. Diversity and inclusion are receiving more attention in the current climate because of the global expansion of businesses (Bertelsen, 2011); moreover, in Ireland this phenomenon is increasing rapidly due to the entrance of immigrants and an increasing number of women in the workplace (FitzGerald, 2020). Another reason that reinforces the necessity of implementing diverse and inclusive practices in the organisation according to Shemla (2018) and McCausland (2021) is the fact that diversity contributes to greater access to a larger variety of talent, helps to retain talent, and increases performance and engagement amongst the workforce.

Both multinational and Irish organisations agree that demographic traits are changing from year to year, and if organisations want to expand their business' reach and their employee's commitment, they must invest in D&I. However, there are differences in the approaches and needs regarding D&I between the two studied organisations, but they both aim for the same conclusion – 'the objectives/success of the business'. Independent of the reasons behind the choice of D&I programmes, the organisations should guarantee that all interventions follow the fairness and equality principles, because incidents surrounding unfair treatment or discrimination and stereotyping can happen every day (Beardwell and Thompson, 2017; Aghazadeh, 2004) and these incidents can result in the failure of diversity programmes (Davidson, 2011).

In the MNC, due to the influence of other jurisdictions, the organisation has several strategies and reasons to introduce practices and policies that support the acceptance of and the growth of D&I. As stated by the interviewees, the organisation relies on diversity to benefit the relationship between clients and partners, as they must deal with people from different backgrounds, cultures, genders and so on. There is pressure from every part of the business that requires a good relationship between the stakeholders and clients, and consequently, the establishment of D&I practices support the achievement of this high-quality relationship.

On the other hand, the IC noticed the increase in teams with mixed nationalities and of women entering the organisation and decided to manage it wisely to improve EE for everyone. They understand that diversity can bring benefits to the business and modern society is calling for more inclusive workplaces (FitzGerald, 2020). With that being said, the organisation has practices and policies regarding dignity and respect in work, which support the organisation to minimise or cease incidents of discrimination. Thus, the organisation makes an effort to spread the policies and practices throughout the different levels and roles within the business, even though the interviewees admit that there are still many more changes to be implemented to have a fully diverse organisation.

Both the MNC and IC have practices in place that promote a better understanding and management of D&I. It has been outlined by a number of participants that the organisations have spent time and resources on creating a diverse and inclusive mindset amongst their workforce, for example both organisations have events concerning the importance of embracing differences, they have training and development programmes to enable everybody to apply for new opportunities and promotions, etc. They have highlighted particularly the HR teams efforts to make these actions accessible to all employees and reduce any chances of having any bias against each other.

However, throughout the presented picture, it is clear that there is a lot to improve on as neither of the organisations displayed policies or practices that help the organisation to increase the diverse population - they are, apparently, more focused in managing their current people. In the multicultural modern society diversity initiatives should consider practices that involve recruitment, retention, and promotion of diverse workforces (Georgiadou et al., 2019), being HR responsible for integrating policies and practices that support diversity through recruitment, work design, training and development, and reward programs (Richard and Johnson, 2001).

### **5.3. Employee engagement**

Employee engagement can have a positive impact on employees with regards to their emotional commitment to their work and the organisation (Peters, 2019) and can help to reduce turnover and absenteeism (CIPD, 2012). In both organisations, the participants of the semi-structured interviews believe that high levels of EE directly contribute to increased employee commitment. Moreover, policies and practices, and the conduct of leaders and HR practitioners, can directly impact on the levels of EE. Both companies hold annual surveys that measure, among other factors, the levels of engagement in each team, the relationship between employees and organisation, and the behaviour of their leaders.

Employee engagement can lead to employees having a positive mindset about their organisation, can help to deliver better outcomes, can lead to increased job performance and creativity, can help to promote client satisfaction and can improve retention of talent (Pahdi and Panda, 2015; Bakker et al., 2014). Saying that, both organisations have more than enough reasons to be more attentive with the factors that affect EE, and to create a supportive environment to maintain sustainable levels of EE.

