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MBA Dissertation

Navigating DEI in a Shifting Political Landscape: A Study of
Corporate Strategy and Stakeholder Reactions Post-2024 U.S.
Elections

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the impact of the 2024 U.S. presidential election and subsequent political shifts on corporate Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) strategies. Set against the backdrop of Donald Trump's return to the White House, the research investigates how corporations navigate heightened political scrutiny and regulatory changes in their approach to DEI, and how these adaptations influence stakeholder expectations and overall organisational resilience.

Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study combines qualitative semi-structured interviews with DEI professionals, open-ended questionnaires distributed across sectors, and secondary analysis of company reports, press releases, and industry statements. The analysis is framed by stakeholder and institutional theory and triangulated for validity.

Key findings reveal that regulatory uncertainty and executive orders have driven many companies to recalibrate, often reframing or selectively scaling back DEI initiatives to manage legal risks and public perception. Despite these challenges, organisations with strong leadership commitment, transparent stakeholder engagement, and a values-driven DEI approach demonstrated greater resilience and sustained innovation. Conversely, firms adopting symbolic or compliance-oriented strategies risked employee disengagement, reputational harm, and a loss of competitive advantage.

The research concludes with practical recommendations for developing authentic and sustainable DEI strategies, emphasising the need for data-driven decision-making, inclusive leadership, transparent communication, and agile adaptation in politically volatile environments. These findings contribute to the broader understanding of DEI as a strategic imperative in times of socio-political change, offering actionable insights for business leaders and policymakers alike.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Opening section

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives are currently the crucial components of corporate strategies, significantly influencing organisational culture, stakeholder engagement, and business sustainability. However, the shifting political landscape—particularly following the results of the 2024 U.S. elections—has introduced new challenges for companies committed to maintaining their DEI efforts. The return of Donald Trump to the White House has raised concerns about substantial policy reversals, regulatory rollbacks, and changes in societal attitudes toward DEI. This research aims to investigate how these political developments are impacting corporate DEI strategies, stakeholder expectations, and long-term business operations. The chapter will introduce the study by first providing background and context, followed by the research problem, aims, objectives, and questions. It will also highlight the significance of the research and outline its limitations.

Background to the study

The 2024 U.S. elections marked a crucial turning point in the nation's political landscape, as Donald Trump, after a four-year hiatus, made a dramatic return to the presidency, unseating Joe Biden. This pivotal shift brought about significant upheavals in various spheres, particularly regarding Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) policies. During Trump's first term, he took decisive action by issuing an executive order in September 2020 that prohibited federal agencies from engaging in diversity training, branding such initiatives as “divisive” (Nirmal, 2025). This entrenched anti-DEI posture persisted into 2024, highlighted by the FBI’s decision to shutter its Office of Diversity and Inclusion in December of that year, sending shockwaves through the federal landscape (Stringer, 2025).

Biden’s presidency commenced with a vigorous reversal of Trump’s stringent restrictions, as he actively championed DEI efforts within the federal workforce, advocating for broader representation and inclusivity (The White House, 2021). However, following the 2024 elections, corporate America found itself grappling with the consequences of this political upheaval, striving to balance its commitment to DEI initiatives amid a rapidly changing political landscape. Major corporations like Meta, McDonald’s, Amazon and others felt compelled to scale back their DEI programs, citing a “shifting legal and policy landscape” that made such efforts increasingly complex. Ford’s CEO voiced similar concerns, acknowledging the challenges posed by evolving political and social dynamics (Meyersohn, 2024).

On January 20, 2025, in a wave of executive actions, Trump enacted a series of orders, one of which controversially recognised only two genders and rescinded 78 of Biden’s directives aimed at enhancing racial equality and anti-discrimination efforts. This sweeping move effectively halted all government DEI programs, underscoring the profound and immediate effects of the political climate on corporate strategies and practices (Long et al., 2025).

These developments not only reshaped policies but also echoed through organisations, influencing the experiences of employees and stakeholders alike.

This interplay between shifting political tides and corporate strategy has captivated my interest, inspiring me to propose MBA research focused on the implications of political transitions on corporate strategies.

Research Problem

There is a significant gap in understanding how rapid political shifts influence the development and reactions of DEI policies. While existing literature often focuses on the legal implications and economic benefits of diversity or inclusive leadership practices, it lacks research on how corporate stakeholders—such as employees, investors, and customers—respond to substantial political changes, especially in the aftermath of elections.

Mathis et al. (2024) highlighted the influence of political affiliation on DEI initiatives, prompting the question of how DEI policies are shaped by political contexts. Mburu et al. (2022) noted limited information on implementing transformational leadership in a rapidly changing political climate. Conversi (2010) explores the relationship between democracy and nationalism, addressing how various ideologies affect DEI policies. Williams et al. (2024) identified a knowledge gap regarding how political changes influence DEI policies over time and how institutions respond to political events when developing their DEI strategies.

Given the anticipated changes following the 2024 U.S. elections, it is crucial to analyse how corporate DEI strategies adapt to political shifts and their impact on organisational dynamics, stakeholder engagement, and brand perception. This research aims to provide valuable insights into the intersection of politics, corporate social responsibility, and DEI, helping organisations navigate a politically divided climate.

Research Aims, Objectives, and Questions

Aim

To analyse how the 2024 U.S. elections and subsequent political shifts impact corporate DEI strategies, examining how organisations balance stakeholder demands with changing political pressures.

Objectives

- Examine how the results of the 2024 U.S. elections and shifts in the political landscape influence the company's approach to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). This will be examined by qualitative research based on semi-structured interviews with the main stakeholders responsible for DEI policies and quantitative research, such as surveys/open questionnaires and secondary data, such as company reports/company statement releases.
- Investigate how companies strike a balance between stakeholder demands and changes in the political environment. This will be examined by qualitative research based on semi-structured interviews with the main stakeholders responsible for DEI policies and quantitative research, such as surveys/open questionnaires and secondary data, such as company reports/company statement releases.
- Explore how organisations sustain or evolve their DEI policies in response to both internal and external pressures and goals. This will be examined by

qualitative research based on semi-structured interviews with the main stakeholders responsible for DEI policies and quantitative research, such as surveys/open questionnaires and secondary data, such as company reports/company statement releases.

- Understand how stakeholders are reacting to changes in DEI policies within the context of the shifting political landscape. This will be examined by qualitative research based on semi-structured interviews with the main stakeholders responsible for DEI policies and quantitative research, such as surveys/open questionnaires and secondary data, such as company reports/company statement releases.
- Formulate recommendations based on evidence and analysis of data gathered above about how companies are navigating the challenges associated with DEI amidst these political changes.

Research Questions

- How do rapid political changes, such as Donald Trump's victory in the 2024 elections, influence corporate DEI strategies?
- What internal and external factors drive companies to modify their DEI policies?
- How do stakeholders—such as employees, investors, and customers—respond to changes in DEI policies?
- What are the potential risks and rewards of altering DEI policies from an internal governance perspective?

Significance of the Study

The 2024 elections and Donald Trump's victory represent a pivotal moment for corporate Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives. Companies must navigate these political shifts to maintain inclusivity and sustainability. This study will offer actionable recommendations for companies to adapt while aligning with their values and stakeholder expectations, helping to avoid reputational damage, stakeholder dissatisfaction, and financial losses. Despite the extensive literature on DEI, only a few studies address its intersection with rapid political changes. This research aim is to fill the gap, providing insights for businesses to remain resilient during political uncertainty. The findings aim to support the development of DEI strategies that foster equity and inclusion, contributing to societal progress and responsible corporate governance.

Limitations

While this research aims to provide comprehensive insights, there are inherent limitations:

Scope and Generalisability

The research examines how the 2024 U.S. elections will impact corporate Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) strategies. However, the findings may not apply to other political contexts or regions due to the unique political and social landscape in the United States. Tomaino et al. (2025) noted that considerations of scope and generalisability are essential in various studies. They argue that research often relies on a limited context defined by the researcher, which can hinder the understanding of whether an effect is consistent across different scenarios.

Sampling and Representation

Semi-structured interviews with stakeholders responsible for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) policies, along with quantitative data from surveys, provided the basis for this study's qualitative analysis. However, the sample may not fully represent all companies or industries, which could limit the comprehensiveness of the insights gained. Silva et al. (2024) highlighted the concern of sampling bias, which can compromise the validity of research findings. They emphasised that this issue could undermine the overall reliability of the results.

Temporal Constraints

This study focuses on the immediate impact of the 2024 U.S. elections, which may not fully reflect the long-term implications of political shifts on DEI policies. Since DEI strategies can develop over time, longitudinal research would be needed for a more thorough analysis. Lin et al. (2023) demonstrated, using behavioural responses and electrophysiological data, that decision-making accelerates under time constraints, potentially leading to different evaluative outcomes in risk-related situations.

Potential Bias

The use of self-reported data gathered through interviews and surveys can introduce response bias, which may compromise the accuracy of the findings. Stakeholders may provide socially acceptable responses or withhold sensitive information, potentially distorting the data. As highlighted by Oberlader et al. (2021), the presence of biased datasets can result in misleading conclusions. This underscores the necessity of addressing bias within meta-analytic methods to achieve reliable estimates of effect sizes.

Secondary Data Reliability

The research employs secondary data obtained from publicly accessible corporate reports, press releases, and news articles, which may possess inherent biases or inaccuracies. The credibility and accuracy of these sources could affect the overall quality of the study. Froelicher et al. (2013) raised concerns regarding the possibility of errors that could occur from survey sampling, data collection, and non-response, which may compromise the validity and reliability of the findings from extensive national survey datasets. Scholars using these datasets should recognise the inherent limitations connected to secondary survey analysis, as it is impossible to eliminate all possible errors, and these can impact the outcomes of their analyses.

Complexity of Political Influences

The study seeks to explore the relationship between political developments and corporate diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, which is a complicated and layered topic. Distinguishing the direct effects of political changes from other contributing elements may be difficult. As noted by Martínez et al. (2020), the notion of contextual mitigating factors (CMFs) offers a framework for analysing the socio-historical-political contexts that affect research design and results. Acknowledging these factors enables researchers to better position their work amid the complexities of the environments they investigate, thus improving the relevance and practicality of their findings.

Limited Theoretical Exploration

While the study incorporates various theoretical frameworks, including Stakeholder Theory and Institutional Theory, it might not fully delve into other pertinent theories that could offer further insights into the research problem. As highlighted in his research, Parker (2022) underscored the significance of the absence of explicit theoretical framing in leading to evaluations that lack depth and fail to effectively justify the research approach.

By acknowledging the above limitations, the research offers a transparent account of its constraints, paving the way for future studies to address these gaps and build upon the findings.

Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is structured as follows:

- Chapter 1: Introduction – Provides an overview of the research, its background, problem statement, objectives, significance, and limitations.
- Chapter 2: Literature Review – Examines existing research on DEI, corporate governance, stakeholder theory, and the impact of political changes on business policies.
- Chapter 3: Research Methodology – Outlines the research design, data collection methods, sampling strategy, and analytical approach.
- Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis – Presents the research results, highlighting corporate responses to political changes and stakeholder reactions.
- Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations – Interprets the findings in relation to existing literature and theoretical frameworks. Summarises the study's key findings, implications for businesses, and recommendations for sustaining DEI amidst political change.
- Chapter 6: References – List of references to sources quoted in the research document.
- Chapter 7: Appendices – List of appendices to information included in the research document.

The above framework presents a logical flow of ideas, leading the reader through the research process and clearly illustrating how corporate DEI strategies adapt to political changes.

Word count: 1929

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) are crucial components of modern corporate strategies, impacting stakeholder relations and sustainability. The political landscape, notably following the 2024 U.S. elections, has reshaped perceptions and implementations of DEI initiatives. The re-election of Donald Trump signifies a pivotal moment, necessitating corporate adaptations to policy changes and evolving societal attitudes. This literature review synthesises existing research on the interplay between politics, corporate governance, and DEI strategies, aligning with the dissertation's research questions.

Aims and Objectives

This chapter aims to analyse how organisations maintain or modify their DEI policies in response to varying pressures and objectives. The exploration will involve literature reviews alongside analyses of press articles, statements, and publicly available materials.

Historical Development and Key Milestones

Evolution of DEI Policies

Professor Fairfax's "business rationale" outlines five justifications for DEI—talent, market, litigation, employee relations, and governance—highlighting how diverse teams enhance decision-making and corporate reputation (Dix, 2024).

Integrating human and social metrics into Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) frameworks is essential for business competitiveness, particularly in the GCC region, where current systems fail to reflect societal impacts (Awadallah, 2024).

Key DEI practices—hiring, retention, supportive relationships, and culturally relevant programs—strengthen efforts to address social stratification (Nayak et al., 2024).

Corporate responses to racial diversity intensified following George Floyd's murder. Firms with higher diversity faced stock market scrutiny, leading to shifts such as appointing non-white directors and establishing DEI departments (Balakrishnan et al., 2023).

Key Historical Milestones

Historical milestones and societal movements have shaped corporate DEI initiatives. Current DEI focuses often arise from societal pressures, leading organisations to favour symbolic actions like mission statements over substantive change (Levi et al., 2025).

Silver et al. (2025) provide evidence supporting DEI initiatives, indicating benefits such as enhanced workplace dynamics and performance, although organisations may encounter backlash during implementation. Long-term advantages, including an inclusive culture, are noteworthy.

Nayak et al. (2024) assert that DEI initiatives yield measurable benefits, such as improved hiring and retention, supportive relationships, and culturally relevant programmes. The evolution of DEI initiatives underscores the need for genuine engagement over superficial efforts.

Influence of Global Trends on U.S. Corporate DEI Policies

Global trends have shaped U.S. corporate DEI policies, driven by internationalisation and shifts in higher education. Efforts to diversify student and faculty populations reflect a broader push for inclusivity, influencing corporate practices (Özturgut, 2017).

Recognising diversity's benefits, organisations are reassessing DEI strategies. Diverse workforces foster innovation and attract talent, though gaps in business education case studies may hinder inclusive practices (Olusanya, 2023; Chavez-Varela et al., 2021).

Marginalised communities continue to face workplace challenges, underscoring the need for adaptive DEI policies. The evolving DEIB discourse highlights practical solutions and ongoing engagement (Ghio et al., 2024).

Stakeholder Expectations and Internal Pressures

Key Drivers of DEI Adoption

Successful DEI adoption depends on leadership, individual agency, and organisational structure. Empowering engagement is crucial for sustained initiatives (Ponting et al., 2023).

Systematic evaluations and clear expectations enhance progress, requiring dedicated resources like funding and staff (Royeen, 2023).

Effective communication and transparency support DEI in supply chains. Public companies benefit from greater resources and stakeholder engagement, while privately owned firms face scepticism and resistance (Shalpegin et al., 2025).

The Influence of Investors, Employees, and Consumers

Investors, employees, and consumers play key roles in shaping corporate DEI strategies. Fortune 100 firms publicly pledged DEI commitments by July 2022, reflecting broader societal concerns (Tang, 2024).

Employees' perceptions matter—73% view their workforce as diverse, while 64% feel diversity is valued. Yet, emotional burdens on HR and DEI professionals can hinder effectiveness (Olusanya, 2023).

Consumer perspectives also influence corporate DEI. Research in the casino sector shows DEI perceptions impact purchasing decisions, making alignment with consumer values crucial (Barsky, 2024).

Challenges Corporate Leaders Face in Implementing Sustainable DEI Initiatives

Corporate leaders face significant resistance, particularly from privileged groups sceptical of DEI's benefits, hindering supply chain and cultural integration (Shalpegin

et al., 2025). Cultural hegemony and unconscious biases further obstruct DEI's adoption in health education and corporate environments (Lazarus et al., 2023).

While integrating DEI into strategic frameworks is essential for regional growth and philanthropy, shifting from symbolic gestures to meaningful change remains difficult (Casey et al., 2021). The concentration of resources within a few corporations exacerbates social disparities, necessitating a balance between DEI and profit considerations (Issifu et al., 2023).

Institutional initiatives and structural reforms are crucial—individual efforts alone cannot resolve systemic inequities (Larkins, 2024). Leaders continue to grapple with embedding DEI at all organisational levels for sustained impact.

Political Influence on Corporate DEI Policies

Impact of U.S. Government Policies

U.S. policies have shaped corporate DEI, especially after the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, though political pressures have led some organisations to retract commitments (Gentry, 2024). DEI's role in the intelligence sector remains debated due to operational concerns.

Resistance persists in the corporate sector, with conservative movements and legal challenges prompting reassessments (Colvin, 2025). Despite diversity pledges, Fortune 500 companies often neglect businesses owned by individuals with disabilities, exposing implementation gaps (Goodman et al., 2024).

Gender diversity in governance influences corporate behaviour, including tax practices, with government efforts potentially fostering responsible conduct (Zhang et al., 2022).

Aligning stakeholder pressures with corporate interests can strengthen DEI strategies, highlighting the potential of policy-driven initiatives (Fichter et al., 2016).

Influence of the Trump Administration

The Trump administration's policies challenged corporate DEI initiatives, with an executive order targeting DEI effort in education and organisations, citing potential civil rights violations (Schwartz, 2025).

This stance created anxiety among corporate executives, prompting a shift in messaging toward "inclusion" and "underrepresented" while downplaying "diversity" (Salinger, 2025).

These actions align with broader anti-DEI legislation, weakening protections for vulnerable groups in higher education and corporate settings (Jones et al., 2024). As a result, organisations are reassessing DEI strategies amid legal and reputational risks (Gentry, 2024).

State vs. Federal DEI Regulations

Federal laws and social movements have shaped DEI policies over decades. Diversity programs in predominantly white institutions (PWIs) emerged after the

Higher Education Act of 1965 and student protests, supporting underrepresented groups (Patton et al., 2019).

Socio-political trends, especially during the 45th presidential administration, shaped diversity perceptions, often prioritising symbolism over meaningful change (Phillips and Thomas, 2024). Affirmative action expanded opportunities for minority groups, though effectiveness varies across countries (Gururaj et al., 2021). Recent Supreme Court rulings against affirmative action in college admissions have raised concerns about workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), while also reinforcing the need for anti-discrimination law compliance (Wisconsin Law Journal, 2023).

National policies continue influencing DEI, with executive orders on unlawful preferences affecting institutional funding and compliance. Federal actions sometimes clash with progressive state policies promoting diversity (Schwartz et al., 2025).

Public Discourse and Media Influence

Media Coverage's Influence

Media representation influences corporate DEI initiatives by shaping public perception, stakeholder engagement, and CSR compliance. A positive media presence fosters consumer trust, encouraging companies to align DEI strategies with media narratives to enhance reputation (Sukhotu et al., 2020).

Li (2024) highlights brand activism, particularly solidarity efforts among marginalised communities, which shape consumer views on shared destinies. Effective media communication strengthens DEI impact.

Irianto et al. (2021) note that media management affects CSR disclosures, with strategic handling amplifying positive exposure and indirectly shaping DEI strategies.

Public Perception of DEI Policies

Opinions on DEI vary across contexts and demographics. In health services, 53.4% of employees reported insufficient workforce representation, while nearly 40% perceived DEI efforts as tokenistic (Chantararat et al., 2023).

European research shows strong public support for diversity training and recruitment oversight, but weaker backing for workforce diversity monitoring, reflecting perceptions of policy effectiveness (Coenders et al., 2024).

EDI policies improve workplace environments but highlight disparities in application (Mbengue-Reiver et al., 2023). A Mayo Clinic study found broad DEI support but noted differing views among diverse groups (Enders et al., 2021).

Despite recognition, scepticism remains, particularly among marginalised communities. Organisations must ensure policies deliver tangible benefits for all employees (Weaver et al., 2025).

Corporate Responses to Political Backlash

Corporate Adaptation to Political Shifts

Organisations increasingly view DEI as essential for workforce productivity and culture, driven by regulatory scrutiny and societal expectations. In response to criticism, companies are refining DEI strategies with data-driven approaches and executive support to ensure measurable impact (Buttinger, 2023).

Integrating DEI into business strategies helps move beyond tokenism and harness diverse talent. While DEI statements in recruitment signal commitment, they may appear compliance-driven rather than authentic (Alahakoon et al., 2024).

To enhance effectiveness, organisations must refine DEI communication strategies to resonate with employees and candidates genuinely. Staying agile and evidence-driven enables companies to navigate political challenges while securing long-term advantages (Nittrouer et al., 2025).

Strategies for Sustaining DEI Initiatives

Sustaining DEI policies is essential for organisational success and social responsibility, driving employee engagement and long-term benefits like decision-making and morale (Dix, 2024). Research shows DEI enhances workplace culture and satisfaction, outweighing short-term risks (Nittrouer et al., 2025).

A strategic approach prioritises cultural transformation over compliance, fostering inclusivity beyond conventional training (Chavez & Weisinger, 2008). Integrating DEI theories into frameworks like family-supportive organisations strengthens effectiveness (Kossek et al., 2025).

Despite advantages, DEI initiatives face challenges, including policy disconnects causing disengagement, resource constraints (Rajagopalan et al., 2023), and compliance pressures (Davis, 2023). Effective measurement is crucial—without metrics, sustainability is compromised (Ruel et al., 2024).

Maintaining DEI Initiatives Over Time

Strong leadership is essential (Taylor et al., 2022). Inclusive strategies enhance employee well-being and require continuous assessment based on feedback (Olusanya, 2023). Organisations must adapt to evolving DEI landscapes, especially amid restrictive legislation (Jackson, 2025). Visible leadership commitment fosters diversity, inclusion, engagement, and innovation (Leuhery et al., 2024). Employee resource groups further strengthen belonging (Royeen, 2024).

