

**A Structured Literature Review on Successful Implementation of Supplier Diversity
Initiatives.**

23028506

A research project submitted to the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy Evidence-Based Management.

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Abstract

Purpose: The aspirations of companies to improve their social sustainability performance through the supply chain have led to a renewed interest in supplier diversity. Notwithstanding this renewed interest, recent studies indicate that companies' implementation of supplier diversity remains inadequate, with only 15% of the Fortune Global Companies having formal diversity programs. This paper aims to critically examine the existing literature on the successful implementation of supplier diversity, to understand the theoretical underpinnings of this phenomenon, and to elucidate opportunities for future research.

Methodology: This paper uses a structured literature review of 61 articles from highly ranked journals from Scopus and Web of Science databases to foster a deeper understanding of supplier diversity. Moreover, the paper adopts an inductive thematic analysis to unearth themes from the literature.

Findings: The review suggests that supplier diversity literature is under-researched within the context of supply chain management. Consequently, buyers often perceive supplier diversity as an onerous obligation that conflicts with supply chain objectives rather than a strategic business imperative. Furthermore, companies are increasingly aware that strong ESG performance can enhance their brand reputation, leading to a growing prioritisation of supplier diversity as a social sustainability dimension.

Limitations: The time constraint may impact the comprehensiveness of the study. There is a risk of excluding some articles from the low-ranked journals because of the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Practical implications: The paper introduces an implementation framework to aid practitioners in successfully implementing supplier diversity.

Originality/value (theory): The paper contributes to the supplier diversity literature by integrating findings from diverse and fragmented studies and facilitating a clearer understanding of the literature. The paper also contributes to theory by critically analysing how different theories relate to each other in explaining supplier diversity in an implementation framework. Additionally, the paper provides an original contribution by providing an analytical framework showing how the theoretical explanations mutually reinforce a suboptimal performance on supplier diversity in a vicious cycle of disempowerment.

Keywords: supplier diversity, diverse supplier, buyer-supplier relationships, sustainable procurement and diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI)

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy [Evidence Based Management] at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

23028506

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background and Research Problem

The reputational risk associated with supply chain violations is driving the intensification of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) as a zeitgeist of modern business practice in the supply chain through supplier diversity (Sordi et al., 2022; Van Wart et al., 2023; Villena, 2019). Using social media's cancel culture, customers hold companies accountable for their supply chain behaviour (Sordi et al., 2022). These social media campaigns often involve public shaming, boycotting, and withdrawing support from individuals or companies due to their perceived socially or morally unacceptable behaviour or conduct (Shalpegin et al., 2023; Sordi et al., 2022). Companies are under increasing pressure to operate ethically and responsibly (Sordi et al., 2022; Van Wart et al., 2023). Consequently, companies proactively attend to social sustainability and embrace diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) principles to mitigate the associated reputational matters (Shalpegin et al., 2023). This positions supplier diversity as an initiative that appeals to organisations seeking to build a positive reputation.

Furthermore, the increasing awareness about the political and social corrosive nature of exclusion and inequality of opportunities leading to class and racial polarisation globally has ironically led to a renewed interest in supplier diversity (Sordi et al., 2022). Despite introducing the supplier diversity concept in the early 1960s, many diverse suppliers globally remain outside the mainstream supply chain (Blount, 2021). Companies have paid leap services to the implementation of supplier diversity programs. The percentage of the number of companies in the Fortune Global 500 companies with concrete supplier diversity programs, as gleaned from their Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) reporting, is 15% (Berenguer et al., 2024).

This trend is evident worldwide and significantly worse in developing countries where it is needed most (Miguel & Tonelli, 2023). The implementation rate in East and Southeast Asia was 11.2% in 2022 (Berenguer et al., 2024). However, the picture is slowly changing, the number of companies mentioning supplier diversity in their ESG reports has increased from 35% in 2020 to 79% in 2022 in North America (Berenguer et al., 2024). Similarly, in Western Europe, the number of companies mentioning supplier diversity has increased from 18% to 28% for the same period (Berenguer et al., 2024).

Supplier diversity has evolved from the United States-centric perspective of the early 1960s (Blount, 2021; Sordi et al., 2022; van Hoek et al., 2023). Initially, the concept of supplier diversity was primarily concerned with giving preference to marginalised ethnic minorities in

the United States and later in the United Kingdom (Berenguer et al., 2024; Blount, 2021; Lashley & Pollock, 2020). Worthington (2009, p.2) defines supplier diversity as "the practice adopted by purchasing organisations of promoting greater diversity in the supply chain by intentionally selling opportunities for traditionally underutilised suppliers like small firms, ethnic minorities, women-owned, and many more." Almost 10 years later, Shelton and Minniti (2018) define supplier diversity as a preferential program to assist entrepreneurs in overcoming the barrier to accessing product markets. Similarly, Sordi et al. (2022) posit that the goal of supplier diversity is to create a supply chain that ensures the integration of diverse suppliers in the procurement strategies of purchasing organisations. All the above latest definitions detract from the narrow focus on race and ethnicity and help broaden the definition to include other categories from disadvantaged communities.

The fundamental definition of supplier diversity has remained the same, but there is a notable change in the scope of the targeted beneficiaries or the dimensions of supplier diversity. Currently, supplier diversity beneficiaries are referred to as diverse suppliers instead of the previously used terms such as "Ethnic Minority Businesses (EMBs)" in the United Kingdom or "Minority-Owned Businesses" in the United States of America (Lee Park et al., 2024; Sordi et al., 2022). For the longest time, race and ethnicity seem to dominate the discourse on supplier diversity, with other categories, particularly war veterans and disability, lagging far behind in the literature (Lee Park et al., 2024). Currently, the definition has adopted a more expansive approach by incorporating enterprises owned by a broader spectrum of marginalised and underutilised groupings, including women, small businesses, the LGBTQ community, military veterans, and people with disability (Berenguer et al., 2024; Cutcher et al., 2020; Sordi et al., 2022).

Diverse supplier is a generic term that refers to entities owned and managed by demographic groups that are socially and economically disadvantaged (Razmdoost & Alinaghian, 2023). Socially disadvantaged groups are those groups or populations that have been marginalised or prejudiced based on their identity as a group (Razmdoost & Alinaghian, 2023). Similarly, economic disadvantage relates to limitations faced by these groups in accessing resources, which are often constrained by the consequence of their group identity (Blount & Li, 2021; Razmdoost & Alinaghian, 2023).

This characterisation of supplier diversity beneficiaries as diverse suppliers helps to expand the dimensions of supplier diversity, thus making it more inclusive. The restrictive definition inadvertently constrained the scaling and implementation of supplier diversity across various countries with different demographic profiles. In contrast, the broader, multi-dimensional

approach facilitates the expansion of supplier diversity globally. Berenguer et al. (2024) define supplier diversity as an initiative by buying organisations to strengthen their relationships with current suppliers and attract new suppliers owned by disadvantaged groups.

The definition of disadvantaged groups is context-specific, considering that different regions have different demographic profiles and cultural and historical contexts. In the context of this research, supplier diversity is construed as a proactive preferential system initiated by buying organisations to broaden supply chain opportunities to all underrepresented groups based on race, gender, enterprise size, sexual preference, military veterans, and disability to achieve fairness and inclusion.

This structured literature review aims to synthesise existing literature to determine what is known and unknown about the successful implementation of supplier diversity initiatives and coherently outline the disparate theory and literature systematically and logically, allowing for future research.

1.2 Study Rationale

A well-executed structured literature review establishes a solid base for theory building, deepens understanding of the construct, and identifies areas where future research is necessary (Bandara et al., 2015). The adoption and implementation of supplier diversity by large organisations have been inadequate, particularly in light of its significance for redress and creating equal opportunities for marginalised communities (Berenguer et al., 2024; Gligor, 2020; Scur et al., 2022). There is a global increase in social unrest and racial polarisation resulting from social and economic exclusion (Sordi et al., 2022) based on race, gender, and class, and has harmful consequences on democracy and pluralism (Lashley & Pollock, 2020; Van Wart et al., 2023). On the other hand, the surfacing of global ethical consumerism, as led by the young generation of consumers who believe in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), propels the resurgence of supplier diversity (Sordi et al., 2022). These consumers do not hesitate to hold companies accountable for their supply chain practices, so supplier diversity has re-emerged in business practices (Sordi et al., 2022).

Furthermore, supplier diversity initiatives respond to a longstanding global problem of socioeconomic exclusion, inequality of opportunity, and discrimination. Social and economic exclusion fuel radicalisation and are the antecedents of societal collapse (Van Wart et al., 2023). Consequently, socioeconomic exclusion and inequality are recognised as the 21st-century grand challenges, and scholars are encouraged to engage in meaningful discourse to

help develop theoretical insights on resolving these challenges (Kistruck & Slade Shantz, 2022; Roulet & Bothello, 2022).

Equally, supplier diversity interventions are crucial in supporting the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), precisely SDG Goal 10, which is about reducing inequalities. By promoting access to mainstream market opportunities for diverse suppliers from marginalised and underrepresented communities, companies contribute to economic inclusion and diversity. Scholars are encouraged to consider the broader implications of their research work on achieving the SDG goals, hence, supplier diversity was considered the main subject of the study (Mende et al., 2024).

Lastly, in most organisations, top management views supplier diversity as a moral obligation to address historical injustices and socioeconomic disparities (Sordi et al., 2022) and as a business strategy and source of competitive advantage (Jääskeläinen et al., 2020). Considering top management's favourable perspective on supplier diversity and its potential contribution to social cohesion, it is puzzling that adopting and implementing supplier diversity remains inadequate, particularly in developing economies. This discrepancy necessitated this scholarly investigation.

1.3 Theoretical and Practice Contribution

The literature on supplier diversity is sparse and fragmented, often weighted toward the experiences of buyers and buying organisations and less about the experiences of diverse suppliers (Blount & Li, 2021). This fragmentation presents an opportunity to contribute to scholarly research. The main aim of this study is to synthesise the existing knowledge on supplier diversity and identify themes and research gaps. The study also addressed some ambiguities and inconsistencies in defining supplier diversity.

In this structured literature review, the study aims to integrate findings from various studies to facilitate the refinement and further development of theories. The researcher will develop and present a conceptual framework for successfully implementing supplier diversity, representing various studies' different perspectives and findings. The proposed framework not only serves to extend the literature by reconciling multiple theories on the successful implementation of supplier diversity but also serves as a guide in practice for effective implementation.

1.4 Review Objectives and Questions

The research question for this study is as follows: What insights does the extant literature provide regarding the successful implementation of supplier diversity? The subsequent review questions are to:

- How has supplier diversity evolved, and what constitutes successful implementation?
- What are the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of successful supplier diversity implementation?
- What are the antecedents of successful supplier diversity implementation?

In this section, the researcher started with the introduction, defined the construct and discussed the rationale for the study. The researcher further discussed the contribution of the study. The following section will delve deep into the research methodology used.

2. Research Strategy

2.1 Research Methodology

The researcher adopted a structured literature review (SLR) to establish what the literature says about the successful implementation of supplier diversity. A structured literature review allows for rigorous and replicable selection, review, and synthesis of existing literature (Snyder, 2019). Furthermore, it enhances transparency by creating an audit trail that outlines the researcher's decisions and steps taken throughout the review process (Tranfield et al., 2003). By integrating and synthesising conclusions and findings from various studies, SLR will map out relevant literature on the construct and help practitioners make sense of the masses of data (Tranfield et al., 2003). It also helps to identify gaps in the literature for future study.

This section will transparently outline the methods used to review the literature on implementing supplier diversity. I will discuss the existing literature's inclusion and exclusion criteria, describe the search strategy utilised, and explain how the sample was determined. Subsequently, I will offer a detailed description of the analysis procedure that facilitated the identification of the emerging themes.