According to the CIPD (2012), organisations should invest in learning and development programmes and selection, assessment, and promotion programmes, because these can help leaders to adopt behaviours that support sustainable EE. An interesting aspect of the actions taken by both organisation and which was highlighted in the research is the fact that they have a consistent system of awareness of D&I. As they are focusing the training on leaders, managers or key employees, the organisations have managed to spread the information downwards to all levels of the business.

The IC has practices and policies in place that minimises episodes of unfair treatment and anxiety, increases engagement, respect, performance and the sense of belongingness, and enables the employee to feel valued by the organisation. Alongside helping the organisation to increase performance, retain talent and improve the relationship with clients, EE also strengthens the connection between employee and employer (Pleasant, 2017). The organisation invests in these actions in order to reinforce the relationship between the organisation and employee, increase the commitment to the business goals, encourage individual performance and retain talent.

On the other hand, due to the field of activity and the pressure from the business environment, the MNC prioritises the practices and policies that engage employees in order to have a better relationship with the clients and suppliers, uphold the brand's reputation, and to attract both talent and new clients. The firm also believes that EE is a facilitator of problem solving and conflict. As defended by Beardwell and Thompson (2017) organisations need to adapt their policies,

thinking, actions and culture to fit into the external environment; however, without forgetting to foster practices that embrace EE (Pilbeam and Corbridge, 2006).

Both MNC and IC have practices and policies in place that focus on the improvement of EE considering D&I, as both organisations are aware of the importance of these actions. For instance, they both have processes for employees to bring ideas, issues, suggestions and complains to be discussed and shared, and they give their employees opportunities speak up and to be coached. Leaders and HR can have a positive influence on EE and diversity with events that enhance engagement such as family-friendly HR practices, training and development programmes, equal opportunities and improving the quality of leaders (Torrington et al., 2014; Nair and Vohra, 2015).

#### **5.4. The importance of leadership on the engagement of diverse teams**

Once the organisation has leaders well committed to the organisation's diversity and inclusion programme, and a HR team that supports leaders and employees, it becomes easier to get the workforce committed to the business plan. However, leaders and managers can create and encourage a diverse and inclusive organisational culture, and consequently it can lead to the commitment of others, but as the process needs individual efforts and contributions, the commitment can be irregular (Hayes et al., 2020). Furthermore, HR has an essential role in this process of creating more inclusive leaders. According to the interviewees, in both organisations there is an extensive amount of information and communication regarding D&I, with an aim of enabling leaders to encourage engagement in their teams. There are however a few leaders who are resistant to change and not as committed as others.

In the IC, leaders have several strategic plans that will enable them to act more fairly, open-minded and professionally towards the daily challenges. Training and learning that will empower leaders to coach their teams and to become information spreaders of the organisation goals and targets are included in their development planning. Even though the MNC operates in a different field than IC, the

organisation also has leaders in constant development in order for them to learn how to deal sensibly with the situations that can negatively impact the experiences of employees, clients, partners, etc. - because an effective leadership has clear vision for the future, sets directions, inspires others, creates followership through trust, respect and loyalty (Richardson (2015).

In addition, leaders need to be ethical with their actions and decisions in order to deal with people on daily basis, as leaders should be able to deliver satisfactory responses and backups in uncertain events (Christina and Fort, 2017; Gotsis and Grimani, 2015). Leaders that are thoughtful regarding D&I have more chances to perform and stimulate fair treatment, equal opportunity amongst their work team and colleagues. Leaders activities should also accentuate the creation of a diversity friendly environment and embrace the inclusion of individuals with different strengths and capacities (Jaiswal and Dyaram, 2019).

In both organisations, leaders play an important role concerning EE in diverse work teams. They are responsible for multiplying the organisational culture and practices, motivating and encouraging employees, being the shining example of ethical and moral practices and guaranteeing that their teams are performing according to the business' expectation. Hayes et al. (2020) and Richardson (2015) stated that leaders have an essential duty because they are responsible for creating and enforcing policies, encouraging employees to participate in the workplace, and consequently they can lead to either positive or negative engagement.