Factors Driving DEI Resilience

Community nurturing and inclusive cultures sustain DEI, particularly in crises (Lamba et al., 2022). Employee engagement—flexible roles, decision-making involvement, and open communication—enhance DEI policy effectiveness (Nkansah-Dwamena, 2024).

Legislative pressures influence DEI sustainability, requiring adaptive strategies to uphold commitments (Helms Pickett et al., 2025). Values-based leadership supports

DEI efforts amid challenges, reinforcing organisational resilience (Gasman et al., 2025).

Examples of Corporations Maintaining DEI Initiatives

Despite recent political shifts and increased scrutiny, several corporations have remained committed to DEI initiatives:

Disney

In March 2025, Disney shareholders rejected a proposal to withdraw from the Human Rights Campaign's Corporate Equality Index, affirming the company's commitment to an inclusive workplace (Edmonds, 2025).

Costco

The board unanimously rejected a proposal to assess DEI-related risks, asserting that its DEI efforts enhance employee attraction and retention (ASBN Newsroom, 2025).

Goldman Sachs

The firm continues to prioritise diverse representation, recognising that a diverse work environment is crucial for meeting client needs (Brent, 2025).

McKinsey & Company

Senior Partner Shelley Stewart III emphasised DEI's importance to corporate success in January 2025 (O'Loughlin, 2025).

NFL

Commissioner Roger Goodell stated in December 2024 that the league's commitment to DEI is vital for its improvement (O'Loughlin, 2025).

Logitech

The company promoted DEI by supporting women's professional esports players, showcasing its commitment to inclusivity (O'Loughlin, 2025).

Ben & Jerry's

Following the 2024 election, the company reaffirmed its commitment to DEI values, expressing solidarity with marginalised communities (O'Loughlin, 2025).

Examples of Companies Facing Backlash for DEI Efforts

Several companies have faced backlash for their DEI initiatives and responded by altering or reevaluating their approaches:

JPMorgan Chase

In March 2025, the company renamed its internal DEI organisation to "Diversity, Opportunity, and Inclusion" (DOI) and modified its programmes in response to directives from the Trump administration (Franey, 2025).

Tractor Supply Co.

In June 2024, the company updated its DEI initiatives, halting contributions to the Human Rights Campaign and removing DEI-focused positions (Grantham-Philips and Hadero, 2024).

John Deere Co.

In late 2024, the company reduced its DEI initiatives due to mounting political and legal challenges (Telford, 2024).

Meta

In the weeks leading up to President Trump's second inauguration, Meta discontinued its DEI programmes following new executive orders (Sherman, 2025).

Google

Following executive orders from the Trump administration, Google publicly stepped back from its DEI efforts, citing adherence to new federal guidelines (Guardian staff reporter, 2025).

Answers to Introduction Chapter Research Questions

How do rapid political changes influence corporate DEI strategies?

In recent years, the conversation surrounding Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) has gained unprecedented momentum within corporate America. As societal movements catalyse discussions on equity and representation, the influence of political shifts on DEI strategies has become increasingly apparent. This report aims to investigate how rapid political changes, particularly in the U.S., shape corporate DEI initiatives, examining the mechanisms of this influence, the internal and external factors driving DEI policy modifications, stakeholder responses to changes, and the associated risks and rewards of altering DEI policies.

The Importance of DEI in Corporations

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion are critical elements of modern corporate strategies. They not only reflect the values of companies but also influence stakeholder relationships and promote long-term sustainability. DEI initiatives contribute to enhanced decision-making, improved corporate reputation, and better employee relations. However, the implementation and perception of these initiatives are profoundly shaped by the political landscape, which poses both challenges and opportunities for organisations striving for genuine inclusivity.

The Mechanisms Through Which Political Changes Influence Corporate DEI Strategies

Executive Orders and Legislation

The political landscape significantly influences the operational framework within which corporations function. Under the Trump administration, executive actions explicitly targeted DEI practices in educational and corporate settings, labelling some initiatives as unlawful. This shift created legal uncertainties that led many companies to dilute or abandon their DEI efforts altogether (Schwartz, 2025). For instance, an executive order aimed at eliminating DEI training programs in federal agencies and contractors illustrated a stark governmental push against established diversity initiatives. The repercussions of such policies reverberated throughout the corporate

sector, prompting firms to reassess their commitments to diversity in light of potential legal challenges.

Case Study: The Impact of Executive Orders

A notable example of the impact of executive orders can be observed in the case of several large corporations that, in response to the new federal directives, chose to curtail their DEI programs. Companies such as Google and Meta re-evaluated their public-facing diversity initiatives, citing alignment with governmental directives as the rationale for their actions (Press, 2025; Guardian, 2025). These instances highlight how political mandates can swiftly alter the corporate landscape, forcing companies to adjust their strategies to comply with governmental expectations.

Regulatory Fear and Compliance Culture

The regulatory environment surrounding DEI initiatives has fostered a culture of compliance that prioritises risk management over progressive social policies. Many corporations became wary of potential lawsuits and compliance violations, leading them to adopt more neutral language, such as “opportunity” or “inclusion,” instead of explicitly using terms like “diversity” (Salinger, 2025). This regulatory fear often results in organisations prioritising adherence to the law over the implementation of meaningful DEI strategies.

Consequences of a Compliance-Oriented Culture

The shift towards a compliance-oriented culture can lead to superficial DEI efforts that fail to effect genuine change. Companies may implement policies that appear robust on the surface yet lack the structural support necessary for transformation. This risk-averse approach can hinder innovation and prevent organisations from exploring bold, new initiatives aimed at fostering inclusivity. The chilling effect on innovative DEI programs, particularly those involving race- or gender-based hiring incentives, further illustrates the complexities of navigating these regulatory landscapes (Wisconsin Law Journal, 2023).

Chilling Effect on Innovation

Concerns about violating civil rights laws and the potential for litigation have led many firms to halt innovative DEI programs. This chilling effect has particularly affected initiatives that involve race- or gender-based hiring incentives, even in the absence of direct legal mandates requiring such caution (Wisconsin Law Journal, 2023). The hesitance to implement bold DEI strategies reflects a broader trend where companies perceive the need to tread cautiously to avoid backlash.

The Cost of Innovation Stagnation

The stagnation of innovative DEI initiatives can have far-reaching consequences for organisations. By failing to pursue progressive diversity strategies, companies risk losing out on the competitive advantages that come from a diverse workforce. Research indicates that diverse teams often outperform their homogeneous counterparts in decision-making and problem-solving (Dix, 2024). Thus, the chilling effect on innovation not only limits the potential for positive social impact but also undermines the business case for diversity.

What internal and external factors drive DEI policy modifications?

Internal Drivers

Leadership Commitment

The commitment of senior leadership is critical in initiating and sustaining DEI programs. When leadership prioritises DEI, firms are more likely to allocate the necessary funding, personnel, and strategic alignment required for effective implementation (Leuhery et al., 2024). The presence of leaders who advocate for diversity and inclusion helps foster an organisational culture that values these principles, ensuring that DEI policies are integrated into the corporate ethos rather than treated as peripheral initiatives.

The Role of Internal Perceptions

Internal perceptions—especially among HR professionals and marginalised employees—shape the design and perceived legitimacy of DEI initiatives (Nkansah-Dwamena, 2024; Olusanya, 2023). Engaging diverse employees in shaping DEI policies enhances their legitimacy and effectiveness, fostering an environment where all employees feel valued and respected. Active involvement of employees in DEI decision-making processes can lead to more meaningful outcomes and greater buy-in from the workforce.

Institutional Mechanisms

Without institutional mechanisms such as diversity councils, Employee Resource Groups (ERGs), and metrics, DEI efforts often remain performative rather than transformational (Royeen, 2023). Establishing these frameworks facilitates ongoing evaluation and accountability, promoting genuine progress toward diversity and inclusion objectives.

External Drivers

Political and Regulatory Changes

Political changes at the national or state level directly shape what is legally permissible or advisable in DEI frameworks (Phillips and Thomas, 2024). Recent legal decisions, including rulings on affirmative action, underscore the complexity of navigating DEI policies within a shifting regulatory landscape. The evolution of these laws can influence how corporations craft their DEI initiatives, compelling them to reconsider their strategies in light of new legal realities.

The Influence of ESG-Focused Investors

Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG)-focused investors assess DEI commitments as part of governance and social responsibility. Increased DEI engagement is linked to higher innovation, reduced cost of equity, and improved ESG scores (Cieřlik et al., 2024; Jenkins et al., 2022). This growing emphasis on ESG metrics compels organisations to prioritise DEI as a strategic imperative, aligning their initiatives with investor expectations and societal values.

Consumer Expectations

Diversity in branding and perceived inclusion efforts significantly influence consumer loyalty and market perception, particularly among younger demographics (Khan et al., 2022). Today's consumers increasingly favour brands that reflect their values, prompting organisations to adopt more inclusive practices to retain customer loyalty and market share. Companies that fail to address DEI concerns risk alienating their customer base and suffering potential reputational damage.

Media Visibility

Media visibility both amplifies and scrutinises corporate DEI strategies, influencing public and stakeholder sentiment (Li, 2024; Khan & Sukhotu, 2020). Corporations are acutely aware of how their DEI initiatives are portrayed in the media, prompting them to be more transparent and accountable in their efforts. The interplay between media coverage and corporate actions can either bolster or undermine the credibility of DEI initiatives.

Systemic Interplay

Effective DEI policy development hinges on a continuous feedback loop between internal evaluation and external pressure. Misalignment between the two often leads to policy erosion or backlash. To ensure the sustainability of DEI initiatives, organisations must remain vigilant in assessing internal and external factors that may influence their strategies and adapt accordingly.

How do stakeholders respond to changes in DEI policies?

Investors

Long-term Value Creation

Investors increasingly link DEI performance with long-term value creation, particularly in ESG contexts. Firms with diverse leadership are perceived as more innovative and better governed (Jenkins et al., 2022). This perspective encourages organisations to view DEI not merely as a compliance issue but as a strategic asset that can enhance their competitive advantage. By prioritising DEI, companies can position themselves favourably in the eyes of investors who seek sustainable and responsible business practices.

Competing Demands

Conservative political donors and activist investors may push against DEI initiatives, perceiving them as ideological or risky. This tension forces companies to navigate competing investor demands (Tomlinson et al., 2021). As organisations seek to balance these divergent perspectives, they must carefully consider how their DEI strategies align with investor expectations and the potential impact on their reputations and financial performance.

Employees

Advocacy and Activism

Employees often champion DEI efforts, particularly in the wake of social justice movements such as the George Floyd protests. Activism includes pushing for authentic change, resisting tokenism, and demanding transparency (Sanyal et al., 2015; Manufacturing.net, 2025). This grassroots advocacy underscores the importance of employee engagement in shaping effective DEI initiatives. When employees feel empowered to voice their concerns, organisations are more likely to implement meaningful changes that reflect the values of their workforce.

Disengagement Risks

If DEI policies are perceived as symbolic or superficial, employees may disengage or choose to exit the organisation. Gaps between policy and practice, particularly regarding age and disability inclusion, fuel scepticism (Chaudhry, 2023; Klinksiek, 2024). To avoid alienating their workforce, organisations must ensure that their DEI initiatives translate into meaningful actions that resonate with employees' experiences and expectations.

Consumers

Moral Indicators

Consumers interpret DEI efforts as moral indicators, with a lack of authenticity or policy regression potentially leading to brand boycotts or reputational damage. Strong DEI practices enhance customer trust and loyalty, particularly in values-driven markets (Barsky, 2024; Khan et al., 2022). As consumer expectations evolve, organisations must remain attuned to the implications of their DEI strategies on brand perception and customer relationships. In an era of heightened social awareness, consumers are more likely to scrutinise corporate behaviours and demand accountability.

Public and Media

Legitimacy and Scrutiny

Media scrutiny can both legitimise and delegitimise DEI efforts. Coverage emphasising solidarity, authenticity, and tangible outcomes resonates positively, while narratives of tokenism or hypocrisy can erode public support (Li, 2024; Irianto et al., 2021). Organisations must proactively manage their public narratives to reinforce their commitments to DEI and mitigate potential reputational risks. The relationship between media coverage and corporate actions is complex; organisations must be mindful of public perceptions and the potential impact on their brand image.

What are the risks and rewards of altering DEI policies?

Risks

Public Backlash

Perceived backtracking on DEI can lead to public backlash, employee disengagement, and negative media coverage (Weaver et al., 2025). The ramifications of such backlash can extend beyond immediate reputational damage, impacting employee morale and retention. Companies that fail to uphold their DEI commitments risk alienating their workforce and losing valuable talent.

Legal Scrutiny

Inconsistent DEI applications—especially around quotas or hiring preferences—can expose firms to litigation or regulatory scrutiny. The legal landscape surrounding DEI is complex and evolving, necessitating careful navigation to avoid potential pitfalls. Companies must remain vigilant in their compliance efforts and ensure that their DEI initiatives adhere to legal standards.

Systemic Biases

Scaling down DEI can reintroduce systemic biases, undermine inclusive environments, and demoralise historically marginalised employees (Nkansah-Dwamena, 2024). The potential for regression in diversity efforts poses significant risks to organisational culture and employee engagement. Companies that fail to address systemic inequalities may face long-term consequences that hinder their overall success.

Talent Loss

Organisations risk losing high-potential, diverse talent due to perceived exclusion or lack of support for identity-based needs (Chakraborty et al., 2024). Retaining diverse talent is critical for fostering innovation and driving organisational success, making it imperative for firms to prioritise inclusive practices. The loss of diverse talent can

also hinder organisational performance and limit the ability to serve diverse customer bases.

Rewards

Enhanced Innovation

Companies that embed DEI authentically report enhanced innovation, employee engagement, and customer reach (Nittrouer et al., 2025). The integration of diverse perspectives fosters creativity and problem-solving, ultimately contributing to better business outcomes. By embracing diversity, organisations can harness the full potential of their workforce and drive meaningful change.

Competitive Advantage

Strong DEI positioning can distinguish a brand in competitive or global markets where inclusion is a priority (Olusanya, 2023). As consumer expectations evolve, brands that prioritise DEI are likely to resonate more strongly with their target audiences. Companies that demonstrate a genuine commitment to diversity and inclusion may find themselves better positioned to attract and retain customers.

Financial Returns

Empirical evidence ties diverse leadership and inclusive cultures to better financial returns and ESG rankings, attracting investors and consumers (Cieřlik et al., 2024; Jenkins et al., 2022). The ability to demonstrate a genuine commitment to DEI can enhance a firm's reputation and market position. Companies that prioritise DEI as part of their corporate strategy are likely to experience improved financial performance and stakeholder engagement.

Resilience

DEI efforts rooted in long-term strategy—not trend-based compliance—build resilience during social, political, or economic disruptions (Kossek et al., 2025). By embedding DEI into their core strategies, organisations can navigate challenges more effectively and sustain their commitment to diversity and inclusion. This resilience is particularly important in an era marked by rapid change and uncertainty.

Conclusion

In conclusion, rapid political changes significantly influence corporate DEI strategies, shaping the mechanisms through which organisations adapt to evolving expectations. Internal and external factors driving DEI policy modifications underscore the importance of leadership commitment, stakeholder engagement, and responsiveness to regulatory changes. Stakeholders, including investors, employees, and consumers, play crucial roles in shaping DEI initiatives, while the risks and rewards associated with altering these policies highlight the complexities of navigating the DEI landscape. As organisations strive to balance compliance with genuine commitment to diversity and inclusion, they must remain vigilant in assessing the impact of political dynamics on their strategies and outcomes. Ultimately, the organisations that prioritise DEI strategically are likely to thrive in an increasingly diverse and socially conscious marketplace.

Additional Considerations and Future Directions

The Evolving Nature of DEI Policies

As the socio-political environment continues to evolve, organisations must remain agile in their DEI policies. The growing recognition of intersectionality and the need

for inclusive practices that address the unique challenges faced by various demographic groups will necessitate a nuanced approach to DEI. Future policies must be informed by ongoing research and dialogue within the corporate sector, ensuring that they are responsive to the changing landscape.

Engaging Stakeholders in DEI Initiatives

An essential aspect of successful DEI strategies lies in the active engagement of stakeholders. Companies should foster a culture of inclusion by involving employees at all levels in the development and implementation of DEI initiatives. This participatory approach not only enhances the legitimacy of DEI policies but also empowers employees to take ownership of diversity efforts within their organisations.

The Role of Data and Metrics in DEI

Data-driven decision-making is crucial for the effective implementation of DEI initiatives. Organisations must establish metrics to evaluate the impact of their DEI policies and track progress over time. By leveraging data analytics, companies can identify areas for improvement and make informed decisions that align with their diversity goals.

Building a Sustainable DEI Framework

For DEI initiatives to be effective, they must be integrated into the broader organisational strategy. Companies should focus on creating sustainable frameworks that prioritise diversity and inclusion as core values. This integration will not only enhance the effectiveness of DEI efforts but also position organisations as leaders in corporate social responsibility.

Conclusion

The path forward for corporate DEI strategies is fraught with challenges yet filled with opportunities for meaningful change. By understanding the complexities of the political landscape and the factors influencing DEI policies, organisations can develop comprehensive strategies that not only comply with legal requirements but also reflect a genuine commitment to diversity and inclusion. As companies navigate this evolving terrain, their ability to adapt and innovate will be critical in shaping a more equitable and inclusive corporate environment.

Word count: 4570

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology adopted to examine how the 2024 U.S. elections and subsequent political shifts impact corporate Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) strategies. The focus is on understanding how organisations navigate tensions between evolving stakeholder expectations and increasing political pressures.

Research Aim

To analyse how the 2024 U.S. elections and subsequent political shifts impact corporate DEI strategies, examining how organisations balance stakeholder demands with changing political pressures.

Research Objectives

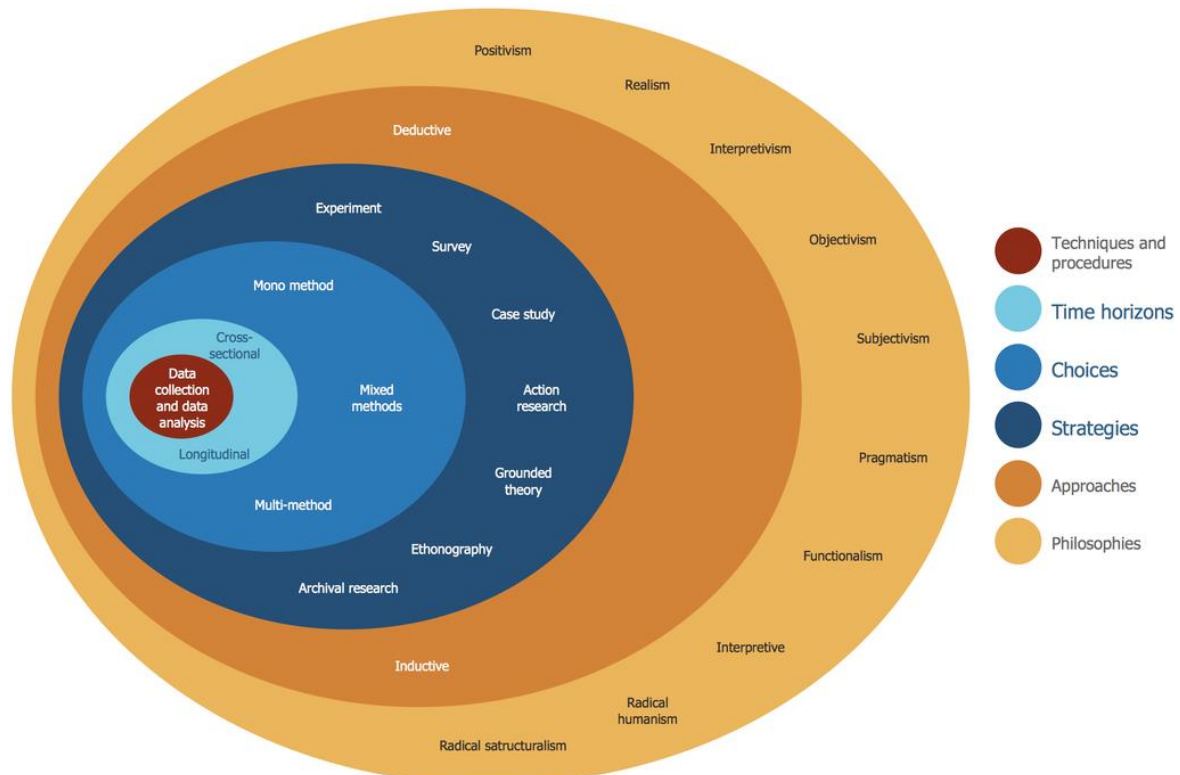
1. To examine how the results of the 2024 U.S. elections and shifts in the political landscape influence the company's approach to DEI:
2. To investigate how companies strike a balance between stakeholder demands and changes in the political environment.
3. To explore how organisations sustain or evolve their DEI policies in response to both internal and external pressures and goals.
4. To understand how stakeholders are reacting to changes in DEI policies within the context of the shifting political landscape.
5. To formulate recommendations based on evidence and analysis of data gathered about how companies are navigating the challenges associated with DEI amidst these political changes.

Research Questions

1. How do rapid political changes, such as Donald Trump's victory in the 2024 elections, influence corporate DEI strategies?
2. What internal and external factors drive companies to modify their DEI policies?
3. How do stakeholders—such as employees, investors, and customers—respond to changes in DEI policies?
4. What are the potential risks and rewards of altering DEI policies from an internal governance perspective?

Research Framework

This chapter will apply the Research Onion framework to examine how the 2024 U.S. elections influence corporate Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) strategies, detailing each methodological layer in depth.



Source: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/exploring-depths-research-design-revealing-layers-onion-borg-ellul/>

Research Philosophy

This study adopts an interpretivist philosophy to explore how organisations experience and respond to socio-political shifts in the DEI space. By prioritising stakeholder meaning-making, it supports Objective 2 through contextual insights into how internal culture interacts with external pressures.