2.2 Methods Framework

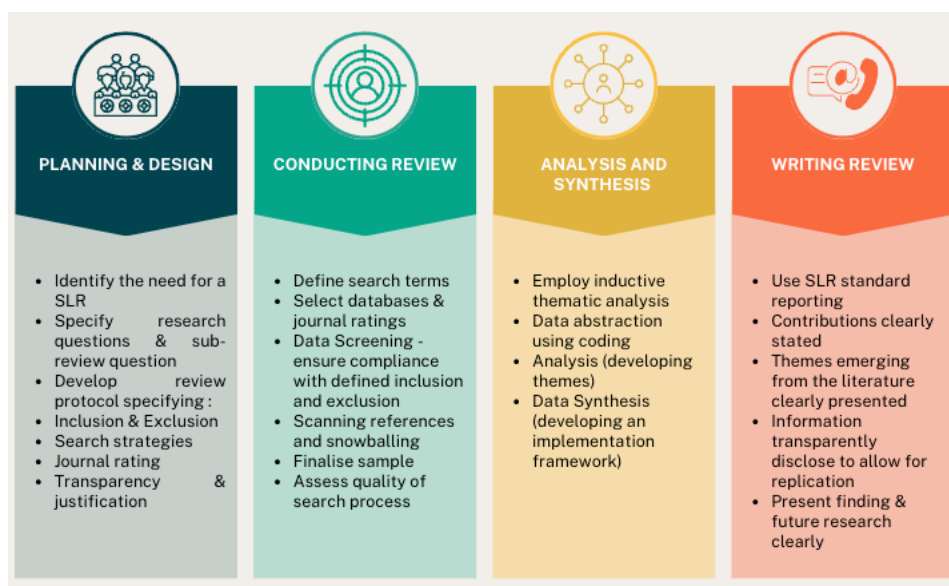
A structured literature review involves several stages to ensure successful completion, as shown in Fig. 1 below. The first stage is planning the review. This stage is concerned with determining the need for the review, defining research questions, and outlining the procedures to guide the structured literature review through a research review protocol (Tranfield et al., 2003). The literature on supplier diversity is sparse and fragmented, and to the best of my knowledge, there is no prior structured literature review on the implementation of supplier diversity. A paper by Sordi et al. (2022) only consolidated the current discussions and debates surrounding supplier diversity. This work represents the closest to a structured literature review on supplier diversity, but it can't be classified as an SLR as it does not follow the SLR protocols. Even the authors refer to it as "notes" and "debates", not SLR. The fact that no properly structured literature review has been conducted on supplier diversity justifies this study. I have also articulated the research question and completed a research protocol. The researcher has completed this stage.

The second stage is about conducting the review; this stage includes defining the search terms, selecting the appropriate database and determining journal ratings, literature screening

and selection using the defined inclusion and exclusion criteria, scanning references and snowballing, finalising the sample, and assessing the quality of the search process.

The third stage is the analysis and synthesis; this stage includes data abstraction using inductive reasoning, thematic analysis, and synthesis of the results (Tranfield et al., 2003). The analysis procedures and synthesis will be outlined in detail in the following sections. The last stage in the methods framework is the reporting of the review (Tranfield et al., 2003). This stage ensures the paper follows the SLR standard reporting protocols regarding transparency, format, and presentation.

Figure 1: Methods Framework



Source: Author (Tranfield et al., 2003)

2.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

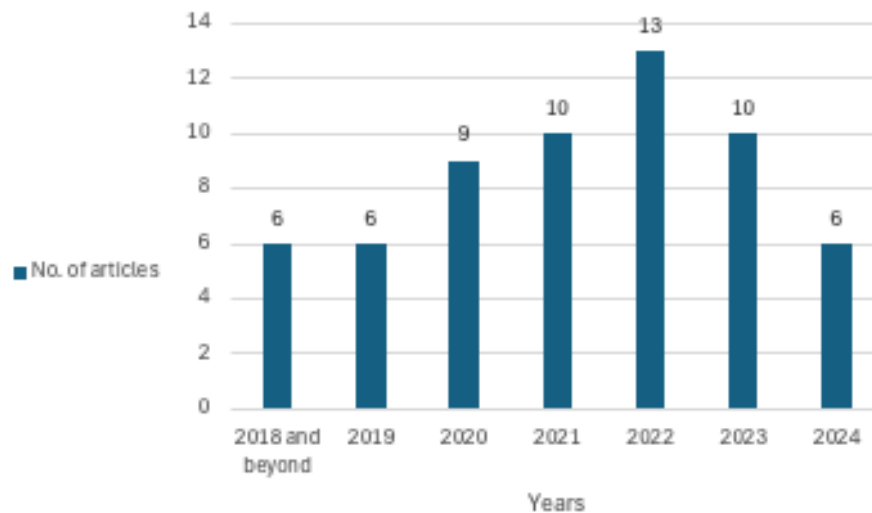
To minimise researcher bias and demonstrate that the review does not represent a singular perspective while ensuring that every best journal article had an opportunity to be selected, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria are presented below (Tranfield et al., 2003).

- Inclusion criteria

The researcher searched the literature on supplier diversity using articles indexed on the Web of Science and Scopus, both credible databases of peer-reviewed and highly ranked journal articles. When conducting a structured literature review, the timeliness of literature is critical to observing current discussions about the construct and assessing its future direction. Consequently, I chose articles published in the last six years, from 2019 to 2024, as shown in Fig.2. However, there are few papers outside this period because supplier diversity is an old

concept. Hence, it was equally important to draw on the seminal articles and foundational papers that continue to be referenced today. These articles represent 9,8% of all the articles selected and hold no sway on the timeliness of the discourse. These articles include the four most influential papers on supplier diversity as confirmed by other scholars (Blount, 2021; Sordi et al., 2022), which are Ram & Smallbone (2003), Shah & Ram (2006), Worthington (2009 as well as Worthington & Shah (2008)

Figure 2: Journal Article breakdown



Source: Author

Another essential inclusion criterion used was the relevance of the article. All articles selected had to be relevant to the literature about the successful implementation of supplier diversity and the research question. The relevance criteria were achieved in two stages; the first stage was to qualify articles using the selected articles' topics and abstracts. The next stage was full-text screening, in which the whole article was read to determine if it contributed to the research topic.

The following criterion is the authority of the article, and this is derived from the journal in which the article was published. The researcher selected articles from journals ranked 3/4/4* on the Academic Journal Guide (AJG) and grading A on the Australian Business Deans Council (ABCD). Table 1 below shows the number of articles per journal ranking using ranking.

Table 1: Number of articles per journal ranking

AJG and ABCD Journal Ranking			
AJG Ranking	No of articles	ABCD Ranking	No of articles
4*	8	A*	43
4	18	A	10
3	32	B	5
2	1	C	1

Source: Author

- Exclusion criteria

I excluded articles not related to the research question, books, book reviews, and all grey literature except one publication by an institution that is actively involved in the promotion and advocacy for supplier diversity and that is (Billion Dollar Roundtable, 2023). Xiao & Watson (2019) contend that grey literature, including reports, should be considered as excluding them could lead to publication bias.

2.4 Search Strategy

The search strategy for literature on supplier diversity consisted of three phases. The first phase mainly focused on reading old articles on supplier diversity and using those articles to generate keywords. That exercise led to the following keywords: supplier diversity, diverse suppliers, buyer-supplier relationships, and sustainable procurement. These keywords returned only 45 articles sourced from articles indexed on the Web of Science and Scopus. Then, snowballing generated an additional 48 articles after eliminating duplications using the parameters indicated in 2.2. This extra 48 articles led to a total of 93 articles.

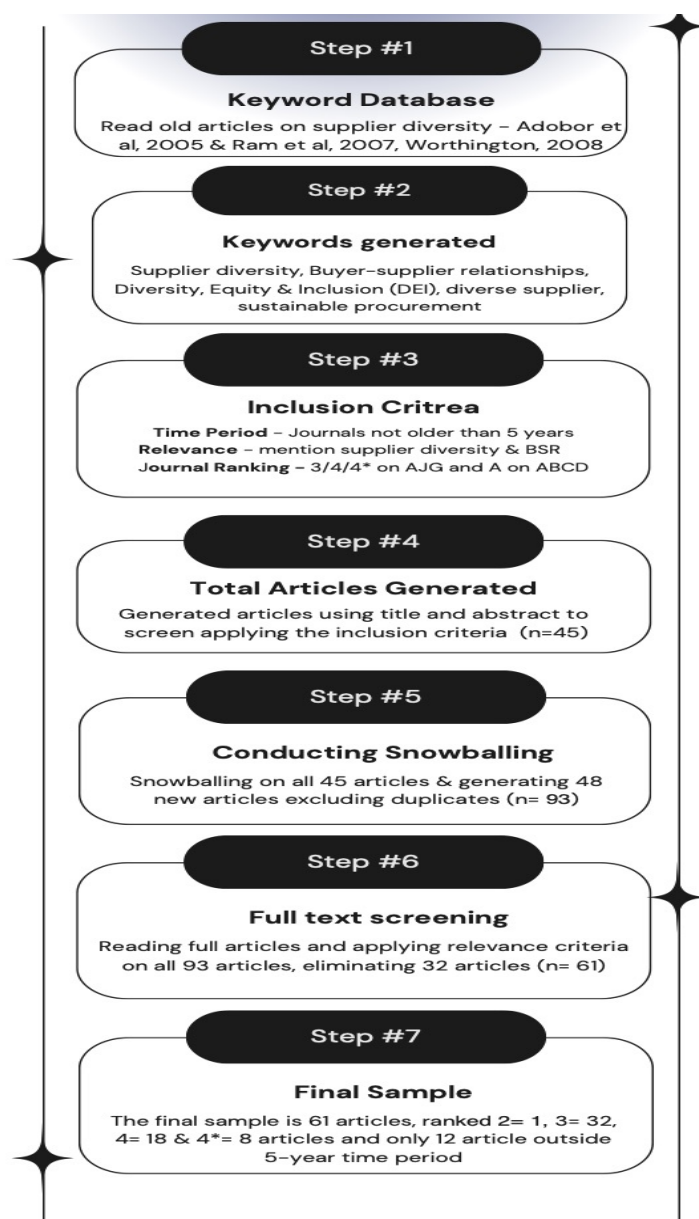
The second phase was full-text screening, where I checked whether the article contributed to the research topic. This exercise resulted in the elimination of 32 articles. This phase yielded a total of 61 articles.

2.5 Final Sample

The selection of samples in a structured literature review is essential for establishing the methodological rigour and trustworthiness of the study. According to Hiebl (2023), the procedures undertaken in the sampling process must be explicitly explained. Furthermore, the sample must be sufficiently comprehensive to address the research question while adhering to the inclusion and exclusion criteria (Xiao & Watson, 2019). I am happy with the final sample

as it meets this guidance. It comprises 61 qualifying journal articles, which is comprehensive enough for this research. All these articles were published in journals ranked 3/4/4* on AJG and A/A* on ABCD. Only one article ranked two on AJG, but it was accepted since it is ranked A on ABCD. More importantly, this article by Miguel & Tonelli (2023) is one of the few articles that researched supplier diversity in an emerging market setting, Brazil. I needed that perspective to balance the often-singular developed context. Furthermore, six articles were not ranked A on the ABCD ranking but were selected because they were ranked three on AJG. Fig. 3 below shows the process undertaken to reach the sample.