## **5.5. Conclusion**

Combining what has been presented previously in the literature review and in the findings and analysis, leadership plays a vital role on employee engagement and the establishment of diversity and inclusion practices and policies, since leaders engage in the daily challenge of ensuring everything runs smoothly for the organisation and the employees. Clearly, leaders have the power to motivate and engage employees by using their relationships with employees and their power to inspire followers. Furthermore, the process must be worthwhile for both sides since the employees

need the organisations to perform and develop themselves and the organisation needs the employees to succeed.

Both organisations come from different fields and differ in their organisational culture, however, this chapter proved that organisations do not necessarily need to be in the same stage of business or in the same field to share the same needs. If an organisation wants to expand their business, they need to have leaders' support and manage diversity in order to promote competitive advantage. As previously mentioned, diversity helps the organisation to widen the range of talent, inclusion helps the workforce feel valued and accepted and, EE reflects on the improvement of the business performance through employee satisfaction and the employees willingness to perform to best of their abilities

Moving forward on this research, in the next section the author will draw the final conclusion and recommendations based on the analysis, highlights and questioning that were discussed in the former chapters, with the objective of giving to the reader the answers of the research objectives and the research questions.

## **CHAPTER SIX – Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **6.1. Introduction**

This chapter aims to highlight the findings of this research and the key points regarding how leaders can impact diversity and inclusion in organisations to promote employee engagement, it will also review these in terms of the research objectives and why those findings are relevant and provide recommendations for future research and the implication of those recommendations in the current framework. This dissertation was written with the purpose of examining how organisations can use diversity and leadership to increase engagement in order to promote competitive advantage for businesses.

### **6.2. Conclusion**

This research discussed the need for organisations to adapt in order to align with modern society and workforces, specifically from an Irish perspective, as the Irish labour market has faced several changes with the increase of women and the entrance of immigrants into the workforce (Russel et al, 2009; McGinnity et al, 2018). Additionally, multiple global companies have set up operations centres in Ireland in recent years (Beard, 2018). In order to keep the market evolving and engage the workforce, the organisations need to guarantee the establishment of practices that support current and future employees, and the organisations interests. The researcher believes that leaders have an important role in this process.

Leaders are capable of motivating, encouraging and inspiring others, they must have a strategic approach and a desire to enforce practices and policies, setting directions and mobilising teams (Hayes et al., 2020; Richardson, 2015). Consequently, these leaders must embrace the organisation's objectives to empower their workforces and encourage them to commit to the business' ideas for D&I, to achieve increased EE and performance. Both IC and MNC have leaders committed to D&I, however, both organisations must encourage their few leaders

that are not totally engaged with the D&I practices and policies by showing these leaders the benefits of such practices.

Employee engagement is directly related with commitment, support, dedication, and physical, cognitive and emotional behaviour that an employee displays towards the organisation (Nagar and Srivastava, 2020; Kahn, 1990). According to Bakker et al. (2014) when employees are engaged, they tend to have a positive behaviour towards the organisation, and a higher performance & levels of creativity, this can also result in an increase in client satisfaction and loyalty. Thus, EE is a vital tool as a competitive advantage for the business.

Therefore, leadership is an organisational asset that can support the organisation in D&I, and EE. HRM plays a role in this process by coaching and preparing leaders to explore this theme by providing them with substantial support in training, learning and development programmes and human capital (Torrington et al., 2014). As such, with the backing of leaders, the organisation will improve its performance by creating a diversity friendly environment through D&I practices, as according to Pilbeam and Corbridge (2006) organisations that can maximise diversity with employees' commitment through making them feel respected and valued will consequently display increased levels of retainment and positive behaviour.

Generally speaking, both an organisation with Irish roots, and a multinational organisation must welcome diversity into their workforces if they aspire to increase their business and remain updated. This must happen as globalisation requires organisations to adapt to fit into the modern business world where businesses are interconnected and accessible globally (Georgiadou et al., 2019). Once an organisation embraces diversity in its workforce, it needs to make it inclusive and fair so as to also have an engaged workforce.