Interpretivism emphasises subjective experience within social contexts, offering a nuanced understanding of identity, discourse, and power—particularly relevant in disciplines like sociology and anthropology (Johnston et al., 2022).

However, the approach faces criticism. Kapilima (2024) notes concerns around methodological rigour, replication, and generalisability due to its subjective nature. Wainwright et al. (2000) add that exclusive reliance on qualitative data may obscure broader trends detectable through quantitative methods.

Kapilima (2024) further highlights the philosophical ambiguity, where the overlap between interpretivism and positivism can complicate research communication and epistemological clarity.

Despite these limitations, interpretivism enables a rich and context-sensitive analysis of DEI strategies. Researchers must remain transparent and reflexive to uphold credibility and mitigate bias.

Research Approach

An inductive approach was employed to allow themes and patterns to emerge from qualitative data, rather than testing pre-existing theories. This aligns with Objectives 2 and 3 by enabling theoretical insights from stakeholder responses and secondary discourse. Its flexibility supports exploration of complex social issues such as DEI, where organisational culture and employee experience shape outcomes (Vears et al., 2022).

While inductive content analysis facilitates the discovery of unexpected patterns, it presents challenges. Armat et al. (2018) note its labour-intensive nature and potential for bias due to subjective interpretation. The absence of a predefined framework can blur distinctions between inductive and deductive reasoning. Bergdahl et al. (2025) add that the creative demands of theory-building may obscure the role of inductive logic.

Despite these limitations, the approach offers valuable insights into DEI adoption. Researchers must ensure transparency and analytical rigour to enhance credibility and minimise interpretive bias (O’Kane et al., 2021).

Research Strategy

Grounded theory underpins the study’s strategic orientation, enabling the development of context-specific theoretical frameworks based on stakeholder experiences and organisational materials. This approach supports Objectives 1–4 by examining how DEI adapts under political pressure.

Its strength lies in generating theory directly from empirical data, making it well-suited to exploring complex social processes in organisational contexts (Pulla, 2014; Whiteside et al., 2012). It also accommodates diverse data sources, including secondary materials, broadening the analytical scope.

However, grounded theory presents challenges. Its non-linear, iterative nature can be problematic for novice researchers to navigate (Sosa-Díaz et al., 2022; Chun Tie et al., 2019). Subjective interpretation and difficulties in achieving saturation may affect theoretical robustness (Pulla, 2014). In digital contexts, adapting grounded theory to online data introduces further complexity (Bonfim, 2020).

While offering valuable flexibility and depth, successful application requires methodological clarity and reflexivity to ensure credibility.

Research Method Choice

The study adopts a mixed-methods qualitative design, integrating interviews and questionnaires to ensure epistemological consistency and methodological depth. This approach supports Objectives 2 and 3 and addresses Research Questions 2 and 3 by enabling a multi-perspective analysis of complex organisational phenomena.

Mixed-methods designs strategically combine both qualitative and quantitative research elements to provide a comprehensive understanding of complex issues. This approach enhances data interpretation by allowing researchers to analyse

numerical data alongside detailed textual insights, thereby capturing nuanced stakeholder viewpoints that might be overlooked with a single-method approach. Such designs are particularly valuable in fields such as business and management, where understanding both measurable outcomes and contextual factors is crucial for informed decision-making (Krivokapic-Skoko et al., 2011; Battista et al., 2025).

The integration of qualitative and quantitative methods enables systematic analysis across larger samples, thereby increasing the breadth of data while preserving the depth and richness of contextual information, which is vital for developing actionable insights and tailored strategies.

However, challenges remain. Battista et al. (2025) note that integrating data strands can be challenging, as it risks misinterpretation. Aschbrenner et al. (2022) emphasise the need for careful planning to ensure coherence across sources. For novice researchers, the complexity may hinder full utilisation of the method's benefits (Battista et al., 2025).

Despite these limitations, the design enhances credibility and breadth, offering a robust framework for triangulating stakeholder insights and organisational discourse.

Research Time Horizon

A cross-sectional time horizon is selected to capture organisational responses during a fixed period following the 2024 U.S. elections. This design provides a snapshot of strategic reactions, helpful in identifying short-term shifts and stakeholder perceptions related to Objective 4.

This method collects data once per subject, making it suitable for descriptive or exploratory research. However, cross-sectional designs often fail to evaluate causal relationships due to the lack of temporal sequences essential for causality. To mitigate these issues, researchers employ strategies like retrospective analyses and experimental survey designs. (Criminology, 2020).

Mann (2003) notes that cross-sectional designs are commonly used in observational research to assess prevalence and are generally simpler to execute compared to cohort or case-control studies. These latter designs enable the measurement of events over time, allowing for a more apparent distinction between cause and effect. Nonetheless, the failure of cross-sectional studies to track changes over time can lead to substantial discrepancies in results when compared with longitudinal studies. (Benagey et al., 2023).

Research Techniques and Procedures

Data collection involves two complementary qualitative techniques:

Semi-Structured Interviews

These interviews will be conducted with DEI leads and other relevant stakeholders within selected organisations. Their flexibility encourages candid reflection and narrative depth, allowing exploration of how strategies align with or diverge from stakeholder expectations and political climates, contributing to Objectives 1, 2, and 4.

Semi-structured interviews create a relaxed atmosphere that promotes candid conversations among interviewers and participants, improving objectivity and relationships, particularly in evaluations of health information systems. Their adaptable nature facilitates thorough examination of subjects, allowing for adjustments to questions based on responses to gather meaningful qualitative data. Nevertheless, this casual approach may diminish the perceived significance of the findings, potentially leading to a reduction in the credibility of the recommendations. (Bogaert, 2022).

Furthermore, depending on technology for interviews can lead to issues of digital exclusion. Some participants may encounter obstacles related to access, devices, and technical skills, which could affect the representativeness of the data gathered. (Kennedy et al., 2021).

In addition, examining data collected from semi-structured interviews can be intricate. The necessity to categorise interviews into themes and relate contexts, mechanisms, and outcomes can pose difficulties, as demonstrated by the creation of innovative methods for assessing qualitative data. (Jackson, et al., 2021). This complexity may affect the clarity and reliability of the findings derived from such interviews.

Surveys & Open Questionnaires

Surveys and open-ended questionnaires were used to supplement interview data, broadening stakeholder perspectives on DEI shifts, organisational priorities, and political influences. Distributed to a wider pool, these qualitative responses supported Objective 4 and informed Research Question 3 by helping validate emerging thematic patterns.

Open formats offer depth and diversity in responses, generating richer insights than fixed designs (Kunz et al., 2022). Online platforms also improved usability and data reliability (Soni et al., 2024). However, challenges remain: Lenzner et al. (2024) note that participants may provide brief or unclear answers, especially in web-based formats. Zhang et al. (2025) raise concerns about generative AI use, which can produce uniform and potentially biased responses, masking variation in stakeholder views.

While surveys enhanced the breadth of data, careful interpretation was required to maintain validity and ensure nuanced analysis of stakeholder sentiment.

Secondary Data Analysis

Public statements, press articles, and corporate disclosures were analysed to examine how organisations communicate DEI commitments and changes. This triangulation enriched the findings by cross-referencing stakeholder perceptions with official discourse, directly supporting Objective 3 and Research Question 1.

Secondary research offers key advantages, including the ability to reinterpret existing data for new theoretical insights (Nimon, 2015) and the feasibility of sharing de-identified qualitative data while maintaining confidentiality (Friedrich et al., 2023).

However, it presents limitations. Methodological challenges differ from those in primary data collection (Greenhoot et al., 2012), and reliance on pre-existing datasets may constrain the scope of inquiry if data do not align with specific research aims (Haile, 2025).

Despite these constraints, secondary sources provided valuable context and supported the study's multi-perspective analysis of DEI discourse.

Sampling Strategy

The sample includes both interviewees and questionnaire respondents, such as DEI officers, HR executives, and mid-level managers. By selecting participants with direct relevance, the study enhances rigour and ensures responses are aligned with the study's aim and Objectives 2 and 4.

The study employs purposive sampling, a non-probability method that selects participants based on characteristics aligned with the research objectives. This approach enhances rigour and trustworthiness by improving data quality, reliability, and contextual relevance. It enables researchers to target meaningful subgroups and supports credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability across diverse settings (Campbell et al., 2020).

According to Setia (2016), purposive sampling, unlike probability sampling, relies on the researcher's judgment tailored to the study's needs. It is effective for understanding specific phenomena within a population rather than generalising findings. Researchers must articulate their sampling methods clearly in manuscripts to prevent misrepresentation. This clarity maintains research integrity and ensures alignment with objectives.

Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to code and interpret qualitative data from interviews, surveys, and secondary sources. Its theoretical flexibility enabled the inductive generation of themes across diverse data types, supporting rigorous analysis aligned with Objectives 2 and 4. This adaptability-enhanced pattern recognition across stakeholder groups.

The method's accessibility and alignment with multiple epistemological frameworks make it suitable for researchers at all levels of experience (Kiger et al., 2020). Its flexibility allows tailoring to specific research contexts, enriching insights into complex phenomena (Ozuem et al., 2024).

However, thematic analysis faces criticism for its conceptual ambiguity, which can lead to inconsistent application and misinterpretation of findings (Hole, 2024). Strict adherence to specific guidelines may also constrain exploration of deeper meanings in the data (Ozuem et al., 2024).

Despite these limitations, thematic analysis provided a robust framework for identifying stakeholder narratives and organisational discourse across multiple sources.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent, confidentiality, and data protection were strictly upheld, with only publicly available secondary data used. Ethical protocols were reviewed for remote digital tools in interviews and surveys, aligning with standards outlined in Techniques and Procedures.

Ethical challenges in information research remain complex. Boustead et al. (2020) highlight that while leaked data may offer insights, it poses risks beyond current ethical frameworks, requiring researchers to minimise harm to human subjects. Golder et al. (2017) argue that ethical evaluations should be evidence-based and tailored to each project.

The study prioritised consent and transparency, acknowledging debates around public benefit versus participant protection. Ethical gaps in non-English research—such as translation barriers and intermediary roles—were also taken into consideration (Eaton, 2020).

Overview of collected data

Semi-Structured Interviews

Four semi-structured interviews were conducted with senior professionals directly involved in shaping or implementing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) strategies within large organisations. Participants were selected for their strategic oversight of DEI initiatives and their experience navigating politically sensitive environments, particularly in the context of the 2024 U.S. elections. Recruitment was purposive, initiated via professional networks and LinkedIn, with follow-up invitations sent by email.

The participants included:

- P1 – DEI consultant to a UK-based energy company
- P2 – DEI consultant advising both UK and U.S. firms
- P3 – DEI and Culture Lead at a global energy consultancy and services firm
- P4 – DEI Specialist working within the UK construction sector

Ethical considerations included:

- Informed consent was obtained before participation
- Anonymisation of transcripts and removal of identifiable organisational details
- Secure storage of audio files and transcripts in compliance with GDPR
- Right to withdraw at any stage without consequence

The semi-structured format allowed for consistency in core questions while enabling participants to elaborate on context-specific challenges and strategies.

Recruitment challenges and mitigation

Despite extensive outreach, securing interview participation proved more difficult than anticipated. Nearly 300 DEI professionals were contacted via LinkedIn, alumni networks, and sector-specific forums, with personalised messages outlining the study's aims, ethical safeguards, and potential contributions.

This yielded four successful interviews. Contributing factors to the low response rate included limited availability among senior professionals, topic sensitivity amid political scrutiny, organisational gatekeeping requiring internal approvals, and survey fatigue due to an increase in research requests.

To address the small sample size, the study employed methodological triangulation. The interviews were supplemented by 13 anonymous questionnaire responses, broadening organisational and stakeholder perspectives. Secondary data—such as reports, press releases, and public statements—provided contextual depth within sectoral and socio-political trends.

This multi-source strategy enhanced credibility and transferability. The convergence of insights across interviews, surveys, and documents strengthened the empirical grounding and practical relevance of the study's recommendations.

Open-Ended Questionnaires

The questionnaire attracted 13 respondents (S1-S13) representing a cross-section of organisational roles and functional responsibilities within the DEI ecosystem. While the survey did not capture detailed personal demographic data such as age, gender, or ethnicity, the professional diversity of the sample provides valuable insight into the range of perspectives informing the study.

Roles in relation to DEI policy

Analysis of the “role in shaping DEI policies” question indicates that respondents occupy positions spanning both strategic and operational levels:

- HR Leaders – responsible for integrating DEI into broader human capital strategies and overseeing policy implementation.
- DEI Officers – dedicated specialists tasked with designing, monitoring, and evaluating DEI initiatives.
- Executives – senior decision-makers with authority to allocate resources and set organisational priorities.
- Analysts – professionals contributing data-driven insights to inform DEI planning and evaluation.
- Hiring Managers – operational leaders influencing recruitment practices and candidate selection.
- People Managers – line managers responsible for embedding inclusive behaviours within teams.
- Specialist Roles (e.g., Tendering Specialist / Commercial Operations) – individuals whose primary functions intersect with DEI through supplier diversity, bid compliance, or client engagement requirements.
- Policy Implementers – employees who apply DEI policies in their day-to-day work without direct responsibility for their design.

Geographic and sectoral spread

Although the questionnaire did not explicitly request location data, qualitative responses indicate participation from both U.S.-based and international organisations, including those from the U.K. and E.U.

Sectoral diversity is reflected in the role descriptions, with participants drawn from various sectors, including technology, professional services, consumer goods, and other corporate environments.

Implications for analysis

The mix of strategic, operational, and specialist roles ensures that the dataset captures both policy-level perspectives and practical implementation experiences. This diversity strengthens the thematic analysis by allowing triangulation between those who set DEI direction and those who execute it, revealing potential alignment gaps or tensions between strategy and practice.

Distribution method

The questionnaire was hosted on a secure online survey platform, with invitations sent via email and LinkedIn direct messaging. The open-ended format encouraged detailed, narrative-style responses, enabling thematic coding that aligned with the interview data.

Secondary Data Sources

To triangulate primary data, a targeted review of corporate reports, press releases, and public statements was undertaken.

Selection criteria included:

- Relevance to DEI strategy, governance, or stakeholder engagement
- Publication between January 2024 and August 2025
- Availability from credible corporate or institutional sources
- Inclusion of measurable DEI commitments or evidence of strategic adaptation

Key sources included the following:

- Meritage Homes 2024 Sustainability and Corporate Responsibility Report – illustrating shifts in DEI terminology and integration into broader ESG frameworks. Meritage Homes (2024)
- Forbes analysis on DEI rollbacks and women’s leadership representation – contextualising political and economic pressures on corporate DEI. Cox (2025).
- BPI Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Report 2024 – an example of a sector-specific DEI strategy with measurable outcomes. British Phonographic Industry (2024).
- World Economic Forum – Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Lighthouses 2024 – highlighting global best practices and “lighthouse” initiatives. World Economic Forum (2024).
- Google 2024 Diversity Annual Report – demonstrating transparency in workforce demographics and inclusion initiatives. Google (2024)

These sources were analysed using a structured content analysis framework, focusing on:

- Framing of DEI (business case vs. moral imperative)
- Terminology shifts (e.g., “Inclusion, Culture and Belonging” replacing “DEI”)
- Commitment levels (presence of measurable goals, budget allocations, governance structures)
- Stakeholder signalling (public statements, shareholder communications, media positioning).

The integration of secondary data offered both contextual depth and comparative benchmarks, allowing the primary findings to be positioned within broader corporate and socio-political trends.

Methodological Limitations

The research methodology was carefully aligned with the study's interpretivist and inductive foundations, yet several limitations emerged during execution that warrant critical reflection.

Limited Interview Uptake and Strategic Adaptation

A key limitation was the low response rate to semi-structured interviews. Despite initial plans to conduct eight to ten interviews to ensure thematic saturation and depth, only four interviews were secured, supplemented by one additional informal stakeholder conversation. This shortfall was primarily due to time constraints, gatekeeper delays, and participant hesitancy in politically sensitive contexts. As a result, the study transitioned from a mono-method qualitative design to a mixed qualitative approach, incorporating 13 open-ended questionnaire responses and secondary corporate disclosures.

While interviews typically offer richer, more nuanced data through dialogic probing, the inclusion of questionnaires broadened participant access and captured a wider range of perspectives. This strategic pivot-maintained alignment with Saunders' Research Onion and upheld the interpretivist commitment to contextually grounded meaning-making. However, it also introduced variability in data richness, with questionnaire responses occasionally lacking the depth and spontaneity of live interviews.

Triangulation as a Validity Safeguard

To address potential bias and uneven data quality, a triangulation strategy was employed. Thematic analysis across interviews, questionnaires, and secondary data enabled cross-validation of patterns. This approach improved internal validity by identifying recurring themes across different formats and groups, reducing reliance on any one source.

Triangulation reduced researcher bias because themes were supported by multiple sources. For example, the theme of "strategic reframing of DEI terminology" was validated through interview quotes (P1, P2), questionnaire responses (S4, S9), and ESG disclosures. This multi-source verification increased robustness and offset the small interview pool.

Philosophical and Analytical Constraints

The interpretivist paradigm, while well-suited to exploring subjective stakeholder experiences, inherently limits generalisability. Its emphasis on context-specific meaning-making can be misinterpreted as lacking rigour, particularly when contrasted with positivist traditions (Kapilima, 2024). Additionally, the inductive approach—though flexible and responsive—requires significant researcher reflexivity and can be resource-intensive. It also risks overfitting theory to data, especially when sample sizes are constrained (Armat et al., 2018; Bergdahl et al., 2025).

Grounded theory, used to guide theme development and theoretical emergence, presents challenges for novice researchers. Its iterative coding cycles and emphasis on saturation demand careful calibration, particularly when applied to digital or asynchronous data formats such as open-ended surveys (Chun Tie et al., 2019; Bonfim, 2020).

Temporal and Design Limitations

The study's cross-sectional design captured a snapshot of organisational DEI responses in the immediate aftermath of the 2024 U.S. elections. While this timing was strategically chosen to assess short-term strategic recalibration, it limits the ability to assess longitudinal change or causal relationships (Criminology, 2020; Benguey et al., 2023). Future research could benefit from a longitudinal design to track the evolution of DEI strategies over time.

Mixed Methods Complexity

Although the mixed qualitative approach enhanced thematic breadth, it also introduced complexity. As Hadi et al. (2016) note, mixed methods research demands a broad skill set to manage data collection, analysis, and integration across formats. Researchers more experienced in one method may struggle to maintain methodological rigour across both, potentially affecting consistency and depth.

Sampling and Source Bias

Purposive sampling was used to target relevant stakeholders with direct DEI experience. While this enhanced relevance and insight, it may have constrained diversity and generalisability due to reliance on researcher judgment (Campbell et al., 2020). Additionally, secondary data—such as corporate ESG reports—may reflect strategic positioning rather than authentic practice, introducing interpretive bias (O'Kane et al., 2021; Setia, 2016).

Conclusion

This chapter provides a comprehensive outline of the research methodology, detailing the philosophical assumptions, research design, sampling strategy, ethical considerations, and methodological limitations. The chosen method ensures that findings are robust, contextually grounded, and reflective of corporate experiences in navigating DEI challenges amidst political shifts.

Word count: 3550

Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis

Introduction

This chapter presents the empirical findings of the study, focusing on the research aim of analysing how the 2024 U.S. elections and subsequent political shifts have shaped corporate Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) strategies, with particular attention to how organisations balance stakeholder demands against evolving political pressures.

The analysis is structured around the five research objectives:

- To examine how the results of the 2024 U.S. elections and shifts in the political landscape influence companies' approaches to DEI.
- To investigate how companies strike a balance between stakeholder demands and changes in the political environment.
- To explore how organisations sustain or evolve their DEI policies in response to both internal and external pressures and goals.
- To understand how stakeholders are reacting to changes in DEI policies within the shifting political landscape.
- To formulate recommendations based on evidence and analysis of how companies are navigating DEI amidst political change.

The following research questions underpin these objectives:

- How do rapid political changes, such as Donald Trump's victory in the 2024 elections, influence corporate DEI strategies?
- What internal and external factors drive companies to modify their DEI policies?
- How do stakeholders—such as employees, investors, and customers—respond to changes in DEI policies?
- What are the potential risks and rewards of altering DEI policies from an internal governance perspective?

Findings are drawn from a mixed qualitative approach, utilising three sources: semi-structured interviews with DEI leaders, open-ended questionnaires, and secondary materials (corporate statements, press coverage, and disclosures). This triangulation enhances credibility—interviews offer depth, surveys broaden stakeholder representation, and secondary data provide external context. Themes were cross-referenced across datasets to ensure interpretations reflect converging evidence. Results are presented thematically, supported by quotations and documents linking research aims with insights.

Insights from interviews

Drawing on qualitative insights from four stakeholder interviews (P1–P4), nine interrelated themes emerged, each reflecting strategic tensions, adaptive behaviours, and stakeholder influence across global contexts. Please also refer to Appendix A for transcripts and the thematic analysis of persons 1 to 4 (P1–P4).

Strategic Shift Post-Election

Organisations responded to the politicisation of DEI with divergent strategies. P1 noted, “We’ve had to embed DEI into governance—no longer optional,” while P2 stated, “We’re not using the term DEI anymore. It’s too politicised.” P3 observed, “Our strategy hasn’t changed formally, but there’s a chilling effect globally,” and P4 added, “Some clients are doubling down, others are quietly rolling back.” This bifurcation reflects a broader trend: some firms deepened their DEI commitments structurally, while others rebranded to avoid ideological backlash.