Figure 3: Literature search and screening



Source: Author

2.6 Data Abstraction and Analysis

The researcher employed an inductive thematic analysis approach to abstract and analyse data from the literature on the successful implementation of supplier diversity. Because thematic analysis provides a systematic and logical way of abstracting and analysing large amounts of data from various sources, this leads to detailed descriptions and theoretical insights (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Additionally, thematic analysis is favoured in examining qualitative data due to its ability to facilitate identifying recurring and significant themes, thereby uncovering patterns within the collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Palmatier et al., 2018). Moreover, I chose inductive reasoning since SLR is about unearthing and mapping scholarly conversations about the construct rather than imposing preconceived ideas.

The researcher reviewed all the articles and used inductive thematic analysis to extract critical data, categorise and cluster similar concepts, and develop themes from the literature on the successful implementation of supplier diversity. I scrutinise the literature to maintain methodological coherence by tracking the qualifying words and phrases derived from the research question, research objectives, and theoretical framework (Bono & McNamara, 2011). The focus of the research question and objectives pertains to the successful implementation of supplier diversity, necessitating vigilance for any discourse in the literature on this subject matter.

I utilised the commonly used reflexive six-step process for thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These six reflective steps require the researcher to be acquainted with the data, create initial codes, identify themes, evaluate those themes, define and label them, and generate the report Braun & Clarke (2006). This six-step process is discussed below in detail.

2.6.1 Familiarisation with data

The first and critical step in inductive thematic analysis is data immersion through reading and re-reading the entire sample of articles (Chenail, 2012). Furthermore, a synthesis matrix was applied to synthesise and summarise initial impressions of the meaningful units of analysis in the scholarly conversations (Creswell et al., 2007). The objective is to interpret the data, comprehend different patterns and concepts, and jot down early impressions about themes and relationships emerging from the literature concerning the successful implementation of supplier diversity (Bandara et al., 2015).

2.6.2 Generating Initial Codes

The researcher inductively abstracted data using a synthesis matrix in an Excel format. The matrix had a publication date, theory, methodology used, findings, and many other fields, but the far-right column had a study summary. This process included reading the articles and selecting specific text passages relevant to the research topic, reflecting on the highlighted sentences, and coding them. Then, these codes were clustered into categories, and each category was clearly defined to ensure consistent application throughout all the articles, but more importantly, to ensure alignment with the research topic and review questions.

The next step involved refining the list of categories to eliminate redundancies and overlaps and redefining and contemplating the intricate meanings of these categories. Through an iterative approach, adjustments, removal, and reformulation of the definition of these categories were done as more articles were reviewed. To check the reliability of this exercise, the researcher went through a sample of clean versions of the same articles and performed the same routine (Fan et al., 2022). Then, I compared the outcome of the new coding with the previous coding, and where there were discrepancies, the categories were adjusted and updated (Elliott, 2018). To ensure the golden thread, these categories/codes should reflect the data emerging from the literature, address the research question, review questions, and meet the research objectives.

2.6.3 Searching for Themes

Following the data abstraction stage, the researcher grouped the categories into higher-level abstract categories or concepts. Subsequently, through an iterative approach, the concepts were clustered into themes and sub-themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell et al., 2007). A theme is a recurring pattern highlighting something significant regarding the data, research question, and objectives (Creswell et al., 2007). This stage brought us closer to answering the research question.

2.6.4 Reviewing and Developing Themes

At this stage, the themes identified above were reviewed by gathering relevant data for each theme to draw meaning from that data (Bandara et al., 2015). Where appropriate, themes that did not make sense, were not sufficiently supported by the data, or were overlapped were

modified and removed. The next step was to establish whether the themes worked for the entire sample of articles to ensure they were coherent, distinct, and made sense.

2.6.5 Defining and Naming Themes

This is the last stage of theme development. This stage was concerned with capturing the core essence of each theme, establishing whether there were sub-themes, and how they related to the central theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I then described each theme thoroughly, including the relationship between themes.

2.7 Measures to Ensure Review Quality

In ensuring the rigour and trustworthiness of the study, the researcher, throughout the structured literature review, utilised the four qualitative research quality indicators to ensure that the research outcomes achieve a high-quality standard (Johnson et al., 2020). These indicators are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Fan et al., 2022; Johnson et al., 2020).

Regarding the study's credibility, the researcher provided sufficient details to demonstrate that the research outcome is based on the literature reviewed. This was achieved by accurately referencing articles read and demonstrating through generating themes and superordinate themes from the literature.

In ensuring the dependability criteria, the researcher described in detail all the research processes and procedures, including the search strategy, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and sufficiently explained the analysis method to ensure that the research can be replicated (Fan et al., 2022; Johnson et al., 2020). The third quality indicator is transferability, which was accomplished by providing enough information, such as methods used, sample size, data abstraction, analysis methods, and the development of themes, among others, to allow the readers to determine whether the results apply to other contexts (Fan et al., 2022; Johnson et al., 2020). Lastly, the confirmability criteria are achieved by demonstrating to the reader that the findings are based on the reflective information gathered from the literature, not informed by subjective interpretations or biases of the research researcher. Contextual information was drawn from the literature for every finding.

2.8 Limitations

The major limitation of studying is the time constraint. A structured literature review requires time to abstract and analyse data; this exercise was performed under pressure due to time constraints. While every activity that needed to be completed in the research process was completed, more time was necessary to enhance the research's comprehensiveness and expressiveness (Fan et al., 2022).

There is always a risk that the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria may lead to other articles being overlooked, particularly the requirements for high-quality journals and currency, which may impact the study's thoroughness (Fan et al., 2022). The specialist journal in diversity titled "Equality, Diversity and Inclusion" has a lower rating, so some of the journal articles had to be excluded.

This section dealt with the research methodology in sufficient detail. I discussed the search strategy, data abstraction and analysis, quality measures, and research limitations. I will now turn to the analysis section.

3. Research Analysis

In the research analysis section, the critical insights from the extant literature will be covered, including the evolution of supplier diversity, revisiting its definition, examining the measures of successful supplier diversity, and engaging the different theoretical frameworks used in the research on supplier diversity. Lastly, the emerging themes from the thematic analysis on supplier diversity implementation will also be discussed.

3.1 Evolution of Supplier Diversity

The evolution of supplier diversity mirrors societal values, ideologies, economic interests, and corporate practices. Below, the five critical phases in the evolution of supplier diversity are outlined, and these stages are not fixed in specific periods as they often overlap. The first phase of supplier diversity is characterised as the initiation phase. Supplier diversity was initiated by the publication of the 1969 Executive Order by President Richard Nixon, the American President responding to the public outcry about the continued marginalisation and discrimination of minorities, particularly Black Americans (Lashley & Pollock, 2020; Pan et al., 2022). This order required government agencies and first-tier government suppliers to contract with minority-owned enterprises and report results against pre-established goals and targets (Lashley & Pollock, 2020; Pan et al., 2022). There were subsequent legislations to reinforce the implementation of supplier diversity.

In the United Kingdom (UK), this was stimulated by the publication of the Race Relations Act, first legislated in 1965 and later amended in 1976, establishing the Commission for Racial Equity (CRE). Even though the legislation was wide-ranging, it gave momentum to supplier diversity initiatives in the UK, and the focus was on promoting business opportunities for Ethnic Minority Businesses (EMBs) (Cutcher et al., 2020)

In Malaysia, the constitution provided anti-discrimination provisions and a preference for original Malays, called the Bumiputera, meaning sons of the soil (Cutcher et al., 2020). In this program, the Malaysian Bumiputera companies received a price preference of 2.5-10% in government contracts (Cutcher et al., 2020). Many other countries were to follow suit with Canada publishing set-asides and sub-contracting requirements for Aboriginal-owned firms, and the Australians implemented Australia's Indigenous Opportunities Program (AIOP) (Cutcher et al., 2020). Later, South Africa followed with Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment, where companies earn points in a Black Economic Empowerment (BEE)

scorecard for procuring goods/services from Black-owned and Black women-owned firms (Cutcher et al., 2020). This phase was about legislation and compliance.

The emergence of institutional intermediaries marked the second phase of supplier diversity. There are various reasons why the business performance of diverse suppliers is lagging that of non-diverse suppliers, and chief among them is the lack of access to mainstream markets despite the supplier diversity initiatives (Blount & Li, 2021; Pan et al., 2022; Selviaridis & Spring, 2022). This is because diverse suppliers have no access to large buying firms, and this is discussed in detail in the following sections. Consequently, supplier diversity intermediaries emerge, and their primary role is to connect diverse suppliers with mainstream buyers and provide training and technical support to ensure that the diverse suppliers are market-ready (Pan et al., 2022).

This emergence of intermediaries was precipitated by the National Minority Supplier Diversity Council (NMSDC), established in the U.S. in 1972 but has since developed chapters in other parts of the world (Lee Park et al., 2024). The South African chapter is called the South African Supplier Diversity Council (SASDC). These intermediaries have succeeded in advancing supplier diversity through advocacy and lobbying, developing and certifying diverse suppliers, and hosting networking events where diverse suppliers and buyers socialise (Cutcher et al., 2020; Lee Park et al., 2024).

The third phase is characterised by shifting corporate perceptions. This stage contradicts the first phase, driven by malicious compliance, where companies merely comply with existing laws. This phase was characterised by companies proactively embracing supplier diversity. After the four influential articles authored by Ram & Smallbone (2003), Shah & Ram (2006), Worthington (2009) and Worthington & Shah (2008), where they made an economic case for supplier diversity and strongly argued that supplier diversity does not only address social issues but economic issues (Sordi et al., 2022). The attitude toward supplier diversity suddenly changed, and supplier diversity was seen as a business imperative, and many organisations started incorporating supplier diversity into organisational strategies (Scur et al., 2022). Some located it under the supply chain and some as a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program, broadening their sourcing criteria to include sustainability (van Hoek et al., 2023).

The fourth phase is characterised by supplier diversity growth and expansion. In literature and practice, supplier diversity has been dominated by race and ethnicity due to the persistent prevalence of race and ethnic bias (Lee Park et al., 2024). However, other markers for marginalisation, such as gender, sexual orientation, disability, military veterans, and small

businesses, are persistently disadvantaged socially and economically. Additionally, variations in demographics in different countries result in equally varied dynamics of diverse groups. In other countries, they may not have minority issues but may have a severe gender imbalance.

Therefore, supplier diversity should be fit for each specific context. All this necessitated the broadening of the scope of supplier diversity. This era also witnessed the introduction of Tier 2 suppliers, where corporations insist on their Tier 1 suppliers to procure from diverse suppliers. These initiatives led to the growth of different dimensions of diverse suppliers and the growth of the relevance of supplier diversity.

The globalisation of supplier diversity was also observed, the National Minority Supplier Diversity Council (NMSDC) started to have chapters worldwide, necessitated by mainly American multinationals who wanted to meet their supplier diversity targets worldwide (Blount, 2021; Lashley & Pollock, 2020). The uptake is still low, for example, in the Fortune Global 500 companies, East and Southeast Asia has the largest firm representation with 214 companies, yet only 14 companies have supplier diversity programs (Berenguer et al., 2024). However, with the emergence of mandatory Environmental Social and Governance (ESG) disclosures, it is anticipated that there will be further growth (Silva et al., 2024).

The fifth and final phase is fundamentally driven by the imperatives related to corporate reputation. The advent of ethical consumerism, where consumers hold companies accountable for their supply chain practices, necessitates that companies exercise caution regarding their environmental impact and their contribution towards diversity and inclusion (Blount & Li, 2021; Tate et al., 2022). Equally, the increasing prominence of ESG reporting, within which supplier diversity is increasingly recognised as the social sustainability dimension, has created an impetus for the adoption and implementation of diversity initiatives broadly (van Hoek et al., 2023). Interestingly, supply chain violations can equally attract sanctions from government agencies; the United States is a leading player in discharging sanctions at 40% of sanctions issued, followed by the European Union at 15% (Shalpegin et al., 2023).