### **6.3. Recommendations**

Based on the findings and the research, the researcher makes the following recommendations that would take 12 months to establish, the cost is low as the

organisations will adapt their existent resources to put the recommendations in place:

1. **Recruitment:** Both organisations need to invest in developing new policies that focus on the recruitment processes in order to attract and hire diverse talent and increase diversity among their workforces. According to the semi-structured interviews, there is a lack of practices that cover the recruitment of people from minority groups.
2. **Leadership:** Both organisations agreed that there are some leaders who are not very supportive of the D&I practices. These leaders require further education to understand the benefits that diverse teams can bring to organisations. This includes 6 months programme with communication, training and job-rotation and HR should coach these leaders.
3. **Employee planning:** The IC has several career planning's in place. However, the MNC has a strong focus on the clients and partners experiences with the organisation, with less regard for their employees on this matter. With the aim of improving EE and relationships, the researcher recommends a 12 months programme which begins using the influence they have from other jurisdictions and applies this to the local jurisdiction.
4. **After Covid-19:** Due to the current climate, both organisations have social events that embrace diversity on standby. However, they can host virtual events and meetings to encourage the employees to interact with each other and enhance a more accessible, diverse, and inclusive environment in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic.

#### **6.4. Future Research**

As the research was undertaken during the Covid-19 pandemic, some future research may differ from the findings presented in this paper, as organisations may have in place practices that at the moment are on hold due the social distancing measures. The author believes that even with the implications experienced due to

the current pandemic, the research was able to present the real picture of the D&I practices and policies in the organisations.

## **Personal Learnings**

When the author decided to pursue a Master's in Human Resources Management, she had no idea how challenging this would be. Firstly, because this course has taken place in the middle of a global pandemic and the challenges were overcome in an isolated environment, where there were no friends, lecturers, or structure available 100% of the time. There were also professional and personal challenges that needed to be navigated together with the master's degree.

Secondly, the lack of experience in HR meant completing the master's degree was not so straight-forward - forcing the researcher to think outside the box; and her desire to submit meaningful work pushed the author to find different solutions and paths to develop this dissertation. The author learned how to ask for help and to trust people when it was needed to provide data and knowledge. This was a great learning experience, since the objective of any project is to compile different ideas and methods to achieve the final result.

With the purpose of finding good resources and cases to study, the author developed a meticulous eye when she was reading hundreds of articles, books, journals, cases and holding the interviews. The research widened the author's views regarding the importance of having good practices and policies in place to encourage employees to perform to their highest level every day. The research also showed the importance of having an engaged team of leaders and HR practitioners aligned with the organisation's objectives and goals. The process of developing this dissertation and finding good solutions for problems sparked a passion for HR in the author and a desire to support organisations to help employees to feel respected, accepted and valued.

The subject of this dissertation has become an area that the author wants to pursue in her career, and she believes that increasing diversity and inclusion practices in organisations is vital for modern society. The author, from now on, wants to educate everyone to understand the vitality of diversity and inclusion themes and believes that every business should invest time and energy in creating or developing diverse and inclusive workspaces.

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## **Appendix A - Interview Questions**

### **Diversity and Inclusion**

1. Do you think the organisation has a strong diverse workforce? How do you see it?
2. Regarding the natural change in Irish society and labour behaviour - which seen an increase over the last few years in the number of immigrants and women entering the workforce. Has the organisation noticed a significant change in the demographics of its workforce or in the labour market?
3. Are there many people from the minority groups occupying senior or leadership roles? How does the organisation support them?
4. Are leaders involved in the diversity and inclusion practices in the organisation? How are these implemented into the everyday job routine?
5. How does the organisation, HR or leaders circulate the practices and policies regarding diversity and inclusion through the workforce?

### **Employee engagement**

6. How does the HR team support leaders in the process of D&I and in their daily basis tasks regarding D&I?
7. How do leaders regularly support and assess employee engagement?
8. What are the strategic characteristics displayed by those in leadership positions that might encourage engagement in their work team?

### **Diversity and inclusion and employee engagement.**

9. What practices and policies does the company have in place regarding D&I that may impact employee engagement?
10. Has the organisation or leaders noticed an increase of employee engagement that can be related to the diversity and inclusion programme? How is it assessed?
11. How can the characteristics displayed by the leaders support them to increase employee engagement and inclusion?