Resource Constraints

Despite rhetorical support, DEI efforts remain under-resourced. P1 described, “It’s just me. No budget. Execs are supportive but silent,” while P2 shared, “We lost funding for diverse suppliers. It’s harder to justify now.” P3 noted, “ERGs run on goodwill. We’ve never had a formal budget,” and P4 added, “Clients are cutting DEI roles. Some networks were dissolved.” Sustainability hinges on strategic framing and visible leadership commitment.

Politicisation and Terminology

The politicisation of DEI has led to widespread linguistic adaptation. P1 explained, “We now talk about inclusive behaviours—not DEI,” while P2 stated, “DEI is seen as ‘woke’. We’ve reframed everything around ROI.” P3 highlighted, “In Hungary and Russia, DEI is seen as propaganda,” and P4 observed, “Clients are changing language to avoid scrutiny.” Reframing DEI helps maintain momentum while navigating political sensitivities.

Stakeholder Influence

External stakeholders emerged as key drivers of DEI continuity. P1 shared, “Our owners are pushing harder for DEI. They want ROI and transparency,” P2 noted, “Shareholders still expect DEI. Consumers, too,” P3 remarked, “In Singapore, corporate pressure helped decriminalise LGBTQ+ laws,” and P4 stated, “Public sector contracts are shaping DEI strategy.” Influence flows from owners, clients, and consumers, often sustaining DEI when internal leadership is hesitant.

Internal Resistance and Polarisation

Organisations face growing internal tensions. P1 reported, “Our belonging survey showed backlash. We had to reframe everything,” P2 described, “We’re getting pushback from both extremes. Messaging must be balanced,” P3 noted, “Even in progressive regions, there’s hidden resistance,” and P4 added, “Some clients fear visibility. Others are pressing ahead.” Behavioural framing and transparency have become essential tools for navigating ideological divides.

Leadership Engagement

Leadership buy-in remains uneven. P1 observed, “Execs are cautious. They fear disengagement,” P2 stated, “Marketing is committed. Leadership varies globally,” P3 noted, “Some execs are silent. Others are vocal allies,” and P4 emphasised, “Senior leaders need training. Awareness gaps are real.” Targeted education and visible sponsorship are critical to sustaining internal momentum.

Global Variation in DEI

The influence of U.S. political rhetoric has cascaded internationally. P1 remarked, “The US election is influencing UK strategy. We’re reframing culturally,” P2 noted, “Legal and cultural barriers make DEI hard to implement,” P3 stated, “Repressive laws in Saudi Arabia and Russia limit visibility,” and P4 added, “UK firms are resisting US rhetoric. Multinationals are adapting locally.” DEI strategies must be localised to remain effective across diverse political and cultural landscapes.

Authentic vs. Performative DEI

Concerns around superficial DEI gestures were widespread. P1 critiqued, “We need meaningful change—not just flags and events.” P2 stated, “We look inclusive externally, but internally it’s not always aligned,” P3 noted, “There’s corporate washing. No board representation.” and P4 observed, “Clients are pushing back against rainbow washing.” Authenticity requires structural change, budget allocation, and leadership accountability.

Long-Term Strategic Imperatives

Despite short-term political volatility, DEI was widely recognised as a long-term strategic asset. P1 asserted, “DEI is futureproofing. It’s about retention and tech adaptation,” P2 cautioned, “It makes long-term sense. Still, short-termism dominates,” P3 emphasised, “It’s essential for equity and human rights. We risk regression,” and P4 concluded, “We’re reconnecting DEI to business rationale.” The tension between commercial pragmatism and ethical imperatives remains a central challenge.

Please also refer to Appendix B for the cross-case thematic synthesis matrix covering persons P1 to P4.

Insights from the questionnaire

Section 1: General Information

Roles in DEI Policy Shaping

- Respondents included HR leaders, DEI officers, executives, hiring managers, and people managers. This spread indicates that the dataset captures perspectives from both strategic decision-makers and operational implementers. It enables triangulation between those who establish DEI direction and those who implement it, revealing potential alignment gaps or tensions between policy intent and practice.
- Most influential roles: “People’s manager” (23.1%) and operational implementers. The prominence of people managers indicates that daily DEI culture is strongly influenced at the team level. This supports interview findings that leadership engagement at all levels is essential for fostering inclusive behaviours.

Pre-Election DEI Initiatives

- Common: Diversity hiring (92.3%), inclusion training (76.9%). These high percentages suggest that most organisations prioritised visible, measurable

DEI activities before the election, aligning with the performative versus authentic DEI debates in the interviews. Hiring and training are tangible but may not address systemic barriers.

- Less common: Supplier diversity, leadership development (30.8%). The lower uptake of these initiatives suggests a gap in the structural integration of DEI. This mirrors secondary data showing that deeper, systemic interventions are less common than surface-level programmes.

Strategy Perception

- 61.5%: No formal DEI strategy. This is a significant finding, indicating that many organisations operate without a cohesive DEI framework, leaving them vulnerable to political and stakeholder pressures.
- 7.7%: Comprehensive and proactive. A small minority have embedded DEI strategically, suggesting that proactive approaches are still the exception rather than the norm.
- Open-ended responses reinforced this with calls for strategic caution (S2) and long-term planning over reactive shifts, echoing interviewee concerns about avoiding knee-jerk reactions to political change.

Section 2: Impact of Political Shifts

Post-Election DEI Changes

- 46.2%: Significant changes (funding cuts, realignments). Nearly half of the respondents observed substantial shifts, supporting the theme of post-election retrenchment found in both interviews and secondary data.
- 38.5%: No DEI policies. This highlights a structural vulnerability — organisations without formal DEI policies are more susceptible to abandoning inclusion efforts entirely.
- 15.4%: Moderate changes. A smaller group experienced incremental adjustments, suggesting some resilience or strategic reframing rather than wholesale rollback.
- Open responses highlighted retraction of DEI (S7), politicisation (S10), and resilience (S3, S8), aligning with the bifurcated strategic responses seen in interviews.

Political Climate Influence

- 38.5% rated influence as “5 – very strong”.
- 15.4% rated it “4”. Over half of respondents perceive a strong political influence on DEI, reinforcing the need for strategies that can withstand ideological shifts. This mirrors interviewee accounts of reframing DEI language to depoliticise initiatives.
- Quotes emphasised DEI as a business imperative, not a political stance (S3), and stakeholder pressure outweighing political cycles (S9), supporting the stakeholder theory link.

External Pressure & Stakeholders

- 69.2%: Strong pressure from multiple stakeholders. This confirms that external forces — not just internal leadership — are key in sustaining DEI momentum.
- Key drivers: Government/regulators (46.2%), employees (30.8%), investors/customers (15.4%). The prominence of regulatory pressure aligns with secondary data indicating that DEI is embedded in ESG compliance. Employee influence also reflects the internal cultural dimension identified in interviews.
- Open responses echoed stakeholder dominance (S1, S8, S9) and regional variation (S11), reinforcing the global variation theme.

Section 3: Stakeholder Expectations & Risks

Organisational Response

- 38.5%: No awareness of response. This suggests internal communication gaps, a theme also raised in interviews (P1, P3).
- 30.8%: Transparent engagement. A third of organisations are actively communicating DEI responses, which may help maintain trust.
- 23.1%: Consistency despite shifts. This group reflects organisational resilience and alignment with long-term DEI commitments.
- Open-ended feedback revealed internal communication gaps (S6) and concerns about authenticity (S10), linking to the authenticity vs. performativity debate.

Internal Conflicts & Resolution

- 23.1%: Reported conflict. Conflicts may stem from ideological divides, as seen in interview accounts of backlash.
- 76.9%: No conflict. This could indicate either genuine alignment or a lack of open dialogue about DEI.
- Resolution strategies were informal: open discussions (15.4%), policy adjustments (7.7%), no formal strategy (30.8%). The reliance on informal resolution suggests a lack of structured conflict management, potentially undermining DEI sustainability.

Risks & Benefits of Adjusting DEI

- Risks: Reputational damage (46.2%), compliance risks (38.5%). These concerns align with legitimacy theory, where perceived inauthenticity can erode stakeholder trust.
- Benefits: Increased stakeholder trust (15.4%). A minority see strategic adaptation as an opportunity to strengthen relationships, reflecting the stakeholder influence theme.
- Open responses reinforced the authenticity versus performativity tension (S10) and minimalist, compliance-driven approaches (S5).

Section 4: Future Outlook

Recommended Strategies

- 84.6%: Strengthen internal DEI policies. This overwhelming majority signals a clear mandate for embedding DEI structurally.
- 53.8%: Expand training. Training remains a popular intervention, although its impact depends on its integration with a broader strategy.
- 30.8%: Engage external experts. This reflects recognition that specialist input can enhance credibility and effectiveness.
- Open responses supported broadening DEI scope (S4) and prioritising expert input (S8), aligning with calls for intersectional approaches.

Future Program Direction

- 38.5%: Expand. Indicates optimism and commitment despite political headwinds.
- 23.1%: Refine. Suggests a focus on quality and alignment rather than expansion.
- 15.4%: Reduce. A minority foresee contraction, likely in politically sensitive or resource-constrained contexts.
- Open-ended feedback emphasised sustainability (S11) and strategic framing (S2, S3), reinforcing the long-term imperative theme.

Guiding Principles

- 38.5%: Sustain commitments despite pressure. This reflects resilience and a values-driven strategy.
- 30.8%: Prioritise transparency and consistency. Transparency is seen as a trust-building mechanism, aligning with stakeholder theory.

Final Section: Closing Thoughts – responses to open-ended questions

In addition to the four stakeholder interviews, open-ended questionnaire responses (S1–S13) provided valuable triangulation, reinforcing and expanding the thematic synthesis. These responses reflect a broader spectrum of stakeholder perspectives across industries and geographies, offering insight into strategic framing, political influence, and DEI authenticity.

Strategic Framing and Authenticity

Several respondents emphasised the importance of a long-term, intentional DEI strategy. S2 cautioned against reactive approaches: “Strategy can evolve but needs to be well thought through, not a reactive knee-jerk reaction to shifting political landscape alone.” Similarly, S10 critiqued performative DEI, noting, “DEI was not a true value, rather a trend easy to adjust when politics change.” These reflections echo interviewee concerns about superficial gestures and highlight the need for sustained, values-driven DEI.

Stakeholder Influence vs. Political Pressure

Responses reinforced the primacy of stakeholder expectations over political volatility. S1 praised responsiveness: “It’s important for organisations to adjust to the demands

of their clients. Great DEI initiatives!” S9 argued, “Pressure from other stakeholders... is higher than what any government can produce in just 4 years,” while S8 insisted, “Experts’ contributions should be prioritised despite any political pressure.” These views align with interview findings that external stakeholders often sustain DEI momentum when internal leadership is cautious.

Regional and Regulatory Dynamics

Respondents highlighted geographic variation in DEI resilience. S11 observed, “It is strongly visible in the US and US owner companies. In Europe, DEI is more sustainable by now, but no clear expectations in the mid- to long-term.” S5 added, “Corporate setup will continue to be aligned with the regulatory requirements... only to the extent regulators demand it.” These insights underscore the need for localised DEI strategies and the influence of regulatory environments.

Visibility and Communication Gaps

Internal communication emerged as a barrier to DEI engagement. S6 admitted, “I’m not aware enough of the DEI initiatives within my company... answering some questions was difficult.” This mirrors interviewee concerns about leadership silence and the disconnect between external branding and internal reality.

Retraction and Politicisation

Post-election political shifts were cited as catalysts for DEI rollback. S7 noted, “Several DEI initiatives were ‘toned down’,” while S10 warned of ideological volatility: “Quick shift towards Trump’s opinions is concerning.” These responses reinforce the interview-based theme of strategic bifurcation—some organisations doubling down, others retreating.

Broadening the Scope of DEI

Respondents advocated for intersectional and inclusive definitions of DEI. S4 stated, “My interpretation includes age diversity, cultural background, religion, or diverse professional experience.” This complements interviewee calls to expand DEI beyond gender and race, especially in global contexts.

Resilience and Long-Term Imperatives

Despite short-term pressures, several responses affirmed DEI’s strategic value. S3 asserted, “Inclusion is not a political stance, but a business imperative,” while S8 encouraged resistance to rollback: “DEI initiatives should always be a priority.” These sentiments align with interviewee perspectives on DEI as a future proofing and talent retention strategy.

Please also refer to the table in Appendix C for thematic analysis of the open-ended question questionnaire responses (S1–S13).

Insights from Primary Data summary

This section presents the integrated thematic insights derived from both semi-structured interviews (P1–P4) and responses to questionnaires and open-ended questions (S1–S13). In line with the study’s interpretivist and inductive approach, the analysis sought to identify recurring patterns across data sources while preserving the contextual richness of participant narratives.

Table 1 below consolidates the emergent themes, illustrating where both interviews and questionnaires support them, and where they are unique to one source. Full

quotes are included to maintain authenticity and to demonstrate the direct link between raw data and thematic interpretation.

Theme	Interview Evidence (P1–P4)	Questionnaire Evidence (S1–S13 + Stats)	Interpretive Insight
1. Strategic Shift Post-Election	<p>P1: “The main change is probably this urgency to embed DEI... into governance policies... into the wider business strategy. We’ve had to embed DEI into governance—no longer optional.”</p> <p>P2: “We’re not using the term DEI anymore. It’s too politicised.”</p> <p>P3: “Our strategy hasn’t changed formally, but there’s a chilling effect globally.”</p> <p>P4: “Some clients are doubling down, others are quietly rolling back.”</p>	<p>46.2% reported significant post-election changes (funding cuts, realignments).</p> <p>38.5% had no DEI policies.</p> <p>15.4% saw moderate changes.</p> <p>S7: “Several DEI initiatives were ‘toned down’.”</p> <p>S10: “Quick shift towards Trump’s opinions is concerning... DEI was not a true value, rather a trend easy to adjust when politics changes.”</p>	<p>Organisations diverged after the 2024 election — some accelerated DEI integration into governance, others rebranded or scaled back to avoid political backlash.</p>
2. Resource Constraints	<p>P1: “I am the diversity, equity and inclusion specialist. I am a team of one... It’s just me. No budget. Execs are supportive but silent.”</p> <p>P2: “We lost funding for diverse suppliers. It’s harder to justify now.”</p> <p>P3: “ERGs run on goodwill. We’ve never had a formal budget.”</p> <p>P4: “Clients are cutting DEI roles.”</p>	<p>61.5% had no formal DEI strategy pre-election.</p> <p>Most common initiatives: diversity hiring (92.3%), inclusion training (76.9%).</p> <p>Less common: supplier diversity, leadership development (30.8%).</p>	<p>DEI work is often under-resourced, relying on goodwill rather than sustained investment, which undermines long-term impact.</p>

Theme	Interview Evidence (P1–P4)	Questionnaire Evidence (S1–S13 + Stats)	Interpretive Insight
	Some networks were dissolved.”		
3. Politicisation & Terminology Shift	<p>P1: “We’ve had to shift from talking more about inclusion than diversity... focus on inclusive behaviours.”</p> <p>P2: “Some of the words... have become tarred... DEI itself... is just woke now. We’ve reframed everything around ROI.”</p> <p>P3: “In Hungary and Russia, DEI is seen as propaganda.”</p> <p>P4: “They’re having to change the terminology they use... not to be kind of out there shouting about it.”</p>	<p>38.5% rated political influence as “5 – very strong”;</p> <p>15.4% rated it “4”.</p> <p>S3: “Inclusion is not a political stance, but a business imperative.”</p>	Language reframing is a survival strategy — shifting to business-friendly or neutral terms to maintain momentum in politically sensitive climates.
4. Stakeholder Influence vs Political Pressure	<p>P1: “Our owners have doubled down on DEI... increased their reporting to showcase the return of investment.”</p> <p>P2: “Shareholders still expect DEI. Consumers too.”</p> <p>P3: “In Singapore, corporate pressure helped decriminalise LGBTQ+ laws.”</p> <p>P4: “Public sector contracts are shaping DEI strategy.”</p>	<p>69.2% reported strong pressure from multiple stakeholders. Key drivers: regulators (46.2%), employees (30.8%), investors/customers (15.4%).</p> <p>S1: “It’s important for organisations to adjust to the demands of their clients.”</p> <p>S8: “Experts’ contributions... should be prioritised despite any political pressure.”</p> <p>S9: “Pressure from other stakeholders... is higher than what any government can produce in just 4 yrs.”</p>	External stakeholders — clients, regulators, investors — often sustain DEI momentum even when internal leadership is hesitant or political climates are hostile.

Theme	Interview Evidence (P1–P4)	Questionnaire Evidence (S1–S13 + Stats)	Interpretive Insight
5. Internal Resistance & Polarisation	<p>P1: “People were much more confident to talk about how they didn’t agree with DEI... Our belonging survey showed backlash. We had to reframe everything.”</p> <p>P2: “We’re getting pushback from both extremes. Messaging must be balanced.”</p> <p>P3: “Even in progressive regions, there’s hidden resistance.”</p> <p>P4: “Some clients fear visibility. Others are pressing ahead.”</p>	<p>23.1% reported internal conflict; 76.9% reported none. Resolution strategies: open discussions (15.4%), policy adjustments (7.7%), no formal strategy (30.8%).</p> <p>S10: “DEI was not a true value, rather a trend easy to adjust when politics changes.”</p>	DEI initiatives face ideological pushback internally, requiring careful messaging and conflict management to maintain engagement.
6. Leadership Engagement	<p>P1: “Our executive team... asked us to not put out as many comms... fear people might feel more disengaged.”</p> <p>P3: “Some execs are silent. Others are vocal allies.”</p> <p>P4: “Training those at senior levels... they know they need to do something, but they’re not sure what.”</p>	<p>38.5%: No awareness of organisational DEI response.</p> <p>30.8%: Transparent engagement.</p> <p>23.1%: Consistency despite shifts.</p> <p>S6: “I’m not aware enough of the DEI initiatives within my company.”</p>	Leadership buy-in is inconsistent; visible sponsorship and education are critical for embedding DEI into organisational culture.
7. Global & Regional Variation	<p>P3: “Hungary... wanted to prohibit the pride... legislation like Russia... LGBTQ propaganda.”</p> <p>P4: “UK firms are</p>	<p>S11: “In Europe DEI is more sustainable... but no clear expectations in mid- to long-term.”</p>	DEI strategies must be localised to navigate diverse legal, cultural, and political environments.

Theme	Interview Evidence (P1–P4)	Questionnaire Evidence (S1–S13 + Stats)	Interpretive Insight
	resisting US rhetoric. Multinationals are adapting locally.”		
8. Authentic vs Performative DEI	<p>P1: “We need to move away from events and flying flags to actual meaningful change.”</p> <p>P3: “Employer branding... fantastic pictures... but does not mean we support our ERG.”</p> <p>P4: “Clients are pushing back against rainbow washing.”</p>	<p>46.2% cited reputational risk; 38.5% compliance risk.</p> <p>S10: “DEI was not a true value, rather a trend.”</p> <p>S5: “Corporate setup will continue... only to the extent regulators demand it.”</p>	Stakeholders are increasingly sceptical of symbolic gestures; authenticity requires structural change, budget, and accountability.
9. Long-Term Strategic Imperatives	<p>P1: “DEI is future-proofing. It’s about retention and tech adaptation.”</p> <p>P2: “DEI makes long-term business sense, but... we’re in a short-termistic climate.”</p> <p>P3: “It’s essential for equity and human rights. We risk regression.”</p> <p>P4: “We’re reconnecting DEI to business rationale.”</p>	<p>38.5% plan to expand DEI; 23.1% refine; 15.4% reduce.</p> <p>S3: “Inclusion is... a business imperative.”</p> <p>S8: “DEI initiatives should always be a priority... despite political pressure.”</p>	Despite short-term political volatility, DEI is widely recognised as essential for innovation, talent retention, and competitiveness.
10. Corporate Influence on Policy	P3: “Singapore decriminalised... pressure from multinational companies.”	—	Corporations can influence policy environments, particularly in advancing human rights and inclusion in

Theme	Interview Evidence (P1–P4)	Questionnaire Evidence (S1–S13 + Stats)	Interpretive Insight
			restrictive jurisdictions.
11. Broadening the Scope of DEI	P3: “If in 2020 we believe that my diversity is sex and gender related, we are really nowhere.”	S4: “My interpretation... includes age diversity, cultural background, religion or diverse professional experience.”	There is a push to expand DEI beyond gender and race to encompass intersectional and less visible dimensions of diversity.
12. Visibility & Communication Gaps	P1: “Our executive team... asked us to not put out as many comms... fear	—	—

Table 1 Consolidation of the emergent themes across Primary Data

Insights from analysis of Secondary data

This section presents a thematic synthesis of the secondary data sources, including DEI and ESG reports, published between 2024 and 2025. Please also refer to the table in Appendix D, Thematic Matrix Secondary Data Sources, for analysis of data and emerging trends.

Reframing DEI within ESG Narratives

A notable trend is the strategic repositioning of DEI within broader ESG frameworks. Meritage Homes (2024) illustrates this shift by stating: “We have also revised our use of the term ‘DEI’ to Inclusion, Culture and Belonging.” This linguistic adjustment reflects a deliberate effort to depoliticise DEI terminology while maintaining its strategic relevance. By embedding DEI within ESG reporting, organisations signal alignment with investor expectations and regulatory compliance, while potentially mitigating reputational risk in politically sensitive environments.

Political Retraction and Declining Representation

The Forbes (2025) analysis highlights a significant rollback in DEI visibility and outcomes, noting:

“References to diversity, equity and inclusion in Fortune 100 company reports dropped 72% between 2024 and 2025.”

This decline coincides with executive-level policy reversals under the Trump administration, contributing to measurable setbacks in gender representation. As reported by Altrata:

“Women accounted for 33.6% of board positions in Q2 2025, down from 34.7% in Q1 2024.”