3.2 Measures of Successful Supplier Diversity

Traditionally, the efficacy of supplier diversity is measured using quantitative data, such as the number of diverse suppliers engaged, the percentage spent with diverse suppliers, and the number of buying organisations adopting supplier diversity (Blount, 2021; Cutcher et al., 2020; Silva et al., 2024). The criticism of using only quantitative measures is that it drives wrong behaviour where the focus tends to be on ticking boxes, for instance, achieving some number

of diverse suppliers or rand value spent on supplier diversity programs necessary to secure a procurement contract (Blount, 2021; Lee Park et al., 2024; Silva et al., 2024).

This narrow approach is often at the expense of sustainable integration of diverse suppliers into the value chains and the realisation of supplier diversity's desirable long-term socio-economic impact (Blount, 2021; Lee Park et al., 2024; Ma et al., 2021). Qualitative factors like supplier development and growth, innovation, community impact, and broader economic benefits are essential in measuring successful supplier diversity implementation (Lee Park et al., 2024; Silva et al., 2024). Organisations must adopt a holistic approach to measuring supplier diversity by looking at the input data and assessing the strategic outcomes.

The Billion Dollar Roundtable (BDR), an entity that recognises and celebrates buying firms that spend more than \$1 billion on supplier diversity initiatives in a year, commissioned the Consulting and Business Development Centre (CBDC) at the University of Washington's Foster School of Business to conduct an economic impact assessment of the 39 member companies (Billion Dollar Roundtable, 2023). The study found that the spending of \$122,7 billion towards supplier diversity leads to the sustenance of 1,76 million jobs, generates \$93 billion in wages, creates \$171 billion in diverse business profits and taxes, and contributes an estimated \$320,5 billion in economic impact, boost economic activity where diverse suppliers are located (Billion Dollar Roundtable, 2023).

As admirable as these statistics are, the biggest reward for successfully implementing supplier diversity from a societal perspective is achieving social cohesion and sustainable political and economic stability, resulting from including the marginalised in mainstream economic activity.

From the perspective of the buying firms, successful diversity programs must contribute to the broader organisational goal and enhance business performance (Scur et al., 2022). Furthermore, it must lead to buying firms achieving better competitive advantage through product development insights from diverse suppliers and the ability of diverse suppliers to offer minimum order quantities cost-effectively (Sordi et al., 2022). The increased security of supply results from having more than one supplier and ultimately increased reputation as a good corporate citizen (Blount & Li, 2021).

However, there are diverse views in the literature between the primary mandate of the buyers, which is to deliver to the internal customer the right quality product at the lowest possible cost, versus the broader objectives of supplier diversity, which is about equity and inclusiveness (Blount & Li, 2021; Scur et al., 2022). Price competitiveness is a critical business strategy

designed to attract customers and grow the business through increased sales volumes (Scur et al., 2022). This price competitiveness is achieved through various strategic interventions such as economies of scale, lower production costs, and technological innovation. These efficiencies have to be achieved through the supply chain.

Conversely, diverse suppliers who have been discriminated against and underutilised may lack the capacity to produce at scale at the lowest price and may not possess the advanced technological capabilities often available to traditional suppliers (Meqdadi et al., 2020; Scur et al., 2022). This contradiction often mitigates against the implementation of supplier diversity. However, not every diverse supplier is underdeveloped. The traditional purchasing strategic priorities, which are price, quality, innovation, and delivery, are still relevant, but they need to be balanced against sustainability procurement objectives (Alcalde & Dahm, 2024; Blount & Li, 2021; Ellram & Tate, 2021; Scur et al., 2022). This requires a strategic shift from profit maximisation as the sole motive of business to a triple-bottom-line business performance motive (Sordi et al., 2022). Many companies have adopted this approach and are reporting it in their ESG reports (Berenguer et al., 2024). On the other hand, diverse suppliers can serve as a catalyst for innovation and novel ideas because of their specialised nature combined with the entrepreneurial acumen of the owner-manager and agile decision-making capabilities (Selviaridis & Spring, 2022). These capabilities enable diverse suppliers to navigate the rapid technological changes better and quickly identify opportunities for innovation (Selviaridis & Spring, 2022), Particularly because new product development requires supplier integration to achieve access to their technology, facilitate knowledge transfer, reduce development time, and lower development cost (Potter & Paulraj, 2020).

Successful implementation of supplier diversity from the perspective of suppliers means more business opportunities, repeat business, and active participation in the mainstream economy (Sordi et al., 2022). Furthermore, the reputation of supplying large buying firms opens more opportunities for diverse suppliers, leading to more business growth opportunities (Blount & Li, 2021). Due to the secured market, diverse suppliers can invest in developing new product offerings and divesting from easily substitutable products (Lashley & Pollock, 2020).

3.3 Thematic mapping of supplier diversity literature

For the purpose of this study, a thematic analysis was conducted to gain insights into the existing knowledge and gaps regarding supplier diversity literature. As an outcome of an iterative coding process, categorisation of codes, and development of sub-themes, nine major

themes have emerged. Below, themes will be defined and discussed in detail as they emerge from the literature.

3.3.1 Supplier diversity and regulatory compliance

Supplier diversity was introduced by promulgating many legislations in different jurisdictions where companies that wanted to bid for government contracts had to comply (van Hoek et al., 2023). While this led to broader adoption and implementation of supplier diversity by many companies, it was not wholeheartedly integrated into the business operations (Sordi et al., 2022; van Hoek et al., 2023). This era was characterised by malicious compliance, where large buying organisations engaged in supplier diversity to tick the compliance box rather than meaningfully impact inequality and exclusion (Huang et al., 2024; Sordi et al., 2022).

Supplier diversity has been more successful in the U.S. than in any other jurisdiction, and the literature is silent about the cause and antecedents of such success (Berenguer et al., 2024). There may be many reasons why supplier diversity has been more successful in the U.S. than in many other regions, but there is no escaping the fact that legislative support has played a critical role. The legislation provided clarity and guidelines for implementing supplier diversity, making it easier for companies to adopt (Cutcher et al., 2020). More importantly, this legislative support was accompanied by direct incentives in the form of government contracts to encourage participation. Governments worldwide are the biggest buyers of goods and services in their jurisdictions and may use their purchasing power to achieve many socio-economic development objectives (Harland et al., 2019).

3.3.2 Supplier diversity as a Corporate Social Responsibility program

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) refers to initiatives companies undertake to promote the public good by going beyond the organisation's interest (Schneider, 2020). The stakeholder theory, which proposed that the interests of all stakeholders must be considered in decision-making, gave impetus to CSR programs (Lee Park et al., 2024). Consequently, CSR has emerged as a prevalent business practice aimed at enhancing corporate reputation in the eyes of consumers. Therefore, supplier diversity initiatives align naturally with the CSR objective as it is viewed as a socially responsible form of behaviour expected of large buying organisations that value diversity and inclusion (Blount, 2021).

CSR has successfully driven the adoption and implementation of supplier diversity, which is presumed to improve corporate brand and reputation (Blount, 2021). More importantly, it was

easier for companies to add supplier diversity to existing CSR programs (Razmdoost & Alinaghian, 2023). However, in many instances, it has been about rhetoric rather than concrete, measurable supplier diversity programs designed to grow and create developmental opportunities for diverse suppliers (Blount & Li, 2021). This is consistent with the research conducted by Berenguer et al. (2024), stating that 348 companies in the Fortune Global 500 mention supplier diversity in their CSR reports, but only 178 have supplier diversity programs.

There are diverse views in the literature regarding the location of supplier diversity, with one school of thought maintaining that supplier diversity is a supply chain issue and should be located in the supply chain and be part of the procurement strategy of the firm (Scur et al., 2022). These authors argue that implementing supplier diversity as a CSR program impacts the development of supplier diversity literature in the supply chain and affects the integration of supplier diversity with procurement imperatives (Huang et al., 2024; Scur et al., 2022).

However, there is another perspective that since supplier diversity has achieved so much as a CSR program, there is no need to change it, but rather, firms must move away from the reactive tick-box CSR exercise to strategic CSR (Berenguer et al., 2024; Miguel & Tonelli, 2023; Sordi et al., 2022). Schneider (2020) contends that no amount of interference with CSR will help as it is an incorrect microeconomic instrument to address structural macroeconomic problems. Consequently, CSR will fail to address the issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion that are an outcome of capitalism (Schneider, 2020).

3.3.3 Supplier diversity as a business imperative

Sordi et al. (2022) reported that integrating diverse suppliers in a value chain is a valuable resource that can lead to competitive advantage. Some scholars have written about positive spinoffs in implementing supplier diversity, including enhancing organisational performance and strengthening corporate reputation (Huang et al., 2024; Sordi et al., 2022; Worthington, 2009). Supplier diversity enables organisations to achieve their key strategic goals, such as attracting more customers and entering new demographic markets represented by diverse suppliers (Blount & Li, 2021). Furthermore, it enhances supply chain efficiencies, allowing for cost-efficient minimum order quantities and quicker turnaround compared to larger firms (Blount & Li, 2021; Silva et al., 2024). Additionally, the disruptions in the global supply chain resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted the significance of security of supply, achieved through diversity in selecting suppliers for each product (Zhang et al., 2023). This approach not only fosters health competition among suppliers but may also lead to price reduction and thus make the firm price competitive (Silva et al., 2024).

However, supplier diversity may pose challenges in achieving specific strategic business goals, such as price competitiveness (Alcalde & Dahm, 2024; Blount, 2021; Ellram & Tate, 2021; Rashidi et al., 2020). One critical strategic intervention to achieve price competitiveness is to exert pressure on suppliers to reduce costs, considering that procurement constitutes a significant portion of all organisational costs (Carnovale et al., 2019). Moreover, buyers manage these costs through economies of scale, representing valid commercial and economic practices.

These economic imperatives are sometimes in stark contrast with supplier diversity, where diverse suppliers cannot achieve certain economies of scale and, owing to their weak bargaining power, accept unsustainable prices to secure the business (Blount & Li, 2021; Carnovale et al., 2019). Presently, literature on mitigating these adverse outcomes is scarce, mainly because more scholarly attention is given to supplier diversity in the context of corporate social responsibility, not in the supply chain (Huang et al., 2024).

3.3.4 Supplier Diversity and Sustainability Agenda

The three dimensions of the triple bottom line, economic, social, and environmental sustainability, have emerged as primary organisational objectives, surpassing the traditional focus on profit maximisation (Le et al., 2021; Meqdadi et al., 2020). Supply chain management plays a critical role in enhancing the overall sustainability performance of the organisation (Le et al., 2021). Because the supply chain plays a crucial role in helping companies create value and benefit for the communities where they operate (Meqdadi et al., 2020). Consequently, Sustainable Supply Chain Management (SSCM) has seen exponential growth in practice and literature (Berenguer et al., 2024; Meqdadi et al., 2020).

However, the focus has been on two triple bottom-line dimensions, economic and environmental sustainability, and less on the social dimension. During the COVID-19 pandemic, some seismic shifts have occurred, and firms are beginning to report tangible progress on the social sustainability dimension (Silva & Ruel, 2022). A study conducted during the pandemic confirmed a reduction in environmental sustainability investment from 54% to 43%, while social sustainability increased from 67% to 81% (Silva & Ruel, 2022). Silva et al. (2024) contend that DEI is designed to reduce inequality, a key component of social sustainability. This will lead to the massive growth of supplier diversity initiatives, mainly because the definition of supplier diversity includes the broader dimensions of marginalised groups. Likewise, Berenguer et al. (2024) assert that the global implementation of supplier

diversity will mirror the trajectory of other supply chain sustainability initiatives, ultimately inducing a ripple effect that permeates all tiers of the value chain, including lower-tier suppliers.