These figures underscore the vulnerability of DEI progress to political and economic headwinds. Stakeholders may interpret such rollbacks as indicative of performative

commitments or shifting corporate priorities, potentially eroding trust and engagement.

Sector-Specific Strategy and Measurable Outcomes

In contrast to broader corporate ambiguity, the British Phonographic Industry (BPI) demonstrates a structured and transparent DEI strategy. Its 2024 report outlines three strategic pillars:

“Lead By Example, Connect and Support, Advocate and Amplify.”

Progress is tracked against 14 five-year objectives, with the BPI reporting:

“Of those nine [objectives], we are ‘Achieving’ on six; three are ‘Partially Achieving’; and five are areas of development.”

This level of granularity enhances credibility and enables benchmarking, particularly within creative industries where cultural influence intersects with representation. It also reflects a commitment to accountability and continuous improvement.

Global Best Practices and Structural Integration

The World Economic Forum’s (2024) “DEI Lighthouses” report identifies organisations that have embedded DEI into core business functions. It asserts:

“The report underscores the critical role of leadership in driving DEI initiatives and the need for a systemic, integrated approach.”

A contributing voice from A Leader Like Me adds:

“DEI done wrong is dying and will be replaced by DEI embedded into business strategies.”

These insights reflect a global shift from symbolic programming toward structural accountability. Organisations that treat DEI as a strategic imperative—rather than a reputational add-on—are more likely to sustain stakeholder trust and drive innovation.

Transparency and Inclusive Innovation

Google’s 2024 Diversity Annual Report positions DEI as inseparable from innovation, stating:

“We’ve learned that making space for diverse perspectives and experiences is inseparable from innovation.”

The report also outlines a holistic approach to belonging across operational domains:

“We focused on building belonging in three areas: our workplace, our technology, and our partnerships.”

This framing links DEI directly to product development, workforce retention, and global impact. Transparency in workforce demographics and inclusion initiatives reinforces stakeholder confidence and positions DEI as a driver of long-term value creation.

Emerging themes map across all data sources

Drawing from interviews (P1–P4), surveys (S1–S13), and secondary corporate documentation, ten interrelated themes emerged, illustrating the evolving contours of DEI strategy within politically sensitive, stakeholder-driven environments.

1. Strategic Reframing of DEI Terminology

Organisations increasingly replaced politicised language with softer constructs, such as “inclusive behaviours” and “culture and belonging.” As P2 explained, “We’re not using the term DEI anymore. It’s too politicised,” while P1 noted, “We now talk about

inclusive behaviours—not DEI.” Meritage Homes echoed this in its corporate reporting: “We have revised our use of the term ‘DEI’ to Inclusion, Culture and Belonging.” Survey data reinforced this shift, with 84.6% recommending DEI be strengthened independently of political framing.

2. Stakeholder Influence as a Stabilising Force

Clients, regulators, and employees were key drivers of DEI continuity. P1 stated, “Our owners are pushing harder for DEI. They want ROI and transparency.” Survey responses showed 69.2% citing strong stakeholder pressure, with regulators (46.2%) and employees (30.8%) most influential. Secondary sources highlighted strategic repositioning to maintain investor appeal, particularly in ESG-linked reporting.

3. Resource Constraints and Leadership Gaps

Despite external momentum, internal capacity was limited. P1 shared, “It’s just me. No budget,” while P3 added, “ERGs run on goodwill.” Survey data revealed 61.5% lacked formal DEI strategies prior to the most recent election cycle, though diversity hiring (92.3%) and inclusion training (76.9%) were common.

4. Concerns Around Performative DEI

Participants criticised superficial branding. P1 remarked, “We need meaningful change—not just flags and events,” and P4 noted, “Clients are pushing back against rainbow washing.” S10 stated, “DEI was not a true value, rather a trend,” while 46.2% of survey respondents cited reputational risk. The World Economic Forum warned, “DEI done wrong is dying... replaced by DEI embedded into business strategies.”

5. Global and Regional Variation

Jurisdictional resistance required localisation. P3 observed, “DEI is seen as propaganda” in Hungary and Russia, while P4 noted, “Multinationals are adapting locally.” Survey responses confirmed this complexity, with 38.5% rating political influence as “very strong.” Secondary data referenced the influence of U.S. elections on UK DEI strategy.

6. Post-Election Retraction and Politicisation

Strategic withdrawal was evident. P4 stated, “Clients are cutting DEI roles,” and S7 reported, “DEI initiatives 'toned down'.” Survey data showed 46.2% observed post-election changes, and 38.5% reported having no DEI policies. Forbes reported a 72% drop in DEI references among Fortune 100 firms.

7. DEI as Strategic Imperative

Despite setbacks, DEI was framed as essential. P1 described it as “future-proofing. It’s about retention and tech adaptation,” while P4 said, “We’re reconnecting DEI to business rationale.” 38.5% of survey respondents planned to expand DEI initiatives. Google’s reporting reinforced this: “Making space for diverse perspectives [is] inseparable from innovation.”

8. Structural Integration and Sectoral Benchmarking

Where DEI was most effective, it was embedded in business strategy. 30.8% of survey respondents recommended engaging external experts, and 53.8% supported expanded DEI training. BPI reported measurable progress: “Of nine objectives, six

are ‘Achieving’,” with DEI framed around three strategic pillars—Lead, Connect, Advocate.

9. Internal Resistance and Polarisation

Pushback was evident. P2 noted, “We’re getting pushback from both extremes,” and P1 shared, “Belonging survey showed backlash.” Survey data revealed 23.1% of organisations experienced employee–executive conflict, yet only 15.4% had formal conflict resolution strategies.

10. Corporate Influence on Policy

Corporate actors shaped policy outcomes. P3 stated, “Corporate pressure helped change laws in Singapore.” Secondary sources confirmed that corporations influence shareholder votes and public perception.

These findings reveal a complex, adaptive DEI landscape shaped by political volatility, stakeholder expectations, and strategic recalibration. The thematic matrix offers a robust foundation for embedding DEI within resilient, evidence-based organisational frameworks.

Mapping of Emerging Themes Against Research Objectives.

Thematic synthesis shows strong alignment across all five research objectives, reinforcing the study’s coherence and analytical depth.

Objective 1 is addressed through political reframing and DEI retrenchment, catalysed by the 2024 U.S. elections. Organisations softened terminology and localised strategy, as reflected in “We’re not using the term DEI anymore. It’s too politicised” (P2) and “US election influencing UK strategy” (Appendix B).

Themes of stakeholder influence and performative tension support objective 2. Companies balanced external expectations with reputational risk in polarised environments: “Clients are pushing back against rainbow washing” (P4) and “Pressure from other stakeholders... is higher than what any government can produce” (S9).

Objective 3 emerges through resource constraints, structural integration, and strategic framing. Sustainability depends on leadership and metrics, illustrated by “It’s just me. No budget” (P1) and “Of nine objectives, six are ‘Achieving’” (BPI).

Objective 4 is reflected in the reactions of stakeholders—both supportive and resistant. Corporate influence on policy is evident in “Corporate pressure helped change laws in Singapore” (P3), while internal backlash surfaced in “Belonging survey showed backlash” (P1).

Objective 5 is underpinned by actionable themes, including strategic reframing, benchmarking, and long-term imperatives, which inform recommendations focused on resilience, authenticity, and an embedded DEI strategy.

This mapping validates the thematic framework and ensures recommendations are grounded in cross-source evidence, enhancing both academic rigour and practical relevance.

Please refer to the table in Appendix E, Mapping of Emerging Themes Against Research Objectives.

Conclusion

Chapter 4's synthesis reveals how organisations manage DEI amid political and stakeholder pressures, drawing from interviews, surveys, and secondary sources. Ten themes emerged, such as strategic reframing and internal resistance. The findings show the DEI landscape is adaptable but contested, with varied authenticity in responses. Post-2024 election volatility underscores the need for flexible, stakeholder-aligned strategies. Chapter 5 will analyse these insights and recommend inclusive, adaptable approaches.

Word count: 3874

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter examines the findings from Chapter 4 through the lens of the research objectives and theoretical frameworks outlined in Chapter 3. Using an interpretivist approach and grounded theory, it explores how organisations have adjusted their DEI strategies in response to the 2024 U.S. elections and subsequent political changes. The discussion is organised around key themes, drawing on insights from interviews, questionnaires, and secondary data, and connecting them to relevant theories such as stakeholder theory (Freeman et al., 2015), organisational legitimacy (Suchman, 1995), and thematic analysis (Kiger et al., 2020).

Discussion

Strategic Reframing of DEI Terminology

The widespread shift from politicised DEI language to gentler terms such as “inclusive behaviours” and “culture and belonging” reflects a strategic response to ideological volatility. This linguistic rephrasing, evidenced by P1 and P2 and supported by Meritage Homes’ ESG report, aligns with organisational legitimacy theory (Suchman, 1995), where symbolic compliance is employed to sustain stakeholder trust in contested environments. From a grounded theory perspective (Pulla, 2014), this change arises as a core category derived from stakeholder narratives, demonstrating how organisations create meaning in reaction to external pressures. The interpretivist perspective (Johnston et al., 2022) further endorses this by emphasising the subjective nature of organisational discourse and its role in shaping strategic identity.

Stakeholder Influence as a Stabilising Force

Stakeholder expectations—particularly from investors, clients, and regulators—were consistently identified as drivers of DEI continuity. P1’s assertion that “Our owners are pushing harder for DEI” and S9’s observation that “Pressure from other stakeholders... is higher than what any government can produce” exemplify this dynamic.

This theme directly supports stakeholder theory (Freeman et al., 2015), which argues that organisational success relies on balancing diverse stakeholder interests. It also reflects the interpretivist focus on meaning-making through stakeholder interactions and the inductive approach’s ability to derive theory from emerging patterns in qualitative data (Vears et al., 2022).

Thematic analysis (Kiger et al., 2020) revealed stakeholder influence as a recurring pattern across data sources, confirming its central role in the resilience of DEI strategies.

Resource Constraints and Leadership Engagement

Despite rhetorical support, DEI initiatives remain underfunded and inconsistently led. P1’s comment— “It’s just me. No budget”—and P3’s observation that “ERGs run on goodwill” highlight the operational fragility of DEI efforts. This finding aligns with grounded theory’s emphasis on uncovering latent structural issues through

stakeholder narratives (Whiteside et al., 2012). It also reflects the interpretivist concern with power dynamics and organisational culture (Kapilima, 2024), where leadership silence and resource scarcity undermine strategic intent. Thematic analysis revealed leadership engagement as a sub-theme within the broader context of resource constraints, supporting the inductive development of theory around DEI sustainability.

Politicisation and Internal Resistance

The politicisation of DEI has caused internal tensions and polarisation. P1's report of backlash in belonging surveys and S10's critique of DEI as a "trend easy to adjust when politics change" illustrate the ideological fault lines within organisations. This theme aligns with organisational identity and resistance theory (Thomas and Davies, 2005), which examines how employees negotiate contested values within institutional frameworks. The interpretivist approach is especially relevant here, as it captures the nuanced, context-specific nature of internal resistance and the symbolic reframing needed to navigate it. Grounded theory supports the development of this theme as a core category, while thematic analysis helped identify it across interviews and survey responses.

Global Variation and Localisation of Strategy

The impact of U.S. political rhetoric on global DEI strategies was clear in comments such as P3's "In Hungary and Russia, DEI is seen as propaganda" and P4's "Multinationals are adapting locally." These insights highlight the importance of cultural sensitivity in implementing DEI on a global scale.

This theme aligns with cross-cultural management theory (Hofstede, 2001) and supports the interpretivist focus on cultural meaning-making. Grounded theory facilitated the emergence of localisation as a strategic response, while thematic analysis showed its commonality across different geographic contexts.

The inductive approach allowed for the identification of regional differences as a pattern that informs theory development around the flexibility of global DEI initiatives.

Authenticity vs. Performative DEI

There were widespread concerns about superficial DEI gestures. P1's criticism—"We need meaningful change—not just flags and events"—and S10's warning about performativity highlight the scepticism of stakeholders towards symbolic actions that lack structural depth. This theme supports legitimacy theory (Suchman, 1995) and critiques of diversity washing (Zanoni et al., 2010), showing the tension between reputational management and genuine ethical authenticity. The interpretivist perspective captures people's subjective views on authenticity, while grounded theory helps develop a theoretical framework around performative DEI. Thematic analysis identified authenticity as a key theme, linking it to leadership engagement, stakeholder trust, and strategic framing.

Long-Term Strategic Imperatives

Despite short-term political volatility, DEI was consistently portrayed as a strategic asset. P1's claim that "DEI is futureproofing" and Google's report that DEI is "inseparable from innovation" strengthen the business case for inclusion. This theme aligns with strategic HR theory (Ulrich, 1997) and supports the grounded theory approach by positioning DEI as a core category linked to organisational resilience. The inductive method enabled the emergence of long-term framing from stakeholder

narratives, while thematic analysis confirmed its presence across data sources. Interpretivism underpins the exploration of DEI as a socially constructed strategic imperative, shaped by stakeholder discourse and organisational identity.

Implications for Practice and Policy

The findings offer actionable insights grounded in both theory and empirical evidence. Organisations should:

- Reframe DEI language to match stakeholder expectations while maintaining ethical intent (legitimacy theory).
- Integrate DEI into ESG reporting and strategic governance frameworks (stakeholder theory).
- Invest in leadership education and resource allocation to support sustainable implementation (grounded theory).
- Create conflict resolution mechanisms to manage internal resistance (organisational identity theory).
- Tailor DEI strategies to fit regional legal and cultural contexts (cross-cultural management).
- Focus on authenticity through measurable outcomes and transparent communication (thematic analysis).

Conclusion

This dissertation aims to critically assess how the 2024 U.S. elections and their subsequent political developments have impacted corporate Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) strategies. It explored how organisations balance stakeholder demands with changing political pressures, maintain or adjust DEI policies, and manage internal tensions and external expectations. Key objectives and research questions guided the study, each examined through a mixed-methods qualitative design rooted in interpretivist philosophy, inductive reasoning, and grounded theory.

Summary of Key Findings

Thematic analysis of interviews, open-ended questionnaires, and secondary data identified ten interconnected themes that collectively depict the strategic shift in DEI within politically sensitive settings:

- Strategic Reframing of DEI Terminology: Organisations increasingly replace politicised language with gentler terms such as “inclusive behaviours” and “culture and belonging.” This trend, seen in both primary and secondary data, reflects a legitimacy-seeking approach (Suchman, 1995) and aligns with interpretivist insights into symbolic compliance and meaning-making.
- Stakeholder Influence as a Stabilising Force: External stakeholders—investors, regulators, clients—emerge as crucial for maintaining DEI initiatives. This supports stakeholder theory (Freeman et al., 2015) and highlights grounded theory's focus on emerging patterns from stakeholder narratives.
- Resource Constraints and Leadership Engagement: Despite verbal support, DEI programs often lack sufficient funding and inconsistent leadership. This theme uncovers structural gaps and supports the grounded theory approach by revealing underlying organisational dynamics.
- Politicisation and Internal Resistance: Political volatility has led to ideological polarisation within organisations, necessitating strategic reframing and

effective conflict management. This aligns with organisational identity theory (Thomas & Davies, 2005) and interpretivist emphasis on contextual nuances.

- Global Variation and Localisation of Strategy: DEI approaches are tailored to local legal and cultural frameworks, supported by cross-cultural management theory (Hofstede, 2001) and the interpretivist emphasis on regional meaning-making.
- Authenticity versus Performative DEI: Stakeholders remain sceptical of superficial gestures, highlighting the need for structural accountability and transparent measurement metrics. This theme echoes critiques of diversity washing (Zanoni et al., 2010) and stresses the importance of grounded, measurable DEI strategies.
- Long-term Strategic Imperatives: DEI is consistently viewed as a future-proofing asset, vital for driving innovation, retaining talent, and ensuring ethical governance. This supports strategic HR theory (Ulrich, 1997) and the business case for inclusion.
- Corporate Influence on Policy: Organisations influence public discourse and regulatory environments, especially in global contexts. This emerging theme highlights the influence of corporate actors in shaping social and political norms.
- Internal Communication Gaps: A disconnect exists between external DEI branding and internal awareness, underscoring the need for transparent and inclusive communication strategies.
- Intersectional Expansion of DEI: Stakeholders advocate for broader definitions of DEI, including age, religion, and professional diversity. This theme promotes inclusive innovation frameworks and broadens DEI beyond traditional categories.

These findings were triangulated across multiple data sources, ensuring depth and saturation in themes. Thematic matrices (Appendices B–E) further confirmed the consistency and relevance of each theme.

Theoretical Contributions

This study makes several key contributions to the literature:

- Interpretivist Philosophy: By emphasising stakeholder narratives and contextual meaning-making, the study provides a nuanced understanding of how DEI is experienced and adapted within organisations. It highlights the value of interpretivism in capturing the complexity of socio-political influences on corporate strategy.
- Inductive Reasoning: The research adopted an inductive approach, allowing theory to emerge from data rather than imposing pre-existing frameworks. This approach facilitated the discovery of novel patterns, such as the strategic bifurcation of DEI following elections and the increased importance of authenticity as a strategic differentiator.
- Grounded Theory Application: The study effectively utilised grounded theory to develop context-specific theoretical insights, including the role of stakeholder pressure in maintaining DEI efforts and the strategic reframing of terminology. These insights are closely linked to empirical data, increasing their relevance and applicability.

- **Thematic Analysis Across Data Types:** The use of thematic analysis across interviews, questionnaires, and secondary sources demonstrated the method's flexibility and robustness. It enabled the identification of overarching themes and contributed to the development of a coherent analytical framework.

These contributions extend existing models of organisational legitimacy, stakeholder engagement, and strategic HR, providing a more dynamic and context-sensitive understanding of DEI during periods of political volatility.

Practical Implications

The findings provide practical recommendations for organisations aiming to sustain and develop DEI strategies amid political and stakeholder pressures:

- Reframe DEI language to meet stakeholder expectations while maintaining ethical intent
- Integrate DEI into ESG reporting and strategic governance frameworks
- Invest in leadership training and resource distribution to support sustainable implementation
- Create conflict resolution processes to manage internal resistance
- Localise DEI approaches to suit regional legal and cultural contexts
- Emphasise authenticity through measurable results and transparent communication
- Broaden DEI definitions to encompass intersectional aspects such as age, religion, and professional diversity
- Improve internal communication to align external branding with employee awareness
- Utilise corporate influence to promote inclusive policy environments.

These approaches support the development of resilient, stakeholder-aligned DEI frameworks that can withstand political setbacks and foster inclusive innovation.

Methodological Reflections and Limitations

The study's methodology—anchored in interpretivism, inductive reasoning, and grounded theory—produced rich, context-specific insights. However, several limitations must be recognised:

- **Sample Size:** The small number of interviews (n=4) limited generalisability, though triangulation with 13 questionnaire responses and secondary data helped to alleviate this.
- **Cross-Sectional Design:** The study captured a moment in time of organisational responses after the election, restricting the ability to evaluate long-term change.
- **Subjectivity and Bias:** The interpretivist and inductive approach, while providing in-depth understanding, may introduce researcher bias and reduce replicability.
- **Digital Constraints:** Challenges in recruitment and digital exclusion may have impacted participant diversity and data depth.
- **Secondary Data Limitations:** Relying on publicly available corporate disclosures might reflect strategic positioning rather than genuine organisational practices.

Despite these limitations, the study reached thematic saturation and maintained analytical coherence, supported by rigorous coding and validation across sources.

Recommendations

Recommendations of how future studies could expand in relation to the research objectives:

Objective 1: Examine how the results of the 2024 U.S. elections and political shifts influence company DEI approaches.

Recommendations:

- Regularly conduct scenario analyses to anticipate regulatory or policy changes following political events, using insights from stakeholder interviews. Ensure DEI policies are adaptable so the company can respond swiftly to evolving legal and political requirements.
- Establish a cross-functional DEI monitoring group, as highlighted by interview data, tasked with tracking legislative/regulatory changes and updating company policies accordingly.

Objective 2: Investigate how companies balance stakeholder demands and shifts in the political environment.

Recommendations:

- Implement ongoing stakeholder consultation mechanisms (e.g., town hall meetings, digital feedback platforms) to ensure all voices—including those of employees, customers, and investors—are represented, as suggested by both survey and interview findings.
- After any significant change to DEI programming, issue clear internal and external communications to explain the reasoning, process, and stakeholder influences on those decisions.
- Anchor all challenging decisions in the company's mission and core values, demonstrating to stakeholders the consistent principles guiding DEI adaptations.

Objective 3: Explore how organisations sustain/evolve DEI under internal and external pressures

Recommendations:

- Ensure executives remain visible and vocal on DEI, reinforcing the organisation's commitment even during turbulent political periods. Findings indicate this boosts employee morale and trust.
- Where cuts are unavoidable, maintain a core funding baseline for DEI activities (e.g., retaining key staff, supporting essential programmes) to avoid losing long-term strategic momentum, as both interview and survey results highlight vulnerability in this area.
- Regularly review quantitative DEI outcome data to fine-tune programmes, scaling what works while quickly phasing out ineffective or high-risk initiatives.
- If DEI language becomes contentious, reframe initiatives within wider ESG reporting or talent/innovation strategies, as observed among peer companies in the secondary data.

Objective 4: Understand stakeholder reactions to DEI policy changes in a shifting political context

Recommendations:

- Set up regular surveys and focus groups to capture immediate responses to policy adjustments as political or legal conditions evolve; triangulate these insights with interview data for a holistic view.
- Based on identified employee resistance or misunderstandings (from qualitative data), offer targeted workshops or communication that addresses misconceptions and builds support.
- Use quantitative data to report tangible DEI impacts (e.g., talent retention, customer satisfaction), reinforcing the value of these programmes amid external criticism or uncertainty.