3.3.5 Supplier Diversity and Internal Workforce Diversity

Berenguer et al. (2024) reported that companies with internal diversity efforts are more likely to implement supplier diversity. This assertion is substantiated by the study conducted on the Fortune 500 global companies, which reveals that 34% of the 379 companies that disclose internal diversity also address supplier diversity in their reports, compared to merely 4% of companies that have supplier diversity programs when they have not reported on internal diversity (Berenguer et al., 2024). Naturally, inclusive leadership that cultivates a culture of fairness and equality of opportunity internally will extend such commitment to supply chain practices.

Moreover, where internal diversity and inclusion initiatives are executed effectively, organisations will likely experience improved workplace relationships and enhanced organisational justice (Hoang et al., 2022; McCrea et al., 2022; Otake-Ebede, 2019). When organisations experience such favourable results from internal diversity and inclusion initiatives, they will be inclined to extend these initiatives to their supply chains. From a diversity perspective, a diverse workforce leads to greater cognitive diversity, enhancing problem identification and problem-solving (Foss et al., 2022; Otake-Ebede, 2019). Therefore, a diverse workforce will likely identify and resolve the challenges of supplier diversity implementation. Furthermore, Gligor (2020) argues that supplier selection is impacted by the race of the buyer and that of the supervisor of the buyer, drawing from the social identity theory. Consequently, a diverse profile of the supply chain workforce will lead to the selection of a diversified supplier base. However, it cannot be conclusively stated that internal diversity leads to changes in the selection patterns of diverse suppliers, and this is an opportunity for further research.

3.3.6 Supplier Diversity and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)

Supplier diversity equity and inclusion (Supplier DEI) is rapidly emerging as a preferred initiative for social sustainability performance indicators (Silva et al., 2024). Global firms, such as Unilever, Microsoft, and General Motors, have made bold public statements about their goals for achieving inclusivity and have integrated the Business for Inclusive Growth Global Initiative (I. Blount & Li, 2021; Silva et al., 2024).

There is a movement to adopt supplier DEI as a novel area of research within the field of social sustainability (Silva et al., 2024). While there is some level of understanding of supplier diversity, we do not know what supplier equity and inclusion are. Equity in the supply chain is about suppliers' respect for human rights, such as the use of child labour, discrimination, sexual harassment, and fair employment practices of suppliers. Inclusion has been used interchangeably with diversity, whereas these terms don't carry the same meaning but are complementary (Silva et al., 2024). Inclusion means diverse suppliers supporting their diverse communities in their business operations (Silva et al., 2024). Sordi et al. (2022) advocate for the discourse beyond supplier diversity to encompass discussions on economic inclusion to address growing global economic inequalities.

Supplier DEI is much more complex and will pose difficulties in implementing and measuring its impact on social sustainability performance. Companies should consider extending their internal DEI efforts to their supply chain, drawing on all the lessons learned in implementing supplier diversity. According to the latest scholarly conversations, this is the direction in which supplier diversity progresses. A lot is known about internal diversity, equity, and inclusion in literature and practice. However, little is known about supplier DEI. Research conducted by Silva et al. (2024) is the first research to elucidate the indicators and measures of supplier DEI, and this presents an opportunity for further study.

3.3.7 Supplier diversity and top management

Top management's commitment is critical to supplier diversity's success (Billion Dollar Roundtable, 2023; Hoang et al., 2022; Jaén et al., 2021). Top management sets the tone at the top, demonstrating commitment through actions and decision-making and transparently reporting through sustainability reports to allow the public to scrutinize the level of commitment (Hoang et al., 2022; Jaén et al., 2021). Actively communicating unambiguous messages about the organisation's audacious goals about supplier diversity, for instance, General Motors broadcasting their intention of becoming the most inclusive firm globally (Silva et al., 2024). In that way, a clear message is sent to all employees, critical stakeholders and suppliers about the direction the organisation is taking to avoid any resistance and create a climate of inclusivity (Hoang et al., 2022).

Nonetheless, resistance will always persist, as some employees may perceive supplier diversity as unfair and not based on merit, leading to further prejudice against diverse suppliers (Gligor, 2020; Hoang et al., 2022). These reactions to supplier diversity required top management to engage all employees to communicate the vision, contextualise supplier

diversity and link it to broader organisational goals. Furthermore, it is essential for top management to facilitate diversity training and cultural awareness initiatives to enable employees to appreciate their inherent prejudices and biases and to help them value diversity (McCrea et al., 2022).

Additionally, top management must develop buyers' performance evaluation systems to drive positive behaviour, appoint supplier diversity champions and ambassadors, and set inclusive procurement systems and processes (Hoang et al., 2022). The institutionalisation of the Moët Hennessy supplier diversity initiative offers a great example of engaged top management (van Hoek et al., 2023). Moët's chief procurement officer started supplier diversity as recently as 2021, but it is already showing signs of great success owing to the inclusivity in the design of the initiative, getting the buyers to drive the initiative instead of imposing it and making them take leadership by presenting in all staff members' meetings and securing buy-in from all levels of management (van Hoek et al., 2023).

It is known that the top management that executes efficiently in driving internal diversity will naturally execute on supplier diversity (Li et al., 2022). It is unclear in the literature what leadership style is ideal for implementing a supplier diversity mandate. In adjacent literature on supply chains, Chen et al. (2021) suggest combining transactional and transformational leadership styles can enhance successful implementation, as these approaches complement each other. In contrast, Li et al. (2022) indicate that transformational leadership style may have a more positive effect. On the other hand, leadership literature suggests that women leaders are better suited because their leadership traits are associated with inclusiveness and knowledge sharing (Foss et al., 2022; Ma et al., 2021). This disconnect presents a future research opportunity.

3.3.8 Inclusive Organisational Culture

Organisational culture is the set of artefacts, such as shared procedures, systems, language, and other elements that the organisation has developed to address internal and external problems (Rizzi et al., 2023). Regardless of how well-formulated a supplier diversity strategy is, if it clashes with or is not supported by the prevailing culture within the organisation, it is unlikely to succeed (Huang et al., 2024; Sordi et al., 2022; Whitfield & Landeros, 2006; Zanon et al., 2021). Zanon et al. (2021) contend that there is a causal relationship between organisational culture and supply chain performance. Since organisational culture influences individuals' behaviour regarding information sharing, teamwork, and other aspects, it plays a vital role in supply chain and supplier diversity (Zanon et al., 2021). Equally, national culture,

including local traditions, religion, and values, strongly influences individual beliefs and decision-making and may support or hinder supplier diversity (Huang et al., 2024; Silva et al., 2024). Organisations are expected to create a diverse cultural climate where employees believe their company is actively promoting fairness and inclusion in all its practices and policies (Jiang et al., 2022). This diverse climate encourages a new procurement value system beyond traditional supplier selection, prioritising short-term economic goals over long-term sustainability goals (Jiang et al., 2022; Sordi et al., 2022).

The diversity climate within organisations will encourage employees to value fairness and support information sharing and inclusion throughout decision-making (Zanon et al., 2021). Consequently, such an inclusive organisational culture will dismantle internal and external resistance barriers and support supplier diversity and broader social sustainability initiatives (Jiang et al., 2022; Sordi et al., 2022). Inversely, a misalignment between organisational culture and supplier diversity will lead to negative supply chain performance (Zanon et al., 2021). The research gap concerns how to build an inclusive culture and promote a positive diversity climate in a context where the prevailing local community culture is incongruent with inclusive ideals. For instance, if the dominant religion in the local community has no tolerance for the LGBTQI+ community, how will management transcend the individual attitudes informed by their religion?

3.3.9 Power asymmetry in supplier diversity

The literature on supply chain relationships generally accepts that power asymmetry exists between buyers and suppliers (Lashley & Pollock, 2020; Razmdoost & Alinaghian, 2023). This power asymmetry is much more evident in the relationship between buying organisations and diverse suppliers due to the inherent resource constraints of diverse suppliers (Lashley & Pollock, 2020; Razmdoost & Alinaghian, 2023; Sordi et al., 2022).

Diverse suppliers have no bargaining power; they cannot produce at scale and cost-effectively, lack capital, and are easily dispensable due to their easily substitutable products (Huang et al., 2024; Lashley & Pollock, 2020). Influential buyers may use their overwhelming power in these unbalanced relationships to exert price pressures and impose payment terms and unfair product quality standards (Lashley & Pollock, 2020). Consequently, the relationship between diverse suppliers and buyers is often characterised by unequal power dynamics and dependence, which influence the successful implementation of supplier diversity (Huang et al., 2024; Pan et al., 2022).

Lashley & Pollock (2020) asserts that more than 50% of buyer-supplier relationships where there is a power imbalance fail, with suppliers bearing the brunt of these failures. It is an inescapable truth that the negative consequences of power asymmetries are most felt in supplier diversity initiatives. Therefore, the power asymmetry in the relationship requires diverse suppliers to make an extra effort to build relationships with various functional and influential actors within the buying firms to create a higher level of visibility and maintain their relationships (Lashley & Pollock, 2020; Razmdoost & Alinaghian, 2023). There is a gap in the literature on how diverse suppliers cope with power imbalance and resource dependence, as these suppliers require further investment to be competitive (Rivera-Valle & Silva, 2024).

3.4. The theoretical underpinnings of successful supplier diversity

Literature on supplier diversity has used various theoretical frameworks to explain, predict, and understand the construct. Below, the top five prominent theories, namely the stakeholder theory, modern discrimination theory, social identity theory, social capital theory, and inter-organisational justice theory, are discussed in no order of priority. The literature on the theoretical frameworks and scope of these theories is vast and beyond the scope of this paper, so it will not form part of this study.

Firstly, the stakeholder theory assumes that organisations must consider the interests and well-being of all stakeholders, not just shareholders, in all decision-making processes (Dmytriyev et al., 2021). This theory postulates that organisations can create value by addressing the interests of all stakeholders, thereby enhancing their reputation and ensuring long-term sustainability (Dmytriyev et al., 2021). In the context of supplier diversity, the underrepresented communities are impacted by the company's operations and are rightfully entitled to have their interest considered in the decision-making (Lashley & Pollock, 2020; Lee Park et al., 2024).

Often, the consideration of these vulnerable groups arises from the pressure exerted by other stakeholders, such as investors whose investment criteria include DEI requirements. Additionally, it happens when consumers threaten to boycott the company's products and services in the absence of diversity and inclusion measures, advocacy groups that publicly censure companies failing that do not exhibit commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion (Lee Park et al., 2024; Miguel & Tonelli, 2023). Conscious of the risks posed by such pressures on their brand and reputation, companies proactively invest in social sustainability.

Corporate social responsibility has been one of the critical enablers for the successful implementation of supplier diversity. Because the notion of CSR is fundamentally rooted in the idea of organisations being viewed as vehicles for promoting and advancing justice (Berenguer et al., 2024). Both CSR and stakeholder theory challenge the school of thought that prioritizes shareholder's sole needs, which asserts that management is primarily responsible to the shareholder (Dmytriiev et al., 2021).

Next is Modern Discrimination Theory (MDT), which states that, although overt forms of social and economic discrimination have been outlawed, more subtle and insidious forms of discrimination continue to persist beneath the surface (Blount & Li, 2021; Gligor, 2020; Van Wart et al., 2023). Blount & Li (2021) contends that the disparity between established and competitive diverse suppliers and their non-diverse counterparts can be attributed to buyers' attitudes toward supplier diversity shaped by entrenched discriminatory tendencies. This is due to the homophily effect of race, and individuals tend to associate and form relationships with others who share similar race and ethnic backgrounds (Blount & Li, 2021). This makes it difficult for diverse suppliers to build relationships with predominantly white male buyers. Because information is freely shared in trusting relationships (Blount, 2021). Therefore, diverse suppliers are disadvantaged as they miss out on critical information, including contract opportunities (Blount, 2021).