Objective 5: Formulate recommendations based on evidence and analysis of data gathered above about how companies are navigating the challenges associated with DEI amidst these political changes

Recommendations:

- Reframe DEI language to reflect local sensitivities and reduce political exposure (e.g., “inclusive culture” or “belonging”); ensure reframing is supported by embedded practice rather than symbolic shifts.
- Use benchmarking against global peers to justify continuity and demonstrate strategic alignment; present comparative data to mitigate domestic pushback.
- Integrate DEI into long-term planning and leadership KPIs to avoid episodic programming, link DEI outcomes to broader business resilience and risk frameworks.
- Leverage stakeholder pressure (e.g., clients, employees) to sustain DEI momentum; use feedback loops to validate strategic direction and counter external retrenchment.
- Allocate dedicated resources and internal coalitions to build DEI resilience; ensure teams are equipped to navigate political cycles without relying solely on senior sponsorship.

Final Reflections

This dissertation demonstrates that DEI is not just a policy area but a strategic perspective through which organisations interpret and respond to socio-political shifts. Following the 2024 U.S. elections, DEI has become a contested yet vital domain—one that requires ethical clarity, stakeholder consensus, and adaptive resilience. By grounding analysis in stakeholder narratives and theoretical frameworks, this study provides a guide for organisations aiming to navigate ideological volatility without compromising their commitment to inclusion. The future of DEI lies not in retreat but in strategic reinvention—rooted in authenticity, accountability, and shared value creation.

Word count: 2533

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Chapter 7: Appendices

Appendix A - Transcripts and the thematic analysis of persons 1 to 4 (P1-P4).

Transcript of interview with Person 1

27 June 2025, 09:04am

□ Lukasz Perski started transcription

Transcript

27 June 2025, 09:04am

Lukasz Perski started transcription

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 0:04 No, exactly it's it's just. So this is recording now. OK, good.

Person 1 0:10 Perfect. Yeah. Yeah, no problem. Before we get into the questions, what's your MBA actually in?

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 0:17 So my MBA is in business studies, so I studied at the University of Wales, you know, Trinity Saint David.

Person 1 0:25 Yeah.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 0:26 And this is sort of a follow-up to the BA on a similar topic and you know I got personal interest in you know in general how businesses operate and you know I see a very, there is obviously a very strong connection especially now of businesses and politics and you know the current political climate. You know. The shift in politics, I think you know, I see the big impact on businesses and you know the whole process. I've read the goals of articles, especially following elections, about how companies, certain companies and especially the materials I found refer to. US-based entities. And it seems to be now changing their approach to the and this is why I found that very interesting. Because this particular link. And the sudden political sort of shift because I think to the very end. You know, using US elections as an example, it was not expected, but it happened and I think that. The reality has changed literally overnight.

Person 1 1:55 I completely agree. I completely agree and the I know we've only got half an hour. Let me not get too much into it, but the fact that the President himself was a businessman and how close business and politics have got because of that, it's a really interesting. I mean, it's horrendous to live through, but a very interesting

socio-political climate at the moment. And I did politics as a degree and I'm just starting a master's in occupational psychology. So I was just interested in the link that you have with your business studies, but that's really cool.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 2:29 Yeah. And you know if I can support your research as well in any way, if you do a questionnaire, so anything like that, I'm also available to take part.

Person 1 2:33 Thank you. Thank you. I appreciate it.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 2:40 Because based on my own example, I know how difficult it is.

Person 1 2:44 You are absolutely. But yeah, if I know we've only got 25 minutes, so I'm happy to start the question. Sorry, I was just interested in a little bit about you as well.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 2:52 Yeah. No, no problem. No, I'm. I'm probably I should have provided the background also right at the start. So yeah, yeah. Person 1 2:59 Don't worry, no problem.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 3:00 OK. So first question, can you describe your role in shaping the DEI policies within your organisation?

Person 1 3:10 Yeah. So I am the diversity, equity and inclusion specialist. I am a team of one which is always difficult, but I create the content of policies, initiatives etcetera. It's then agreed with the People leadership team and then signed off. We've got a really strong relationship with our trade unions. So policies have to go through trade unions, but I do write the policy and then it's signed off by others.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 3:40 OK. Second question, before the 2024 U.S. presidential elections, what were your company's key DEI initiatives?

Person 1 3:51 So we were in, we've been in a bit of a unique position, so we actually transitioned out of a bigger organisation, National Grid in 2023 and then became a standalone business in 2023. Sorry. So our key focus has been really to set ourselves up and create our own kind of DEI story. What it means for us. But we did have two key focuses. On gender and ethnicity. Diversity and then also a wider thing around how do we drive inclusion throughout our business. But it has changed. Since before let me not get ahead of myself, but it was we, we did have a really big focus on gender and ethnicity.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 4:46 Hey, how would you characterise your company DEI strategy before the election results?

Person 1 4:56 See it as I say, like sort of finding our feet. Our strategy was so we had and I can send this to you if it's helpful, I'm happy to share it. We had kind of four key pillars around how to support leaders in understanding DEI. We wanted to

start a bit of a drumbeat of DEI through things like training webinars we had in 2024 we had. Sorry, end of 2023 and towards the 2024, we had about 24 webinars on DEI, so it was really to get people to understand DEI. And we had, we have some events and stuff, but our strategy was really to get the word out there about DEI because whilst National Grid had a big DEI strategy, they also had a really huge number of people in their organisation. Their organisation, something like 20,000 or something. So a lot of people actually didn't know what they did unless they were really tuned in. So we tried to make it a point of getting DEI to every part of the organisation.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 6:15 OK, that's great. Since the 2024 U.S. presidential elections, have there been any significant changes in your company's DEI priorities? If so, what changed and why? And I think you actually partially covered that in your previous response as well.

Person 1 6:35 Yeah. So I think just to give you a bit more detail, I think it's probably more subtle than others because again, we'd only just really started our journey. But I think the main change. Is probably this urgency to embed DEI into the organisation much quicker. So where we were initially just supporting people to understand what DEI is, we now are trying to embed it into governance policies. Into the wider business strategy so that DEI can't be separated from business. So we were looking at doing, there's something I don't know if you've seen it but KPMG, I think it's KPMG and I can send you a link if it's helpful. They have the five stages of DEI maturity, and so it goes from awareness all the way up to sustainability. And we were trying to go to each. Part. But we've now had to kind of go from the awareness piece. To what is the word that they use? Two seconds? Two integrated very quickly because what we've felt is that. With the change in the political environment.

I really felt that people were much more confident to talk about how they didn't agree with DEI whereas before because it came from such a traumatic event, people felt like this was the right thing to do, or if they were disgruntled by it, it was quite a quiet voice in a much louder supportive piece and the evidence to that for us was we did a belonging survey at the end of 2024. And you could really see some changes in the feelings towards DEI. So many more people talk about how they feel alienated by DEI and really disconnected to it. People were saying that we should just hire based on merit and if they and people felt that they'd basically been harmed if they weren't in the underrepresented groups, and when we did the belonging survey in 2023, but they didn't. We didn't hear that at all. So I think it gave people more confidence. So I think what we've had to do is really mature in a much quicker way than perhaps you would have in 2020 where people felt like they could just put out

how they were going to support people? And grow into it. We then have had to kind of speed up quite a lot, if that makes sense.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 9:36 Yeah, yeah. And it is very interesting insight because I've, you know, the feedback I had from the sort of previous interview I had was quite similar that people now feel quite more. Relaxed. When actually talking about or maybe not criticising but expressing their opinions about the DEI topics.

Person 1 10:06 Uh, huh. Absolutely. And that has come from, you know, linking it back to the question, the US elections, where DEI must die. Elon Musk talking about getting rid of DEI from things. I think it's given people the confidence to say, well, if our leaders or global leaders don't believe in it. Why should I?

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 10:31 I should read. Yeah. Exactly, exactly. OK, that's great. And you, I think you're also partially answering the next question. So to what extent do you feel the political climate has influenced your organisation's DEI strategies?

Person 1 10:49 Yeah, I suppose the only thing that I'd probably add to it is, whilst it's great that it's forced us to mature and I do think it is a good thing because. Where? If it takes too long, it can feel like it's not meaningful for anybody, right? So the people who it's meant to support would say you've paid lip service. You've told me all of these things that we haven't seen it, and then the people who are disgruntled by DEI would say, well, you don't really believe in it either because you're not actually making a change. And so it's been great. I think what it has been, though, is based on a fear of changing a feeling so. Particularly our executive team.

They have asked us to not put out as many comms, not do as much. Like not do as many events and things like that, because there's a fear that people might feel more and more disengaged by it. So if we can try and do things that link to culture rather than DEI, they still prioritise it. But I think the political climate has definitely affected the way that we are. How our executive feel about our DEI work?

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 12:11 OK. Thank you.

Person 1 12:13 OK.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 12:14 Has your organisation. Oh, sorry you wanted.

Person 1 12:18 And I don't know.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 12:20 Has the organisation faced pressure from external stakeholders, investors or customers regarding DEI commitments, especially due to political shifts?

Person 1 12:31 So as a business, we don't really have traditional customers because of the nature of our work and we supply suppliers if that makes sense. But the one thing that I did want to mention here is that actually our owners have

doubled down on DEI. So they've shared new strategic priorities. But what they do want is they've increased their reporting to showcase the return of investment. So saying that we're doing DEI is no longer enough. They are looking at how we showcase what it means and the impact that it has on our work or people. But we haven't had. Luckily we haven't really had much from external stakeholders at the moment.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 13:24 OK, that's great. Thank you. Next question, how does your company manage stakeholder expectations while navigating political pressures surrounding DEI?

Person 1 13:37 Yeah. And I think this is a really interesting question because. I would say that we're in a bit of a tug of war with just with colleagues at the moment, so some people feel like we're not doing enough. So you've said that you want to do DEI, but there's only one person in the team. You don't have that much resource or budget and then you have other people saying that we're doing too much. The way that we're having to manage stakeholder expectation is becoming much more transparent. In our communication, so before it was kind of like DEI is rolled out as a good news story, right? Like look at how many people we have at an event and look at this and actually now it we have to be much more real and I know that this is about the US elections, but things such as you know the. New Supreme Court ruling around trans rights and what that means for people, even that sort of stuff. Has really affected how we do things and we've had to be much more, like I said, transparent and we've had to shift from talking more about inclusion than diversity and things around people's behaviours rather than their opinions. So rather than trying to change people's opinions about DEI, we talk about actually. We what we want from this is inclusive behaviours and we want people to show up in an organisation. In our organisation where people can be their authentic selves without you making them feel like they're unable to do that. So it's been like a subtle shift. But that is how we've had to kind of ride the conflict a little bit between the stakeholders because what we didn't want to do is have two really strong camps of pro and anti DEI. And where is that middle ground that we can find, which is everybody wants to have a workplace that they feel safe in.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 15:47 OK. Thank you. How does your company manage stakeholder expectations while navigating? Oh no. We had these questions for how does your company manage stakeholder expectations while navigating political pressure surrounding DEI? It's a very similar sort of one to the previous actually, but.

Person 1 16:15 Yeah, I probably don't have too much more to add for that question. I think the main thing is really supporting, so we don't really have too much political pressures in terms of actual stakeholders or. Particularly external stakeholders, I think what we're having to do is hold our nerve and say that we do prioritise DEI. So it's being strong in our conviction. That DEI is the right thing to do.

But as I say, like trying to find the middle ground where we don't push people super far away. And we've also been working much closer on topics that people from across the spectrum care about, like armed forces and stuff like that. So we're finding other topics that we can utilise. Lukasz Perski (2219674) 17:13 OK, that's great. Thank you.

Person 1 17:15 Number one.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 17:19 Do you see long-term risks or benefits in adjusting DEI policies based on political shifts?

Person 1 17:28 This one, again a brilliant question that Kasha I think the.

Otherwise I want to start with the fact that it probably was always going to happen. So the way that DEI came into the forefront of for organisations is based on trauma. So the trauma from watching the horrific murder of George Floyd and the second wave of the Black Lives Matter movement that came from that, from seeing again the brutal murder of Sarah Rivera and then the political backlash that we saw. And the violence that we saw at her vigil and then the deep inequalities that we saw in the pandemic and a digital divide and and things like that, I think there was always going to be a push back because it was based on trauma and it was a very quick response to something that was so horrific. It also meant that organisations, so obviously it created a market for things like unconscious bias. But lots of the DEI work when it first came out was quite surface level. It was do this bit of training on unconscious bias and you'll be OK. I think it was always going to happen because when people saw that that wasn't. It was well-intentioned, but it wasn't meaningful. And I think we also run the risk of increasing polarisation because of things such as climate change, which will obviously cause migration, which could then if not well handled, create racism, which we are seeing already with the different political parties, even in the UK talking about migration and how we can limit it. So I think it was always going to happen. I think there is a long-term risk of continuing to allow that to happen and I think we do have to shift the way that we look at DEI into how it can be more sustainable. And I think that's by driving it into the heart of an organisation. You put things into governance, you put things into processes so that you become diverse by default. Rather than putting out lovely pictures of all these people who don't actually work in your organisation to try and attract people that look like them to go into your

organisation. But I think it's about how do we showcase that DEI can help people be fit for the future. But I do think of course, there's a risk that if we adjust the DEI policies every time there's a political shift, it will not be meaningful because it happened so frequently and so quickly.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 20:28 Yeah. OK. So that's great. Next question, and I think you also covered that previously, is your organisation planning to expand, reduce or modify its DEI programmes in the near future and why? Person 1 20:43 Yeah. So I think for now we're going to continue as is and whilst that is great, we've always needed more resource in this space. Which we won't get because I think the optics of increasing DEI wouldn't be. And I think all exec are on board with that. So I think there's something about how do we continue on but change the way that we do DEI. It is still a priority for our owners if that changed. I would hope that there is something that we would still prioritise DEI in some way, but I do think it would have less of a focus. I think. Our owners, standing strong in the DEI is the reason why we will continue ourselves, but if it was our own choice. As an exec, I'm not 100% sure. I think it would go into culture work and I think resource would be taken out of it.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 21:52 I think that's great. Thank you. What advice would you give to other businesses trying to balance DEI, stakeholder demands and political realities?

Person 1 22:03 I think probably the first piece of advice is to recognise how difficult that is. You know, businesses are trying to make money. They're not trying to be the moral compass for the country. I think there is something around rallying around your DEI team. They are your greatest resource in this space. But I think some of the other things I would look at is really shifting that focus from wanting everybody to share opinions to creating a contract of shared behaviours. So whatever people think about it, we can still and it's when I say it, it feels like a way out, right? Like I just want you to be inclusive. It doesn't matter. Your opinion of course your opinion does matter. Like I don't want you to have racist opinions or whatever that looks like.

But in the moment that we're in now, it becomes more difficult to have those conversations when the voices are much louder. So if we can focus on behaviours, it creates a platform to have those conversations in the future. Continue to drive DEI as a cultural imperative. When I was saying before about the fit for the future, we have a really difficult time ahead of us in terms of recruitment, so some statistics. So we're just looking at our new DEI strategy, which is why I'm bringing this up. But by 2035, which is only in 10 years, we're going to have more births and deaths in the UK. If we continue in the pattern that we are now, and so there's also a real need to focus on intergenerational inclusion. Because where people where the economy is

so bad at the moment, people are working later and then that means there's potentially 6 generations working together for 2030. And then obviously there's rapid technological advancements, which is already leaving some people behind. So I think it should. There's a rather than the business case that we spoke about in 2020 for DEI around. Oh, it makes people more creative and therefore you get more money from people from the work of the of diverse people. It turns into retention becomes imperative. And how do we retain skilled people is by creating a culture where people feel that they belong.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 24:34 Right. That's great. That's great. Thank you very much.

Person 1 24:36 You're very welcome.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 24:38 And the last question, do you have any final thoughts on perspectives on DEI in the current political landscape?

Person 1 24:46 I think very briefly because I know we've only got 2 minutes I think.

Whilst I'd really disagree with the shift, absolutely I do see where it's come from. I think the way that, as I said, the way that DEI was came into the forefront of people's minds. We learnt on the hard work and lived experience of people who are minoritised in this country. And society. And I think we haven't done enough to bring people along for the journey to understand their role in belonging and inclusion. And it's a really, really hard time, but it's an incredibly important topic that you bring up and through your dissertation. And I think the more people that can see that we need to move away from events and flying flags to actual meaningful change and to organisations, it's a really, really hard time for minoritised groups and DEI specialists alike, and I think it's about how do we drive meaningful change in a time that's quite complex and unsafe for people. So I just, yeah, I wanted to say thank you for the work that you're doing in your dissertation. It's a super important topic.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 26:07 Yeah. Well, thank you very much. Thank you.

Thank you, Person 1. So. I don't have any more questions, so I'll stop the interview. It's something according now, sorry. Let me just stop it.

□ Lukasz Perski stopped transcription

Thematic Analysis of Interview with Person 1

Voices of the Participant (Quotes)	Meaning Interpretation (Researcher)	Concepts/Themes Identified
"I am the diversity, equity and inclusion specialist. I am a team of one which is always difficult..."	Indicates limited resourcing and structural challenges in implementing DEI initiatives.	Resource Constraints in DEI Implementation
"We transitioned out of a bigger organisation... our key focus has been really to set ourselves up and create our own kind of DEI story."	Highlights organisational restructuring and the need to redefine DEI strategy independently.	Post-Divestiture DEI Reorientation
"We had about 24 webinars on DEI... our strategy was really to get the word out there."	Emphasis on awareness-building and education as foundational DEI strategy.	DEI Awareness and Education
"The main change is probably this urgency to embed DEI... into governance policies... into the wider business strategy."	Reflects a strategic shift from awareness to integration due to political pressures.	Strategic Embedding of DEI
"People were much more confident to talk about how they didn't agree with DEI... people felt that they'd basically been harmed if they weren't in the underrepresented groups."	Reveals rising internal resistance and perception of exclusion among majority groups post-election.	Backlash and Alienation in DEI
"Our executive team... asked us to not put out as many comms... there's a fear that people might feel more and more disengaged."	Suggests cautious internal communication strategy to avoid polarisation.	Executive Sensitivity to DEI Messaging
"Our owners have doubled down on DEI... increased their reporting to showcase the return of investment."	Demonstrates external stakeholder commitment and demand for measurable DEI outcomes.	Stakeholder-Driven DEI Accountability
"We're in a bit of a tug of war... some people feel like we're not doing enough... others say we're doing too much."	Illustrates internal conflict and polarisation around DEI efforts.	Internal DEI Tensions and Balancing Act
"We've had to shift from talking more about inclusion than diversity... focus on inclusive behaviours."	Indicates strategic reframing of DEI to focus on shared values and behaviours over identity politics.	Behavioural Framing of Inclusion

Voices of the Participant (Quotes)	Meaning Interpretation (Researcher)	Concepts/Themes Identified
“If we adjust the DEI policies every time there’s a political shift, it will not be meaningful...”	Warns against reactive DEI strategies and advocates for long-term sustainability.	Risks of Politicised DEI Adjustments
“Businesses are trying to make money... they’re not trying to be the moral compass for the country.”	Acknowledges commercial realities and the tension between ethics and profitability.	Commercial Pragmatism vs Ethical Imperatives
“By 2035... more deaths than births... potentially 6 generations working together... rapid technological advancements...”	Projects future demographic and technological shifts as drivers for inclusive culture.	Intergenerational Inclusion and Future-Proofing DEI
“We need to move away from events and flying flags to actual meaningful change...”	Critiques performative DEI and calls for substantive organisational transformation.	Call for Authentic and Impactful DEI

Transcript of interview with Person 2

24 June 2025, 09:05am

Lukasz Perski (2219674) started transcription

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 0:06 Hey, it started. So. Hello, Person 2. Thank you very much for meeting with me. So. So the purpose of this call is to conduct an interview.

Person 2 (1352610) 0:08 Cool. Hello.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 0:21 For a research project titled Navigating DEI in a shifting political landscape, study of corporate strategy and stakeholder actions, post-2024 US elections which aim is to investigate how companies react to sudden political changes.

Person 2 (1352610) 0:32 Mm hmm. Yeah.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 0:41 And in this case, we're looking at changes to the DEI policies, so the interview would take approximately 30 minutes. The research is fully confidential and it will be covered by an interview consent form provided by the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, which I'll send you the email after this interview.

Person 2 (1352610) 1:04 Yeah. Cool.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 1:11 So I'll ask you a few questions which I altered based on your role. So can you describe your role in supporting and shaping the DEI strategies for the organisations you advise?

Person 2 (1352610) 1:15 Of course. Yeah, of course. Yeah, of course. So I am an external consultant and I work either direct with corporates or I work with a couple of specialist organisations as well who work with big corporates and we may need advice on diversity and inclusion related to marketing. So that's both kind of creative. So what you see and media investment as well. So you know where they where they spend their money and I mean that does also have some implications for things like internal marketing practices and teams so the composition of marketing teams, where they get insights from how they put checks and balances into those processes for diversity, equity, inclusion. So that's how I work with companies all over the world.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 2:22 OK, that's great. Thank you very much. Next question. So prior to the 2024 U.S. presidential elections, what were the main DEI priorities or initiatives you were helping your clients to implement?