The personal sentiment of the buyer toward supplier diversity or attitude towards diverse suppliers may contribute to the disconnect between the organisation's commitment towards supplier diversity and what happens in reality. Moreover, modern discrimination focuses on systematic and structural factors that perpetuate discrimination. Although diverse suppliers may not experience visible discrimination, the existing procurement systems and structures may marginalise them through exclusion and negative performance evaluation.

Now, I turn to social identity theory (SIT), which explains how individuals categorize themselves and others into social groups, in-groups, and out-groups (Gligor, 2020). The theory suggests that a person's identity is largely derived from their membership in social groups, such as race, nationality, gender, religion, and many other characteristics. Like modern discrimination theory, the theory further posits that individuals associate themselves with their in-group members and dissociate with out-group members (Gligor, 2020).

Literature suggests that social identity, particularly racial identity, poses the most critical challenge to implementing supplier diversity as it influences supplier selection and rating because of lower expectations resulting from unconscious bias (Blount & Li, 2021; Gligor,

2020; Ogbonna, 2019). Similarly, buyers of the lower-status group tend to dissociate with diverse suppliers by demonstrating stronger identification with higher-status groups (Blount & Li, 2021; Gligor, 2020).

The buyers do this out of concern that they might be perceived as being socially competitive or engaging in nepotism when giving preference to diverse suppliers, which could trigger negative stereotypes towards them (Gligor, 2020). Blount (2021) reported that average revenues for minority businesses are \$ 171,000 compared to equivalent white-owned firms whose income is at least \$ 650,000 per annum. The prejudice suffered by diverse suppliers is not confined to supplier selection but also supplier rating, which leads to a vicious cycle of exclusion (Blount & Li, 2021; Gligor, 2020). This dynamic exacerbates diverse suppliers' challenges as they encounter discrimination from out and in-group members. Literature on how to mitigate the debilitating effects of social identity on supplier diversity is scarce

Regarding the Inter-Organisational Justice Theory. This theory expands the justice theory, which focuses on individual or internal organisation contexts, to address how organisations perceive fairness in their interactions with one another organisation (Blount, 2021). Inter-organisational justice manifests itself in four dimensions. The first is distributive justice, which relates to the perceived equality of economic returns or outcomes (Alghababsheh et al., 2020; Blount, 2021). The second dimension is procedural justice, which deals with policies and procedures that govern the relationship (Alghababsheh et al., 2020; Blount, 2021). These two dimensions are deemed structural and formalized, contrary to the next two.

Third is information justice, which is concerned with how information shared by one party is perceived by the other. Lastly, interactive justice pertains to the perceived fairness of interpersonal treatment (Alghababsheh et al., 2020; Blount, 2021). Using inter-organisational justice theory to study the implementation of supplier diversity, some scholars hypothesize that the negative perception of the inter-organisational justice behaviour by diverse suppliers impacts their commitment, ultimately destroying the buyer-supplier relationship (Alghababsheh & Galliar, 2021; Blount, 2021; Huang et al., 2024).

Therefore, justice and fairness in managing and maintaining strong supply chain relationships are strategic priorities in implementing successful supplier diversity initiatives. The reason is that inter-organisational justice contributes to building the solid supply chain relationships necessary for the success of supplier diversity. Therefore, it is critical as it reduces conflict and opportunism on one side and increases commitment, collaboration, and knowledge sharing on the other hand (Alghababsheh et al., 2022). In a supply chain environment where perceived

inter-organisational justice exists, there is mutual respect, a high level of trust, less conflict, and diverse suppliers are treated with dignity, increasing commitment and level of collaboration (Alghababsheh et al., 2020). Consequently, supplier diversity thrives in such supporting environments.

Lastly, the research examines the Social Capital Theory. In the context of buyer-supplier relationships, it refers to the networks, relationships, and norms that facilitate cooperation and collaboration between buyers and suppliers (Jääskeläinen et al., 2023). Numerous scholars on supply chain relationships use social capital theory as a theoretical framework for analysing the dynamics in buyer-supplier relationships (Alghababsheh & Gallear, 2021; Blount, 2021; Jääskeläinen et al., 2022, 2023; Pan et al., 2022). The consensus amongst these scholars is that building positive social capital between buyers and suppliers enables both parties to tap into the tacit resources embedded in their respective networks, which ultimately contribute to business performance (Jääskeläinen et al., 2023).

Suppliers pursue social capital, as it provides business advantages such as improved payment terms, enhanced reputation emanating from working with reputable buyers, a steady income flow, and increased business opportunities (Blount, 2021). Equally, buyers pursue these relationships because they seek preferred customer status, which comes with preferential resource allocation compared to their competitors, making them more competitive (Jääskeläinen et al., 2022).

These embedded resources, including co-creation and sharing knowledge between buyers and suppliers, require investment in building all three dimensions of social capital (Jääskeläinen et al., 2020;). The three dimensions of social capital are cognitive, structural, and relational (Alghababsheh & Gallear, 2021; Blount, 2021; Jääskeläinen et al., 2020). Cognitive social capital entails establishing shared goals, culture, codes, and mutual understanding among individuals (Alghababsheh & Gallear, 2021; Jääskeläinen et al., 2020)

Building positive social capital allows for the development of intellectual capital, helps avoid misinterpretations, and is an advantage in aligning objectives and sharing information (Alghababsheh & Gallear, 2021; Jääskeläinen et al., 2020). Structural social capital pertains to the configuration of connections and linkages, facilitating the free flow of information, providing avenues for acquiring new knowledge, and enabling frequent interactions and meetings (Alghababsheh & Gallear, 2021; Jääskeläinen et al., 2023). Lastly, relational social capital is about the personal relationships built by both actors over time, emphasising trust, friendship, dedication, and mutual respect. This form of social capital enhances reciprocity and

flexibility, forging strong bonds between actors and instilling a belief in a collective future (Alghababsheh & Galleary, 2021; Jääskeläinen et al., 2020).

Moreover, these three dimensions are interdependent and complementary (Jääskeläinen et al., 2023). For instance, while relational capital is perceived as the most impactful in building social capital, cognitive and structural serve as the antecedents of relational social capital (Jääskeläinen et al., 2023). Equally, on complementarity, the structural social capital dimension is more useful in an execution-orientated environment, whereas the relational dimension is critical in a more strategic-orientated task (Jääskeläinen et al., 2020).

The extant literature on social capital in buyer-supplier relationships is limited by its predominant focus on buyers' perspectives while paying little attention to suppliers' perspectives (Blount, 2021; Gligor, 2020). The lack of positive social capital, which must be co-created by both buyer and supplier, emerges as the most critical factor in implementing successful supplier diversity (Jääskeläinen et al., 2023). Owing to historical social exclusion and issues of social identity, diverse suppliers require sponsored network events to facilitate socialisation opportunities for them to build relationships with buyers, hence the role of supplier diversity intermediaries (Pan et al., 2022).

Whilst social capital theory is the most suitable framework for examining the relationship between buyers and diverse suppliers as it provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the interplay, trust dynamics, and resource exchanges critical in building partnerships between buyers and suppliers, it has not received appropriate scholarly attention (Pan, Hill, Blount & Rungtusanatham, 2022).

However, it is equally important to note that excessive social capital frustrates business performance. Therefore, there is an appropriate threshold of social capital that actors should strive to maintain. (Jääskeläinen et al., 2023). Literature suggests that higher levels of cognitive social capital, where the two actors (buyer and supplier) have highly similar objectives and norms, eliminate the positive tensions necessary in the supply chain relationship.

4. Synthesis

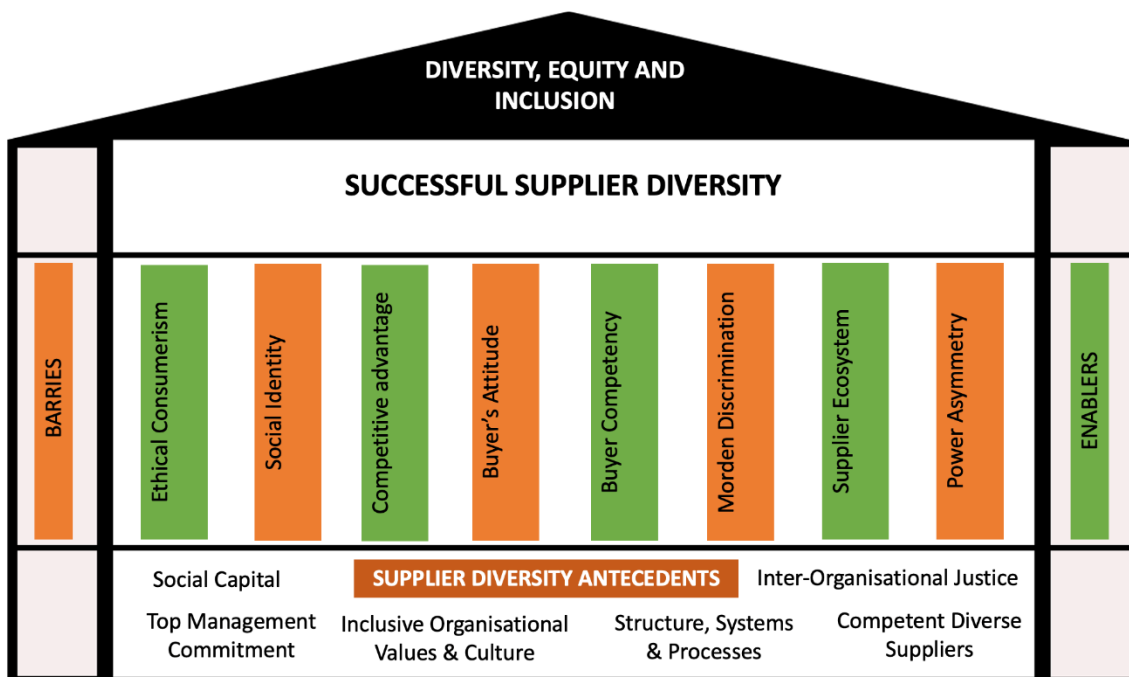
In the previous section, I started by discussing the evolution of supplier diversity and tracing it to the early 1960s. I explored the multidimensionality of supplier diversity and how the definition remained unchanged but has broadened its scope. A discussion about the measures of successful implementation of supplier diversity followed. Next was the thematic analysis, a discussion of all major themes from the literature. And we finished the section by discussing the theoretical underpinnings of supplier diversity implementation. This section was necessary for a shared understanding of what successful supplier diversity means.

In this section, I synthesise the data by combining, mapping, and summarising key insights from the literature as elucidated by the themes. I used the synthesis matrix to compare and juxtapose emerging themes, patterns, and trends. I will now provide a narrative synthesis weaving the key themes into a comprehensive and insightful overview of the existing literature, starting with the proposed framework for successfully implementing supplier diversity.

4.1. Framework for Successful Implementation of Supplier Diversity

In mapping the relationship between the themes, I propose an implementation framework in Fig.4 based on the four superordinate themes. These superordinate themes emerged from combining and clustering the major themes discussed in the previous section. This synthesis will be underpinned by the discussion on the superordinate themes that inform the development of the key elements of the proposed implementation framework. These superordinate themes are antecedents for the successful implementation of supplier diversity, barriers to the successful implementation of supplier diversity, enablers for the successful implementation of supplier diversity, and diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) as an outcome. I will discuss these superordinate themes below.