Person 2 (1352610) 2:29 Mm hmm. Yeah. Yeah, definitely. So I think before the election, lots of clients had very public-facing targets that they'd set, whether that was in terms of representation within their kind of their marketing creative or whether it was in terms of spend of money with what you would term diverse suppliers. So kind of media owners or production companies or agencies that were owned or

predominantly run by marginalised or minority groups. So you know, in the US this is quite a big deal. You know, whether it's like kind of black-owned suppliers, women owned. That kind of stuff. So lots of big corporates had very explicit targets of how much money they would spend with those types of marketing suppliers. So those were a lot of the initiatives also things like kind of marketing playbooks which is a bit like guidelines really for how they do inclusive marketing. Thinking about kind of where they get insights from, how they what, how they compose their target audience, that kind of stuff.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 3:47 OK, that's great. Thank you. Next question, how would you describe the general DEI approach or mindset amongst your clients before the 2024 election results?

Person 2 (1352610) 3:59 Yeah, I think it varies really depending on the client, because some clients were kind of just getting started on their journey and they were kind of just becoming, I'd say compliant. So they were just starting to think about. OK. Are we targeting the right audiences and are we using the right media to target those audiences? Are we using the right creative to target those audiences, whereas others were really quite progressive and they were funding initiatives with big media suppliers? To do things like develop diverse creators or diverse producers. So it was like a full spectrum through for OK, we're just getting started through to actually we're leading the industry. So yeah, a really broad spectrum of clients, sorry, I'm just thinking that.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 4:47 OK. Next question. So since the 2024 elections, have you observed any notable shifts in your client's DEI priorities? If so, what kind of changes and what do you think prompted them?

Person 2 (1352610) 4:57 Uh huh. Yeah. So I think the big divide as well based on where you are in the world and what industry you sit in. So there's definitely AUS and UK divide lots of global clients who are run out of the US. Have dismissed or kind of retracted their very explicit commitments to DEI. So all those things I was talking about, like a percentage of spend set spent with diverse suppliers or having diverse representation in kind of marketing teams or leadership teams, a lot of those public commitments have gone for variously publicly reported reasons. I think a lot of them are very cautious about that. In the US, political climate in particular, and that's globally for organisations that are mainly based or have head offices in the US, so some of them I think are quite nervous about making public commitments. But also I think for some of them genuinely the DEI kind of conversation has moved on a bit and they want to move beyond. Kind of setting a target. They actually just want to ingrain it in a day-to-day working practices so you see various things reported in the press, so there's a definite US-UK divide and firms that even global firms that are

mainly based or the head office in the US have changed more than firms that are kind of like with clients who are UK only as well and actually they haven't changed their commitments quite so much. In fact, they're kind of continuing. I also think that. It depends on the industry as well. So the category. So one area where we see this not really impacting is higher education. So I've read quite a few reports in that higher universities are big spenders in terms of marketing. And they know that they have to attract, you know, they've got a commitment and a governmental commitment to attract people who are from marginalised and minority communities and are underrepresented in their student population. So actually in the UK we're seeing extended commitments to DEI amongst those kind of spenders. I know that's not the same in the US, so there's a definite kind of there's a definite divide there. So, but I think, yeah, three things I've seen change are fewer explicit targets and commitments that are publicly reported or made a big deal out of. An increased focus on accessibility because that's one of the things around disability or kind of cognitive, even cognitive kind of impairments that are still a kind of human right and you can focus on. So lots of I think in the initial time when the political landscape changed, people were still making excessive visibility commitment. Not kind of DEI commitments, but one thing that is a definite fact is that I work with a lot of organisations who are specialists in this space and there have been massive budget cuts, so money is just being pulled out of budgets allocated towards inclusive marketing and inclusive marketing spend and a lot of specialists in this sector are really struggling for business and I suspect lots of them will go out of business and those kind of smaller suppliers. So production, you know like in the US you would say kind of black-owned or woman owned or. You know, veteran owned kind of production companies, media, media companies, we may see some of them go out of business because there has just been budget cut for those kind of initiatives.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 8:44 OK, that's great. Thank you. So I think that you've actually partially answered the next question. So in your experience, how has the current political climate influenced the DEI strategies of the organisations you work with?

Person 2 (1352610) 8:53 Yep. Mm hmm. Yeah. Yeah. Definitely less explicit, more implicit, I think for a lot of organisations the work is still going on, whether they call it DEI or EDI is a different question.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 9:05 None.

Person 2 (1352610) 9:20 And I think it's just more tricky. Even if the companies that are very passionate or have individuals within them that are very passionate in this space, it's harder for them to get significant amounts of budgets signed off for these kind of initiatives and to spend on them. So that is a real shame.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 9:36 OK. I see. Yeah, thank you. Have any of your clients experienced pressure from external stakeholders to alter the DEI commitments in response to political developments? Are you aware of any? Person 2 (1352610) 9:52 Well, I don't kind of get that. I'm I'm not as aware of because I'm not working within an organisation, the kind of shareholder pressure. I mean all I see is what's been reported in terms of the media and in terms of external pressure, I think consumers are still very interested in it. So there was a. There was a report by the UNMISTAKABLES recently, which is a specialist in the sector called the grow up, and actually a lot of the sample was UK, but in the UK you know most the majority of people still believe that companies that invest in DEI are more likely to succeed in the long term and a quarter of people still believe that. Companies with inclusive marketing are more relevant to them, so from external kind of consumer groups and advocates and the general public, yes, that external pressure is to continue. Also, you've seen quite a lot of reports lately where companies like Apple or Costco, their shareholders have unanimously voted to continue investment in DEI, you know, and to continue investment in DEI promises and commitments. So it's a really interesting one because there may be political pressure, but I actually think that the markets and state shareholders see that there's a business argument for DEI and they actually see, you know there's. Been lots of research by side Business School and you know you're still. You're kind of McKinsey's reporting about better return on investment from companies with boards that have representation of non-white individuals of women. So if the financial markets, I think there's still a business argument that this is a good thing to commit to in the long term.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 11:28 Hmm.

Person 2 (1352610) 11:30 That differs to the political argument. So I think there is a divider.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 11:38 OK. That's great. Thank you. So moving on to the next question. How do you help your clients balance stakeholder expectations with the political sensitivity surrounding DEI? Are you involved in any activities like that? Yeah.

Person 2 (1352610) 11:57 That's a tricky one, I think, because. On a date I would be more involved on kind of a day-to-day basis and I think one of the things that has kind of changed is the language that is used. So we talk a lot more about the business argument and the business evidence for continued investment in DEI as opposed to moral imperative. Because I don't think that those kind of moral arguments are flying in the current political climate, you know, just doing the right thing and making sure that you're investing in funding in marginalised communities, forbid the sake of altruism is not really as fashionable as it used to be. So you have

to kind of pull more on the return on investment argument and the fact that consumers still want to see inclusive marketing and it will be more effective in terms of driving sales, loyalty, brand preference etcetera. So. That's how we would help them manage that with internal stakeholders is by helping them still fuel the argument for investment and commitment to DEI and yeah, around, you know. Yeah, language I think is a big thing. Well, yeah, you talk a lot more about return on investment. You talk much more about some of the words I think have become tarred. So even DEI itself, I think can it is just woke now, you know, so you. We're having to find alternative language to discuss things in turning clients.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 13:35 I see. OK. That's great. Thank you. Next question, have you encountered any situations where the tension between different stakeholder groups, for example leadership, excess employees regarding DEI decisions and? Are you aware of how these tensions have been managed?

Person 2 (1352610) 14:01 Not so much kind of. I think actually predominantly marketing teams, which is who I work with mainly are quite committed to this because they're they're kind of quite connected to consumers, right, and what consumers want and they can see a lot of the time in terms of brand tracking metrics and brand health metrics that more inclusive marketing works really well. They're very much kind of in. You know, they may be more slightly progressive thinkers. I think some of the tensions I've seen is with global brands. There are different priorities in terms of DEI around the globe, you know, so. Even US versus UK, the marginalised groups are very different in both in both countries and the way we do it is very different. So that's kind of tension. And then if you have another market, so you know Middle East for example again. There's certain sensitivities there and then if you go even to Europe, lots of DEI data and kind of consumer inside that you can get. There's legislation around not being able to access people's social characteristics and get that in surveys and see, you know, what the onus. So if in the US you can get accredited as a diverse own supplier, whereas in France companies have no legal obligation, and in fact they're encouraged to keep that kind of social characteristics of the ownership confidential. So the main tension is about OK, if we want to do this, how do we implement it in different markets because it needs a kind of localized approach? It's not a kind of one-size-fits-all around the world's DEI approach.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 15:42 That's great. That's great insight. From your perspective, what are the long-term risks or opportunities for companies that adjust their DEI strategies in response to political shifts?

Person 2 (1352610) 15:53 OK. Yeah, I mean, I hang on. I'm just kind of some notes on this before, but I think there's a huge risk. So you see from lots of surveys

that consumers still want inclusive marketing, the population and especially in the US is increasingly what they would call multicultural a mixed race. The you know we we're becoming a more intersectional society and you know you're not going to be able to sell to everyone if your marketing doesn't reflect that, right. You're not you. You become increasingly irrelevant. And actually the generation, the kind of younger generation which you can turn Gen Z or whatever are more interested in brands just as a principal being inclusive, you know lots of surveys kind of report that back and what was really interesting is that unmistakable survey shows that even people who voted reform it were still believed that inclusive marketing was more relevant, so that is quite an interesting dichotomy there. So there's a long-term risk in terms of not investing in DEI practices and DEI in terms of marketing and there's the business risk because you know it is still good. For business, you know your shareholders will make a better return if you have better representation and in your marketing and on your boards and in your leadership teams. So you know that there is a business argument. So that is a huge risk if you scale that back. You know, I think you've got as much risk of getting backlash from going to woke or as if you completely relinquish all your DEI commitments. You know, if you completely backtrack, I think you're going to get a lot of backlash there. So that's a huge big business risk. The public you come out and and proclaim that.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 17:42 And.

Person 2 (1352610) 17:46 And in terms of the marketing industry, I think there's a huge risk because like I said, if we pull all that funding from diverse from margin from companies that are owned by more diverse populations, marginalised populations. So that's in terms of production companies, media companies, media owners, you know agencies, they will go out of business because actually they're relying upon, they're almost like start-ups, right. So they're relying upon that funding from progressive marketers to actually survive a lot of them are kind of small scale up starts. About businesses and that I think will have a huge detrimental effect on those industries because we'll have fewer innovative companies, fewer companies with more ways of thinking, more consolidation. So actually, I think as a media and marketing industry, it's a very. It's a big as well.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 18:38 OK, that's great. Thank you. We'll each you got four more questions. So what strategies would you recommend to companies aiming to maintain or strengthen their DEI efforts despite political headwinds?

Person 2 (1352610) 18:45 Yeah, that's fine. No worries. I think it's just got to be brave and ride it out and I think that's what a lot of companies are doing in the background. I think actually, even though lots of companies have stopped

proclaiming that we're we're we're investing in DEI, they still are and they're still trying to do things behind the scene.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 19:01 Yeah.

Person 2 (1352610) 19:14 You know, it's still a more effective business strategy. Increasingly, you know we say I did a report with a kind of awards body in the UK and 58% of the most highly awarded in terms of effectiveness marketing campaigns.

Uh. Yeah. So I had inclusion at the core. So throughout their strategy, they're targeting their media investment and their creative. So I think it's just be brave, ride it out and it's up to you to judge the PR of that and how you manage that. But keep going, keep investing because the political headwinds will change more so than what actually makes financial sense and business sense for you.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 19:59 That's great. I think you also partially answered the next question. So other organisations you work with generally looking to expand scale back or adapt to the DEI programmes in the near future, what's driving those decisions?

Person 2 (1352610) 20:09 None. Yeah, like I said, I think it's only really some of the UK higher education organisations that are looking to expand and that's because of they, they have a commitment to, but also they need the money they see, you know, international students and students from different backgrounds as new sources of revenue. OK. It's like tapping into new audiences, right? So that makes business sense for them. On the whole, I would say that most people either keeping their amount, their commitment, the same or reducing. Because of what they can do publicly and because it's kind of gone out of fashion, I think there's a in some ways, regardless of the political headwinds, I think there's like a slight tedium with DEI. It's like, oh, yeah, we've been doing this for too long, you know, the next thing. And also in times I think it's more related to the economic climate. If truth be told, because in times of financial squeeze, which it most businesses are in at the moment, especially in the Western world, we're not in a growth economy at the moment. Things like DEI and even sustainability initiatives, anything that's more slightly altruistic and doesn't give you a very short-term return on investment. Yeah, it's cut and I, you know, I think that's I think a lot of it is actually more to do with the economic climate than the political climate, because businesses are facing hard times and they're just cutting anything that doesn't give a short-term return on investment. And that is something that shareholders are probably interested in and putting pressure on. Well, regardless of what the kind of moral arguments are, so DEI kind of makes long-term business sense, but it may not always make sense in the short term, and we're in a short-termistic climate.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 22:01 Yeah. OK, that's great. Thank you. What advice would you offer to businesses trying to navigate the intersection of stakeholder expectations and political realities?

Person 2 (1352610) 22:17 Gosh. Oh advice. Stick to the business case. Even the current political leaders listen to money. I would suggest more so than any kind of principles or morals. So. It may need a reframe, a slight reframe. The way that you're going about DEI and the language that you use, and you may want to talk. Start talking about things like you know, I think one of the big arguments is at the moment is, you know, do you have to directly represent your audience? In your organisation? Well, no, you don't. You can't always. But actually you should avoid homogeneity within your organisation as well, because that that will lead to groupthink and less kind of productive outcomes, less successful outcomes. So you may just have to reframe the way you talk. You may have to be further that way you talk. Talk about things, but everybody, even Trump says to money, so you may also have to school yourself up on the business case. And a lot of organisations working in this space are doing more and more studies and there's really good research to show what the return on investment for investing in diversity actually inclusion is.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 23:33 OK, that's great. And the last question, do you have any final thoughts or perspectives on the DEI in the current political landscape?

Person 2 (1352610) 23:42 I think you just have to be brave. I think. I think we just need to be mindful that things like this come in and out of fashion and this is a long-term commitment and this is something where it will only change over the long term.

So you know, they keep going. Could be brave.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 24:04 Well, that's great. Thank you. Thank you very much for your answers. I'll conclude the interview at 10:29 and stop the recording now.

Person 2 (1352610) 24:12 Cool. Thank you.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) stopped transcription

Thematic Analysis of Interview with Person 2

Voices of the Participant (Quotes)	Meaning Interpretation (Researcher)	Concepts/Themes Identified
"Lots of big corporates had very explicit targets... how much money they would spend with... black-owned suppliers, women-owned..."	Highlights pre-election emphasis on supplier diversity and public DEI commitments.	Supplier Diversity and Public DEI Targets
"Some clients were just becoming compliant... others were really quite progressive..."	Reveals a spectrum of DEI maturity across organisations, from basic compliance to industry leadership.	Varied DEI Maturity Levels
"Global clients run out of the US have dismissed... their very explicit commitments to DEI."	Indicates post-election rollback of DEI initiatives among US-based corporations.	Retraction of DEI Commitments Post-Election
"Massive budget cuts... specialists in this sector are really struggling for business."	Demonstrates economic pressures leading to reduced DEI funding and risks to diverse suppliers.	Budget Cuts and Threats to Diverse Suppliers
"Work is still going on... whether they call it DEI or EDI is a different question."	Suggests semantic shifts and rebranding of DEI to avoid political backlash.	Reframing DEI Language
"We talk a lot more about the business argument... as opposed to moral imperative."	Reflects strategic pivot to ROI-based justification for DEI.	Business Case Framing of DEI
"Some of the words... have become tarred... DEI itself... is just woke now."	Acknowledges politicisation of DEI terminology and need for linguistic adaptation.	Politicisation and Terminology Sensitivity
"Different priorities in terms of DEI around the globe... legislation around not being able to access people's social characteristics..."	Highlights challenges of implementing DEI globally due to legal and cultural differences.	Global DEI Implementation Challenges
"You've got as much risk of backlash from going too woke... as if you completely relinquish all your DEI commitments."	Warns of reputational risks from both extremes of DEI positioning.	Reputational Risk from DEI Extremes
"If we pull all that funding... we'll have fewer innovative companies... more consolidation."	Predicts negative impact on innovation and diversity in the marketing industry due to funding cuts.	Innovation Risk from DEI Defunding

Voices of the Participant (Quotes)	Meaning Interpretation (Researcher)	Concepts/Themes Identified
“Be brave and ride it out... political headwinds will change more so than what makes financial sense.”	Encourages long-term commitment to DEI despite political volatility.	Long-Term DEI Commitment and Resilience
“DEI kind of makes long-term business sense, but... we’re in a short-termistic climate.”	Identifies tension between short-term economic pressures and long-term DEI value.	Short-Termism vs Long-Term DEI Strategy
“Even Trump listens to money... stick to the business case.”	Advocates for pragmatic, financially grounded DEI advocacy in politically sensitive environments.	Pragmatic Advocacy via Financial Justification
“We need to be mindful that things like this come in and out of fashion... this is a long-term commitment.”	Emphasises DEI as a sustained cultural and strategic imperative, not a trend.	DEI as Enduring Strategic Imperative

Transcript of interview with Person 3

8 August 2025, 11:33am

Lukasz Perski started transcription

Lukasz Perski 0:04

OK, so recording started. So first question, can you describe your role in shaping the EI policies within your organisation?

Person 3 0:18

With reference to the day, are you being to diversity, equity and inclusion, right?

Yeah. So I'm so I started my journey a long time ago when, especially when. So I'm with the company since a long time. I was always engaged. But then when we were detached, detached from XXXX.

Lukasz Perski 0:22

Yes.

Person 3 0:33

We realised that the LGBTQ group was completely unexisting and there was no representation, so together with some colleague in Zurich that we're already part of, former XXXX, we decided that we need to do something and then that's where we started to work creating our.

On erg. And it was, it started like a local project. But then soon I was contacted by many people, HR and things also because especially we were really unhappy when the company come out with a 360. I don't know if you remember the very beginning when they come out with.

It's fantastic idea that the diversity is being a woman. I say like, honestly, I earned. They had people at headquarter and say like if in 2020 we believe that my diversity is is sex and gender related. We are really nowhere and that's where where we started.

And say that we want to do something for the gay and lesbian and LGBTQ community, and we started with a platform that was launched together and that is still there is a Yammer. Now we've engage and we start gathering people and then the diversity I was, I was also granted the.

Chance to be the ambassador of a 360 and I have 41 voltage and I use this to turn into a campaign for the GBTQ that was totally missing and that's when he started and then I started to interact with the many global experts and from HR and from communication.

And then thanks to that, we started to have first the platform and then we also managed to have our website founded the ERG, and then be present and doing

pride activity and still a long way to go. But from there, we did a huge improvement, I believe so this is.

With the story of our ERG 2025 starting from 2020.

Lukasz Perski 2:34

OK, that's great. Thank you. Before the 2024 U.S. presidential elections, what were your companies key DEI initiatives?

Person 3 2:47

I think it's so we have discussed a bit of this and as you know, it's actually energy has not changed his commitment. We also have a chapter in US enrollee and we have many member of the Community from the beginning there was a Marty and all these other guys supporting from US.

They always been very active. We have are not so impacted. So we have not discontinued to the extent of my knowledge we have not discontinued any activity there. And we also did also in June this June there was a kind of a big celebration in the role headquarter.

I've heard of sound downgrade like for instance XXXX, that is remove officially with diversity equity and inclusion. But we didn't. So that is a good point. Still we need to do a lot better in Itachi. This is my my personal fault and there is also a lack of coordination.

So there is also the global Xxxx for the conglomerate.

And but we have a discontinue relationship and also with a touchy right with them and but specifically for the USI am not aware that has been our core and this was also confirmed by the CSO CEO what one point the Vizier stated that committee.

For diversity will not we will not step down, but you know we are Japanese company.

So I think that's also easier and but other company like MVV and I've heard a lot of them like challenging and no longer be allowed to do certain type of activity or we just step down and saying like we will not.

I can force that. So that's what. What I what I can tell for my experience and for what I've heard.

Lukasz Perski 4:28

OK, thank you. I believe that you also partially answered the next question. How would you characterise your company's dei strategy before the election results?

Person 3 4:42

But the strategy is a it's a real formal without a lot of content. This is also I'm not only speaking from my ERG, but also from other like I'm also a member now of the ERG for diverse ability and it was excellent. So we there are excellent ideas.

Yeah, but then it's always based on the goodwill of people on us dedicated extra time on our work with no budget. So this is a bit of and I also think and then there was one point from the chapter US saying that we are absolutely not represented in the board. So none of us and none of.

And so that's why we say, you know, that is often we talk about corporate washing and I think that there is a genuine content coming from the RG, but the overall strategy is also unclear and it has been recently subject to a bit of critique and because I also also to give.

Give an example. Finally, this is the first year where we managed to have a branded T-shirt and then also Toto bag and this stuff it took ages. Also this is like a really the minimum because it's ridiculous. It's you under Franks, we both like, I don't know 34 for Switzerland and but should I have.

Organise everything. Do we have to do everything so so it's always a bit. This is a bit of a common feeling and not only for LGBTQ, but also within the other energy.

Lukasz Perski 6:12

OK, that's great. Thank you. Since the 2024 U.S. presidential elections, have there been any significant changes in your company's DI priorities? If so, what changes and why? And I think also you partially.

Touched on actually answer for, for, for, for for that question.

Person 3 6:34

Yes, there have been not a sensitive change I would say. And you, you, I see that you focus on the USI would like to. I can't take your attention on the fact that we have a situation has not improved as it is for LGBTQ.

And like this year, we also managed to, I had a wonderful article on the horrible situation in Hungary for the pride that that legislation because like it's full of country who are doing a repressive legislation, including Hungary, who wanted to prohibit the pride. And we did, we did, but we did an article that went.

Well, and was also supported by the company and Hungary is now like similar situation like Russia where it is even like they start to talk about LGBTQ propaganda and these things. So yes, and US of course, I'm not surprised of it. But the US has always been a visa conflict, right?