Fig. 4 Supplier Diversity Implementation Framework



Source: Author

4.1.1. The antecedents of successful implementation of supplier diversity

As shown in Fig.4 above, the antecedent variables and conditions must exist for supplier diversity to thrive. It is a combination of the effect of these factors rather than one variable in isolation that has the effect. Equally, the absence of one or two of these variables may not necessarily lead to the collapse of supplier diversity but will result in suboptimal performance. The antecedents serve as a foundation whose strengths or weaknesses will determine the success or failure of supplier diversity initiatives. The previous section extensively discussed these antecedents: social capital, top management, inclusive organisational culture, and inter-organisational justice.

In this supplier diversity framework, shown in Fig. 1, two theories set the foundation for successfully implementing supplier diversity. These two theories are inter-organisational justice and social capital theory. The social capital theory is concerned with the dynamic in dyadic relationships between the buyer and diverse suppliers, emphasising the importance of building positive social capital to implement supplier diversity successfully. In the same way, inter-organisational justice examines the perceived justice experienced by the diverse suppliers. The theory suggests that negative perceptions of fairness adversely affect the relationship between buyers and diverse suppliers and, as a result, undermine the successful implementation of supplier diversity.

4.1.2 Enablers for the successful implementation of supplier diversity

Enablers are the variables that facilitate or promote the successful implementation of supplier diversity. Leveraging these enablers can significantly enhance the effective implementation of supplier diversity. Conscious of the reputational risk associated with unethical buying and potential backlash from stakeholders and consumers about their ambivalence towards diversity, equity and inclusion, companies are proactively embracing ESG or CSR (Blount, 2021; Dmytriiev et al., 2021; Gligor, 2020). Supplier diversity through broader diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives are part of the ESG or CSR programs.

The existence of a supplier diversity ecosystem serves as the most significant enabler considering the capital outlay and other non-financial resources necessary for the design and implementation of supplier diversity. This capital outlay may include supplier recruitment, assessments, training and development, and management of multiple supplier relationships (Selviaridis & Spring, 2022). Additionally, this may also involve the provision of capital and other resources to help the diverse suppliers deliver (Selviaridis & Spring, 2022). The collaborative sharing of resources minimises the investment exposure associated with adopting and implementing supplier diversity initiatives. Additionally, it gives a sense of confidence in the integrity of the initiatives. The network of these stakeholders includes supplier diversity intermediaries, enterprise development providers, certification bodies, and government agencies.

The supportive legislation framework, which may be promulgated with clear procurement opportunities and guides on implementing supplier diversity, gives the initiative a tremendous impetus. North America and Western Europe have implemented supplier diversity far more than any other region in the world, and this may be in part because of legislation promulgated in those countries (Berenguer et al., 2024). Supplier diversity is lagging in other regions with no legislation, like East and South Asia (Berenguer et al., 2024). In the Fortune Global 500, East and South Asia are represented by 214 companies (43%), and yet only 7% mention supplier diversity, and only one reports concrete action. Compared to North America, which has 136 companies (27%), the Fortune 500 has 86% supplier diversity programs, followed by Western Europe, which has 35% (Berenguer et al., 2024).

In the same way, consumers are willing to pay a premium for sustainable products certified by third parties, and so are the ethical-driven consumers eager to withdraw support for companies that are not prioritising diversity, equity, and inclusion (Agrawal & Lee, 2019). Implementing

supplier diversity is perceived as a good corporate citizen, and that is a competitive advantage that companies are pursuing. Moreover, supplier diversity gives companies insights into new markets and may lead to new product development for disadvantaged communities. All these together enable supplier diversity to thrive.

Stakeholder theory is an overarching enabler for supplier diversity. This theory asserts that businesses should generate value for all their stakeholders and that the interests of shareholders should not take precedence over the interests of other stakeholders (Dmytriiev et al., 2021). The theory further postulates that there shall be no “trade-offs,” but competing needs shall be resolved through innovative thinking. In the context of supplier diversity, sustainability objectives should not be compromised because of price-competitive objectives (Dmytriiev et al., 2021). Management must resolve these tensions arising from competing needs and interests using innovative thinking, and the supplier diversity ecosystem is one of those innovative interventions. Whereas there has been no study on whether women are better able to manage these inter-relationships, Foss et al. (2022) suggest a positive relationship between women managers and firm innovation.

4.1.3. Barriers to the successful implementation of supplier diversity

Three theoretical frameworks help examine and predict resistance to supplier diversity implementation. These theories are social identity, modern discrimination, and power asymmetry theories. The first two theories, though different, tend to have similar effects in shaping the buyer’s attitude, behaviour, and decision-making (Blount & Li, 2021; Gligor, 2020). Social identity illustrates how the self-conception of group membership shapes individual attitudes and behaviours (Gligor, 2020).

The theory further suggests that individuals belonging to a particular in-group are likely to prefer their in-group members while simultaneously discriminating against the other out-group members (Gligor, 2020; Ma et al., 2021). In the buyer-diverse supplier context, the in-group, which is most white males, tends to favour businesses owned by white males and discriminate against those owned by other groups (Blount & Li, 2021; Gligor, 2020; Hekman et al., 2017). Despite the organisational inclusivity agenda, buyers ultimately place orders, supplier ratings, and re-orders. When the buyer’s attitude towards supplier diversity or diverse suppliers is negative, successful implementation may be impacted negatively (Blount & Li, 2021).

Similarly, modern discrimination posits that discrimination against marginalised groups persists, albeit being subtle, and focuses on systematic and structural factors that perpetuate

discrimination. For instance, biases may manifest in supplier diversity within procurement processes where artificially imposed pre-bidding requirements effectively exclude diverse suppliers from participation. Although diverse suppliers may not experience overt discrimination, the existing system may marginalise them through exclusion and negative performance evaluation.

This study has extensively discussed power asymmetry between buyers and suppliers. Where buyers exercise hard power, more than 50% of those buyer-supplier relationships collapse (Lashley & Pollock, 2020). Power asymmetry is one of the critical barriers to the successful implementation of supplier diversity.

4.1.4. Next level of supplier diversity: supplier diversity, equity and inclusion

Diversity, equity, and inclusion have significantly gained traction in the management literature and practice as the interest in building inclusive societies and workplaces has increased, given the changes in demographic profiles worldwide (McCrea et al., 2022). However, most literature has focused on internal workplace inclusion and less on the supply chain (Hoang et al., 2022; McCrea et al., 2022). However, that picture is changing, with more than 5% of global firms reporting inclusiveness on supplier DEI (Silva et al., 2024). Supplier DEI is the future of supply chain sustainability, but there is still a long way to go, including developing measurement metrics.

4.2. The findings

Several findings emerge from the literature review. Firstly, ethical consumerism refers to a practice by consumers where they buy goods and services that are produced in a manner that aligns with their beliefs and values. A growing generation of ethical consumers value diversity, equity and inclusion. These consumers use social media campaigns to publicly shame, boycott, or withdraw support for any company perceived to conduct unacceptable business practices, including discrimination in terms of race, gender, sexual orientation, religion and many more. This inadvertently gives supplier diversity a leg up as companies are under increasing pressure to be seen to be acting environmentally and socially responsible. Ethical consumerism will be one of the biggest drivers of supplier diversity in the near future.

Secondly, regarding buyer competence, the traditional purchasing objectives of price, delivery terms, and payment terms are no longer consistent with the ESG reporting imperatives.

Today's buyers need new competencies to navigate social and environmental sustainability expectations and integrate these often-contradictory objects into their purchasing decisions. Thirdly, diverse supplier competency has long been in the literature perhaps scholars are not writing about it because it is regarded as a given. Diverse suppliers face many systematic challenges that impact their ability to deliver quality services, ranging from lack of access to capital to parochial markets that require essential products and services. Supplier competency is a crucial cog in the wheel of supplier diversity, and buying organisations often have to contribute towards supplier development to ensure the proper competency levels for diverse suppliers.

Fourthly, there is a cost associated with implementing supplier diversity. The expenses include but are not limited to supplier development and training, employee training, consulting fees, membership fees to organisations supporting supplier diversity, production of impact studies, and dedicated staff. Such a financial burden may deter organisations from pursuing supplier diversity, especially without a clearly defined return on investment. Therefore, a compelling case exists for a supplier diversity ecosystem comprising supplier diversity intermediaries like NMSDC and SASDC, enterprise development providers, certification bodies, and government agencies to share the resources collaboratively. This cooperation framework can help mitigate the associated costs and make implementation more feasible.

Fifthly, top management must champion supplier diversity to ensure proper buy-in by all stakeholders. The necessity of top management's commitment to supplier diversity can never be over-emphasized. Hoang et al. (2022) contend that inclusive leadership practices that demonstrate an appreciation of all individual differences are required. The top management has to deal with internal resistance to supplier diversity informed by the perception of reality where those in power believe that supplier diversity is unfair as it seeks to exclude their own (Hoang et al., 2022; Van Wart et al., 2023).

Inclusive leadership practices are likely to enhance the positive perception of organisational justice among white males, given that the perceptions of disadvantaged groups alone are insufficient to implement supplier diversity (Hoang et al., 2022). Furthermore, buyers who are members of diverse communities may also experience aversion towards supplier diversity as they do not want to be perceived as socially competitive or engage in nepotism when contracting diverse suppliers (Gligor, 2020). It can destabilise workplace peace and destroy stakeholder relationships if not managed properly.

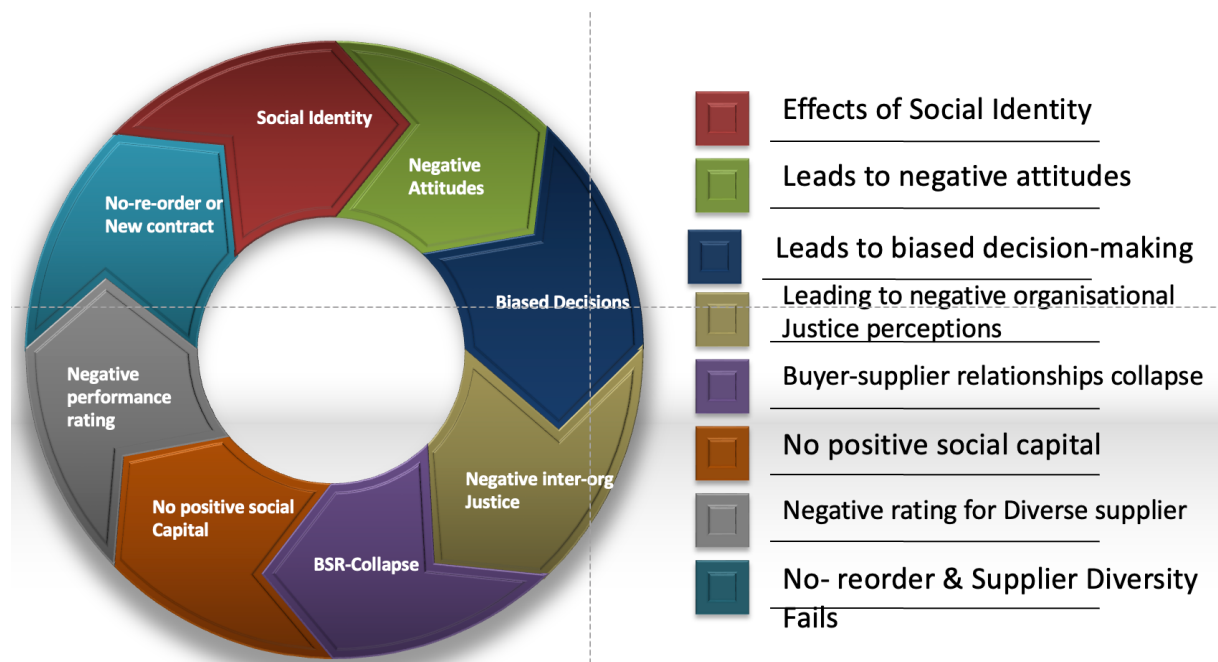
Top management needs to review all the procurement policies, processes, systems, and structures as part of the supplier diversity program design to ensure that they do not perpetuate prejudice and eliminate modern discrimination. Furthermore, top management is expected to create an enabling environment for the successful implementation of supplier diversity, including the appointment of appropriate personnel at the right level to support supplier diversity, set measurable indicators, incorporate supplier diversity into the organisational strategy, and many more (Blount, 2021; Gligor, 2020; Scur et al., 2022). The literature does not describe the ideal leadership style for driving supplier diversity.

Sixth, Corporate Social Responsibility is sometimes used interchangeably with Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) (Berenguer et al., 2024; Silva et al., 2024). However, corporate social responsibility, which accounts for the tremendous success of supplier diversity, tends to be associated with greenwashing and attempts to distract the public, consumers, and investors from harmful business practices (Gligor, 2020). For instance, in the Fortune Global 500 companies' study, 42% mentioned diversity in their CSR reports, yet only 15% had concrete supplier diversity programs (Berenguer et al., 2024). It seems there has been more rhetoric and less concrete action, hence, in the last 50 years, supplier diversity has not been implemented effectively. Currently, the benchmarked supplier diversity spend is 9% of the total procurement spend, and there are less than 39 companies in the world that spend \$1 billion or more towards supplier diversity (Billion Dollar Roundtable, 2023; van Hoek et al., 2023).

On the other hand, ESG is propelled by a seismic ideological shift from shareholder primacy to stakeholder capitalism (Dmytryiev et al., 2021). The adoption of ESG is enabled by mandatory ESG disclosures for listed companies on many stock exchanges worldwide (Dmytryiev et al., 2021). Stakeholders place more weight on ESG disclosures than they would on a CSR report because the ESG report often follows strict guidelines and reporting metrics provided by the relevant stock exchange (Berenguer et al., 2024; Silva et al., 2024). Therefore, the seemingly inevitable shift of supplier diversity to the socially sustainable wing of ESG from being a CSR program is much more appealing from the perspective of achieving the desired commitment from companies (van Hoek et al., 2023).

Seventh, while the five major theories discussed in this study are unrelated, they are mutually reinforcing and create a vicious cycle of disempowerment. Fig. 5 below shows how this vicious cycle of disempowerment manifests as an obstacle to the implementation of supplier diversity.

Figure 5: The vicious cycle of disempowerment



Source: Author

As shown in Fig.5, the effects of social identity may lead to negative attitudes against supplier diversity, resulting in biased decision-making processes to the detriment of diverse suppliers. Consequently, this leads to a negative perception of inter-organisational justice from the perspective of the diverse supplier. Where there are negative perceptions of inter-organisational justice, the relationship between buyers and diverse suppliers will likely deteriorate (Alghababsheh et al., 2020; Blount, 2021). Such deterioration affects the building of positive social capital between the buyers and diverse suppliers, leading to a trust deficit and a lack of information sharing (Blount, 2021; Jääskeläinen et al., 2023). Subsequently, this leads to poor performance ratings, influencing buyers’ decision-making regarding the next contract or purchase order. Ultimately, the supplier diversity initiative collapses.

Lastly, it is clear from the literature that no overarching theory seeks to explain or predict the supplier diversity construct. As discussed in this study, the five commonly used theories only serve certain aspects of supplier diversity implementation; social capital and inter-organisational justice theories explain the basic foundational principles of supplier diversity and serve as antecedents. The social identity, power asymmetry, and modern discrimination theories only explain the factors mitigating the successful implementation of supplier diversity, and the stakeholder theory only describes the imperatives of prioritizing all stakeholders, including disadvantaged communities, in decision-making.

5. Conclusion and Future Study

In this paper, I sought to systematically explore, synthesise, and map the literature to compare and contrast findings, emerging themes and theories on successfully implementing supplier diversity. I answered the research question: what insights does the extant literature provide regarding the successful implementation of supplier diversity. I started by outlining the evolution of supplier diversity, tracing it back to the early 1960s. I delineated stages within this evolution by identifying specific characteristics that lend significance to the progression and recognising the advancement of literature about the implementation of supplier diversity. I then discussed measures for successful supplier diversity to ensure the same interpretation of what success means in the context of supplier diversity. These two sections addressed the first review question: how supplier diversity has evolved, and what constitutes successful implementation?

The following review question was: what are the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of successful supplier diversity implementation? I discuss the five major theories used in explaining and predicting the supplier diversity construct: social identity, social capital, inter-organisational justice, modern discrimination theory, and stakeholder theory. I further discuss how these theories interface in the proposed framework and connect in the vicious cycle of disempowerment. The last review question was about the antecedents of successful supplier diversity implementation. This question was answered, and a framework was built showing the antecedents for supplier diversity.

All these review questions were answered using a robust research methodology suitable for a structured literature review. A structured literature review using the iterative four-phase approach proposed by Snyder (2019) was used; the first phase is designing the review, conducting the review, performing the analysis, and then writing up the review. In designing the review, this research focused on the methodological coherence from the research questions to the literature search strategy and research methods.

In conducting the review, this study followed the plan designed in phase one to ensure it appropriately addresses the research question. I applied my inclusion and exclusion criteria, including currency, relevance, and ranking of the journal articles. The search strategy was thoroughly explained, leading to the final sample of 61 journal articles and providing justifications for the search terms, selection criteria, and databases.

In the analysis phase, a thematic analysis was performed to examine the data from the literature using inductive reasoning to categorise, interpret, and develop themes. The

framework applied for conducting thematic analysis is the reflexive six-step process proposed by (Braun & Clarke, 2006): familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

The last phase of the literature review is the write-up. Firstly, the researcher provided motivations for this literature review, which, amongst other issues, involves bringing together fragmented literature. Then, the researcher demonstrated high levels of transparency in communicating the inclusion and exclusion criteria, data abstraction, analysis, and methods used. The researcher used the established literature review protocols to ensure that only a clearly defined reporting format was utilized (Fan et al., 2022). Furthermore, this approach enables readers to assess the suitability of the methodologies used, increasing the reliability of the study (Page et al., 2021).

5.1.1 Contribution to practice

In this study, the researcher introduced an implementation framework that can be used in practice to implement supplier diversity. Furthermore, the researcher suggested a practical proposal for appointing white males as champions and ambassadors for supplier diversity. However, this still requires further scholarly scrutiny, debate, and discussion, but the extant literature suggests that they are more likely to succeed when committed to it.

5.1.2 Contribution to theory

The researcher contributed to the literature on supplier diversity by distilling major theories used in the supplier diversity literature and demonstrating how they address and explain the various stages of implementing supplier diversity. Through this study, the researcher was able to highlight the inadequacies of those theories in explaining supplier diversity in its entirety. This study also proposed the vicious cycle of disempowerment, which further highlights the interrelatedness of the theories. In conclusion, these theoretical contributions will set the tone for future debates and studies in the quest for theory-building in supplier diversity.

5.2 Future research

There is insufficient scholarly work on supplier diversity in the supply chain literature (Huang et al., 2024). Most research has focused on supplier diversity in the context of CSR (I. Y. Blount, 2021; Sordi et al., 2022). Consequently, there are several gaps in the literature on supplier diversity and how it aligns with the supply chain imperatives. The Moët Hennessy

supplier diversity remains a distinct example of success, as supplier diversity is located within the supply chain, and the buyers drive its implementation from conceptualization. Given these limitations in the extant literature, future studies in supplier diversity should focus more on supply chain

5.2.1 Power asymmetry

The statistics around the number of buyer-diverse supplier relationships that collapse owing to the hard power exercised by the buyers is staggering at 50%, and diverse suppliers suffer as a result (Lashley & Pollock, 2020). Supplier diversity to succeed requires equally competent diverse suppliers. The question for future research is whether the horrifying experiences of diverse suppliers will deter these suppliers from participating in a supplier diversity program.

5.2.2 Location of Supplier Diversity

More studies must be conducted to determine whether supplier diversity is correctly located as a CSR program or a supply chain issue. Additionally, the study will discuss whether it makes any difference in developing the literature and implementing supplier diversity.

5.2.3 Social identity and resource dependency

The literature on supplier diversity identifies social identity and modern discrimination as the key barriers to successfully implementing supplier diversity. However, there is barely enough research on how to mitigate the debilitating effects of these two societal issues. Companies are a reflection of society; what is happening in the company reflects what is happening in society. Where the local community has less tolerance for the LGTBQI community, it will play out at work, and there is not enough literature highlighting these circumstances.

5.2.4 Supplier Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is not a new concept and has been written extensively in the context of human resources, but supplier DEI is a new concept that needs further probing. (Silva et al., 2024) proposes that it is the future, and many companies' social sustainability elements in the ESG already reflect DEI as the vital element. The applicability of the three dimensions of the DEI in the supply chain needs further exploration, as companies wanting to improve their social sustainability performance through the supply chain will be adopting these strategies.

5.2.5 Change Management Theory

Regarding change management theory, the researcher proposes that adopting and implementing supplier diversity constitutes change management, and the literature on supplier diversity does not draw from the change management theory. Most of the implementation challenges top management faces in implementing supplier diversity are dealt with in the literature on change management. Therefore, there is a gap for future studies to focus on whether introducing the change management theory will provide a better theoretical explanation for supplier diversity performance.

5.2.6 White males as champions of supplier diversity

The researcher proposes that future research be undertaken to establish whether the prospect of having a good performance rating can outweigh the homophily of race and social identity dynamics in the context of supplier diversity. White males receive high-performance ratings when taking initiatives to empower disadvantaged group members (Hekman et al., 2017). This positive performance rating may encourage white males to do more to advance transformation. Furthermore, appointing white males as champions and ambassadors for supplier diversity may not be viewed with suspicion that they want to displace white businesses. Therefore, they may not receive much resistance when driving transformation.

However, employees from disadvantaged groups who advance transformation receive negative performance ratings and, consequently, do not push the transformation envelope (Hekman et al., 2017). Yet, those who dissociate from their fellow disadvantaged members and give opportunities to white males receive high-performance ratings (Hekman et al., 2017). Therefore, to advance their careers, they deem it prudent to look after white male interests (Hekman et al., 2017).

5.2.7 Supplier diversity in emerging markets

There is an urgent need for a study on supplier diversity in emerging markets. As far as we reasonably know, only one study has been conducted that outlines the implementation of supplier diversity in emerging markets (Miguel & Tonelli, 2023). What makes it even more interesting is that even multinationals that implement supplier diversity in their home countries neglect it in the host countries (Miguel & Tonelli, 2023). Therefore, a gap in the literature on supplier diversity in emerging economies is inviting further research.

5.5.8 The vicious cycle of disempowerment

One of the novel insights shared in this study is the observation of the mutually reinforcing theories often used to explain or predict supplier diversity performance. In this study, I theorised how social identity theory, inter-organisation theory, and social capital theory interface in various stages in predicting the outcome of supplier diversity implementation. I called this a vicious circle of disempowerment. Future studies should focus on testing the existence of this vicious cycle and to what extent it is even valid.

5.5.9 Leadership style

Existing literature is unambiguous about top management commitment as a critical area of focus for successfully implementing supplier diversity. However, it is unclear which leadership style is appropriate to implement supplier diversity successfully. Chen et al. (2021) suggest combining transactional and transformational leadership styles to enhance successful implementation, as these approaches complement each other. In contrast, Li et al. (2022) indicate that transformational may have a more positive effect. This disconnect presents a future research opportunity.

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