But it's also I can also see what I've seen and what I read is also it will minority in US, will be all impacted because let's not always talk on LGBTQ like some RG.

There was this lady very nice there and the black woman and the colleague and she told and share with us.

How bad was like the situation during her studies and the huge discrimination she has faced and that's why she also created locally with ERG for black women in Xxxx and we are all afraid that now without any protection or framework, then discrimination.

Will increase so because it's this is also what will happens, and it probably is already happening in US, not specifically specifically maybe in Itachi, but for sure there will be again a huge barrier and discrimination growing in US and in other countries.

Obviously.

Lukasz Perski 8:32

Yes. So and basically you know the the way how I put those questions together was with more sort of intent. You know it would seem that the US is always setting a scene for the rest of the world.

Person 3 8:50

Mm-hmm.

Lukasz Perski 8:50

And I've I've read many articles following the election result of companies that actually attracted the DI policies or scaled down and and and it would seem that this does not only apply to strict US based company.

Person 3 9:03

Yes, yes.

Lukasz Perski 9:09

Is, but it's also spreading.

To the other parts of the world. Really. So. So yeah, OK.

So let me just.

Check so the next question, to what extent do you feel the political climate has influenced your organisation, DEI strategies?

Person 3 9:35

But overall global, of course it will. It will impact because there was as we as was retouching a bit. I always have this feeling that there is a lot of corporate washing and then and no content including for us. And so it's also a bit of a trend. But then if even if it's not, I still believe.

Eve of it.

Even if it's only a trend, at least they will be beneficial for some minority still is better than nothing now, without having even these framework, there will be a huge impact then. And also if even leading country like US step down, then let's not forget you know, I'm also a bit.

I am a lawyer. I'm also a passionate for human rights. You know, it's like be like for gays. It's it's a crime in many countries and it is even increased like in Africa and other countries. So this is for sure will will not help and will also have an impact in the index, right of human rights.

Development and these things so that is something perhaps you would like to to evaluate in your study by the impact, the negative impact on index of human rights in US and outside like it because if the country were supposed to set an example, they just get worse and worse.

Like it is happening and I'm afraid we we may arrive at in and I was mentioning angry but angry is fiction is totally unacceptable because it's they even said that it's so they compare just like being open like to a propaganda like in a totally crazy way like have you ever seen anybody turning out gay or lesbian just because of.

One gay or or like they even say that gay people try to convert people like to. This is like the stupidest thing they ever heard on the planet. But yeah, we are a very bad example of restriction and bad impact.

Lukasz Perski 11:22

Yeah.

Yeah. No, no, that's that's great. Thank you. Thank you. Has your organisation faced pressure from external stakeholders, investors or customer regarding DEI commitments due to political shifts?

Person 3 11:40

This is also an interesting topic, So what I'm sure I'm sure about it because we had to discuss a bit that for sure there is the social environment does not allow to certain things like to give you an example, we were celebrate pride and then somebody from China reach out to me and say, well, it would be great to one of the employee.

We're do the post so like, but we here in this country, we cannot do anything and Friday is forbidden and for sure you cannot have the same approach. And then also like we have now 1/4 and many place we have the rainbow flag of the world Month. But that would be even an illegal act in country like Saudi Arabia. I still believe that you can influence to give you.

Idea like I work a lot with Saudi people and like last year, not this year. Last year I had this logo, whatever with the pride and like some of the colleague told me, happy pride with Saudi colleague. So even there we also have a this year we also had the one guys was asked pro to like that one guy in Saudi asked to join the Rainbow Erg. And then one of my colleagues say my I'm concerned, you know, there is a crime, a death penalty, and whatever said, well, this is a safe space. So if you want to join, he's afraid to join our many. We have also many alive but so we can still influence in a positive way. And you can set example of course you have to be this is.

A bit of a topic, but you cannot. It's illegal to put a rainbow flag in a country like Saudi Arabia. Yeah, so you cannot just do. We have not been whatever was posted globally and this things since it's not specifically related to that we have never experienced any any problem but even.

Lukasz Perski 13:01

And.

Person 3 13:18

In a country like Switzerland, they refuse one of the venue. We didn't want to put to put the rainbow. We never convince them and they say Oh no, but this is not in our spirit or whatever. This is like, I don't know what you mean. So these their existence is everywhere. And also we did also, even in Zurich 2025.

The Super progressive city. There were even people we went to. We did one day and then meeting people and distributing gadget and then somebody didn't know. And actually one guy was also young. I don't know which country, and I don't know.

Lukasz Perski 13:44

Aye.

Person 3 13:54

Are you done? Like never seen the rainbow? Whatever. But then you ask. And then we explain. And then we say, do you want? These are? No. Then I don't want it. Like so actually, even actively and not not aggressive. But even like rejecting in on denial.

Lukasz Perski 14:02

Yes.

Person 3 14:09

So yeah, that is always everywhere. And so and the resistance is always there. But also another example, sorry if we talk a lot like, but also even in Switzerland we approach then the local unit and say this is wrong because there we had these cases of there where the the Family Day and the.

Was already the classical image and say like can we change a bit this because this is also we know we have a paternity and stuff like that and many people can even be offended and then people don't even think about these things. And then we had a case with a huge case. We related to a Transco league that there was a huge problem.

Problem with a restroom and changing room, and this is so you can imagine in an underdeveloped country, like how it could be the situation. So resistance is sometimes is and aggressivity is also not even hidden even within the company.

Lukasz Perski 15:08

Yeah, yeah. No, no, it's it's, it's a really good feedback. It's a really good feedback.

How does your company manage stakeholder expectations while navigating political pressures surrounding the EI? And I think you already answered that as well.

Person 3 15:30

Yeah, we do a bit of on a very high level and then they manage and then they you need to meet the shareholder experience. There is a commitment, there is very touchy group. Imagine if you if you browse it, there is a globally touchy. They also do nice sharing. There was a story about these.

Lukasz Perski 15:31

So yeah.

Person 3 15:48

Rainbow Tibetan monks, not Tibetan Buddhist monks and Tokyo. And yeah, so they do things. And so they imagine is there. Then he's also declaring the code transferring to the Code of Conduct.

They are extremely careful in and not in in following the trend and not to the. But I I'm not aware of any specific questioning or like at a political level pressure and I know that in xxx they had this pressure for.

Remove the day into US, but because their presence is probably stronger. We didn't, but this to the extent of my knowledge.

Lukasz Perski 16:32

OK. OK. I see. Thank you. Have there been conflicts between stakeholders, employees versus executives regarding the EI decisions? If so, how, how have they been addressed?

Person 3 16:47

I'm not aware about Visa conflict, but then you see that often you have some people who have 0 sensibility. I ask also people some executive member and like one of the most thing and more engaging was xxxx and then some are ready to engage other just say nothing and also.

I believe that if you're in a certain position without making any statement or never being supportive of things that you already make a statement. In my personal opinion, in at least that you choose to not actively support, while at a very executive level we had the best sponsor we had where our Andrew law that was.

Active even did some marathon and things, and then now he stepped down. But it was also xxxx was also he did also an interview how we see. And then he also supporting in a child all this policy. So we have implemented a lot of policy into like now for the paternity leave open that has been now open also LGBTQ and then. I also.

To cooperate because I'm also lawyer with the transition of employee because we did a disaster in the past meaning with HR not able to identify the person and creating excel file with Mr /Mrs. from total disaster. So to avoid visa situation.

Like there are there were improvement, but at the executive level I can recall these two people who were actively representative LGBTQ community in several occasion.

Lukasz Perski 18:14

What's the next?

OK. That's great. Do you see long term risks or benefits in adjusting the EI policies based on political shifts?

Person 3 18:32

Well, the risk is all there. Like if you just if it's just a. So for me it's not only the diversity equity is is about equanimity and and equity. And so if you want to grant equity, you need to really to support.

The the Community no, no matter what. Like if you don't, then as we partially said then discrimination will increase and you all know that discrimination is still into the company where are many even like very high level. Sorry between a guy and a woman.

In certain country there are still for what's the size of this, why everyone should be paid less. There are a lot of big things, so if you don't stand, there will be no

improvement and I don't see. I don't see. I see. I believe that our site is not going in a good direction and is also also the CEO, the Japanese.

Your.

Just said that we will enter into a time of chaos and confusion. We said this year in general on referring to the political situation, and then you see that in countries that are struggling like Ukraine and Russia, the situation is worse than in a dramatic way for both for the Community and and it can work and also is also.

Something that can deteriorate at any times, but also what was doing. Again I come back to to anger like some of his initiative like ban on book and things and then also it didn't.

A certain category of people. It's terrible because, you know, I also like history, if you know about history. The Nazi did exactly this, like individuating a category and then directing the eight or the Jewish and then and you can do also the same for the gay community or any or any other. So there are really high risk at stakes. And then one step.

Spec and then it takes. Perhaps the other 15 years to to recover from from that.

Lukasz Perski 20:30

Thank you. What strategies do you think companies should adopt to sustain the EI initiatives despite political political challenges? Apologies.

Person 3 20:41

We need to invest so like you cannot base on on on goodwill as I was saying and this was also so also another things visa, I I take it from Vanessa, we just was doing it for for the other one. So they they do also many things that are wrong like sanitization. So they try to to direct the the initiative.

Into where they want to and to remove what they don't lie to in the initiative. And that's bad. And then also, if you really want to invest like, again for LGBTQ like we should be certified as a company. But like, it's not me, it's not my colleague who need to start because.

International company doing this you need to invest a certain type of money if you want to be certified as a GB TQ supporter company. There is a process and then that so you need to invest and here I don't see a genuine intention, at least in in in Itachi of investment in in this or.

Partially. And then you ask, and it was also funny because sometimes a night that we also knew join, and then we asked to HR and communication supporting as and say what is the budget and then budget there is no budget. So this is there is no budget and I don't know like we can do very limited things.

Yeah.

Lukasz Perski 21:58

Yeah, yeah, yeah. I think you also answered the next question partially. Is your organisation planning to expand, reduce or modify its DEI programmes in the near future and why?

Person 3 22:13

They keep changing because also like a one things I can touch is the employer branding. So it touch you want to present so but always there should be an interest know and I did a great corporation with xxx in HR and she's doing these employer branding and she did a wonderful.

Job they can. They can influence a lot, meaning that for one reason or the other, like now, they imagine like for the pride she was able to do a lot of initiative and then about the content, you know, she made these fantastic pictures. And I know that she didn't ask you, member of the community she.

Went to a youngster in in Sweden and asked do you want to make they made this fantastic photo and but then also there it's but on so to the extent the strategy and in this case is is employer branding it is the still interest of this company to improve.

And to show openness and to be to be like a company that rocks so that they did some changes and then when it was in their interest for the employer and it also by the way, thanks to xxxx that we have the also the the branded stuff rainbow.

Because they were specifically targeting this and because it enter into the strategy, but it does not mean necessarily that we are supporting our energy, but there is at least like the same interest and then they even push it a bit when they are interested.

Lukasz Perski 23:46

OK, that's great. Thank you. What advice would you give to other businesses trying to balance the stakeholder demands and political realities?

Person 3 23:58

You mean tools? If you can explain a bit.

Lukasz Perski 24:02

So. So what? What advice would you provide to other companies that that's trying to balance? Yes. Yeah, yeah.

Person 3 24:07

To other company that we want to do.

Yeah. Well, I think first of all, like they should decide to to be to, to be visible on a certain topic and and to support it. And then it's there are many who do a lot and they even have a branding dedicated website. So I personally we still we we have something. So one thing you can do is to have a visa.

Worldwide website and say if you type in Xxxx and Pride then it come UPS this and most company do have else an external 1. So it's something that is also reachable from outside. So that if you want also to target certain type of employee or potential candidate.

You can do that and then you should do conference. You should do press release and show present during not only the pride but all all the possible initiative and on LinkedIn changing the log these things they do so I cannot. I cannot complain.

There was a huge improvement, at least in term of visibility. The impact I'm not so sure. So it's also amazing. Like many Youngs I know like I think, speak for the place. I know there are many.

Game I assume, but I'm not. I'm open, other are not, and I'm not going to ask actively to people. Also for privacy reason, but then I also see many people who are not engaging, even young, and I'm a bit surprised. And I we were always discussing between our group. Why is that to win?

Something comfortable, even now, and yeah, so perhaps they don't. This is still the reality. But even in a country like Switzerland or Italy or. Yeah, you can have or in Europe and US. So still many people are not comfortable and then they don't want. To engage simply or we don't want, don't feel to to share. But I completely. I always been an activist since I'm a student. I I really disagree with this attitude also in the Community because not only you are not helping but you you are pushing back, you know and like not, yeah.

Lukasz Perski 26:21

Yeah. Yeah, exactly.

Person 3 26:22

Yeah.

Lukasz Perski 26:23

OK, that's great. Thank you. Thank you for your feedback. So the final question is, do you have any final thoughts or perspectives on the EI in the current political landscape?

Person 3 26:36

Yes, actually we should even spend more time and in the corporation, even if they really have a genuine intention, they should really, we should really. We did keep engaging. I can give you an example, but it was very good like Singapore is decriminalise the.

The law against gay people two years ago in 2023, and this was possible for the pressure of a big multinational who told to the state that in this way we have many people who don't want to work in Singapore because they would feel like.

Discriminated, or at least they believe it will come into an environment that is not friendly. So the corporation they can actually improve the situation in in, in putting pressure in in certain country. Then also India is decriminalised but then on the other hand many other country as worsen and.

And then if yes, so you can, you can still set an example and you can improve and even influence if you want to do so until to a certain extent, because then if you arrive in All imagine that you cannot have in Russia more than Russia probably.

Lukasz Perski 27:41

Yeah.

Person 3 27:51

We used to be there until five years ago now we are no longer there. I think it's impossible to have a diversity equity in that country, but not only in that quantity, probably also another. So in a in a non democratic environment I think you can do really little.

While you can support a big democracy and advocacy of human rights in an active way in a certain framework, but the situation is really deteriorated. Like, if you look close to what happens to UN has really show.

Absolutely incapacity to to face and support in in many country also when it comes to human right like we make statements very completely empty. I I was a big support and big fan of UN but and that is really important really bad so also corporation can do very little to to influence in their way.

They can still set an example, but then if the country where there is freedom will keep like narrowing and then it's will just get worse and then at one point corporation we say OK, but we cannot do this anymore and then it will just get worse and worse.

Lukasz Perski 28:57

Yeah, yeah.

Person 3 28:59

The best hope is not going to be like that.

Lukasz Perski 29:02

Yeah, no, exactly. Exactly, no, that's that's great. That's great. I I I'm really grateful for, for, for your extensive feedback. So we've gone through all the questions. So I can actually stop the recording now.

Person 3 29:17

Mm-hmm.

Lukasz Perski 29:19

Umm.

Lukasz Perski stopped transcription

Thematic Analysis of Interview with Person 3

Voices of the Participant (Quotes)	Meaning Interpretation (Researcher)	Concepts/Themes Identified
"If in 2020 we believe that my diversity is sex and gender related, we are really nowhere."	Critiques narrow definitions of diversity and calls for broader inclusion, especially of LGBTQ+ identities.	Expanding DEI Beyond Gender
"We started to work creating our ERG... launched a platform... founded the ERG... doing pride activity..."	Describes grassroots efforts to build LGBTQ+ representation and visibility within the company.	Grassroots LGBTQ+ Advocacy and ERG Formation
"The strategy is real formal without a lot of content... based on goodwill... no budget."	Points to performative DEI and lack of institutional support or funding.	Corporate Washing and Resource Deficiency
"None of us are represented in the board... we talk about corporate washing."	Highlights structural exclusion and lack of representation at leadership levels.	Leadership-Level Representation Gaps
"Hungary... wanted to prohibit the pride... legislation like Russia... LGBTQ propaganda..."	Raises concerns about rising global repression of LGBTQ+ rights and its impact on corporate DEI.	Global Legislative Backlash Against LGBTQ+ Inclusion
"Discrimination will increase... without any protection or framework."	Warns of rising risks to minoritised groups in absence of strong DEI policies.	Vulnerability of Minoritised Groups
"Even in Switzerland... people refused to put the rainbow... not in our spirit."	Reveals resistance to LGBTQ+ visibility even in progressive regions.	Hidden Resistance in Supposedly Inclusive Contexts
"We had a huge case related to a trans colleague... problem with restroom and changing room."	Illustrates real-world challenges in implementing inclusive policies for trans employees.	Operational Barriers to Trans Inclusion
"If you're in a certain position and never support DEI, you already make a statement."	Suggests that silence from leadership equates to passive resistance.	Leadership Silence as Implicit Opposition
"We need to invest... not base on goodwill... no budget."	Emphasises the need for financial commitment to make DEI sustainable.	Financial Investment as DEI Imperative
"Employer branding... fantastic pictures... branded stuff... but does not mean we support our ERG."	Points to disconnect between marketing-driven DEI visibility and actual	DEI Visibility vs Internal Impact

Voices of the Participant (Quotes)	Meaning Interpretation (Researcher)	Concepts/Themes Identified
	support for internal communities.	
"Singapore decriminalised... pressure from multinational companies."	Demonstrates how corporate advocacy can influence national policy.	Corporate Influence on Human Rights Progress
"If leading countries like US step down... it will have a negative impact on human rights index."	Connects political shifts in major economies to global human rights regressions.	Global Ripple Effects of Political DEI Retraction
"We should be certified as a company... but there is no genuine intention to invest."	Advocates for formal recognition and certification of DEI efforts, but notes lack of institutional will.	Certification and Formal DEI Commitment
"Still many people are not comfortable... even in Europe and US."	Acknowledges persistent discomfort and fear among LGBTQ+ employees despite external visibility.	Psychological Safety and Cultural Barriers
"UN has shown incapacity to face and support human rights... statements are completely empty."	Critiques global institutions for failing to uphold human rights standards, especially for LGBTQ+ communities.	Institutional Failure in Global Human Rights Advocacy

Transcript of interview with Person 4

Lukasz Perski (2219674)

0 minutes 5 seconds0:05

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 0 minutes 5 seconds

OK, so this is the interview to gather the information for research for project title, navigating DI in a shifting political landscape, a study of corporate and stakeholder reactions post 2024 US elections.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 0 minutes 25 seconds

And the research will be anonymous and all the information collected under this research will be covered by the university consent form that was shared with you.

And I would like to ask you a couple of questions.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 0 minutes 41 seconds

So can you describe your role in supporting and shaping dei strategies for the organisations you advise?

Person 4

0 minutes 50 seconds0:50

Person 4 0 minutes 50 seconds

Yeah. So I am. I'm a consultant, so I work with organisations helping them. Well depends some some organisations I'm helping with the initial EDI strategy. Others I'm helping with implementation.

Person 4 1 minute 7 seconds

Training, etcetera. I focus on the built environment sector, so construction and property engineering, that kind of thing. So yeah, that's my niche market.

Lukasz Perski (2219674)

1 minute 21 seconds1:21

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 1 minute 21 seconds

OK, that's great. Thank you. Next question, prior to the 2024 U.S. presidential elections, what were the main DI priorities or initiatives you were helping your clients implement?

Person 4

1 minute 36 seconds1:36

Person 4 1 minute 36 seconds

Yeah. So at the kind of the higher level because I work in construction and facilities management and things, they're quite behind. So a lot of organisations were coming to me going, we need to do something on EDI.

Lukasz Perski (2219674)

1 minute 39 seconds1:39

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 1 minute 39 seconds

Yeah.

Person 4

1 minute 51 seconds1:51

Person 4 1 minute 51 seconds

You know how? How can you get involved? So it was kind of, yeah, from the initial point of of realising the need to do something which is often driven by clients, you know, the clients are asking them to do more on it. So yeah, their priorities.

Person 4 2 minutes 10 seconds

Probably you know very much the diversity piece because you know the the sectors that we work in are not very diverse initially, but also then it comes down to the inclusion element. So making sure that the culture is right of the organisation.

Person 4 2 minutes 30 seconds

And and often that starts with training those up at the at the senior levels who might know that they need to do something, but they're not sure what they're supposed to be doing. So yeah, and also kind of a key area is setting up internal networks.

Person 4 2 minutes 49 seconds

So that sorry so that they can get feedback from their employees on EDI issues.

Lukasz Perski (2219674)

3 minutes 3:00

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 3 minutes

OK, that's great. Thank you. How would you describe the general dei approach or mindset among your clients before the 2024 election results?

Person 4

3 minutes 11 seconds 3:11

Person 4 3 minutes 11 seconds

And everybody wanted to be seen to be doing it and some were doing it in. I mean my my clients, obviously I didn't want them to be rainbow washing and just sticking up logos and and saying that's you know the right thing to do.

Person 4 3 minutes 29 seconds

Interestingly, kind of since well coming on since since the election. But but it's it's all about being visible to do it to be doing ADI and the attraction attracting you know talent through.

Person 4 3 minutes 44 seconds

Being, you know positive around EDI. So yeah, I think before then it was kind of really kind of the the in thing to be doing.

Lukasz Perski (2219674)

3 minutes 57 seconds 3:57

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 3 minutes 57 seconds

OK, thank you. So since the 2024 elections, have you observed any notable shifts in your clients, the EI priorities? If so, what kind of changes and what do you think prompted them?

Person 4

4 minutes 13 seconds 4:13

Person 4 4 minutes 13 seconds

So actually my clients are very much knuckling down and going double the speed to to to embed it. So they're, you know, my clients are, you know, the ones that realise exactly the importance of it, not just because it's a nice thing.

Person 4 4 minutes 33 seconds

Do, but the business need, you know, they're very much pressing ahead with it.

Having said that, I do know others in the industry who are hiding away now and there. There's been redundancies around EDI leads.

Person 4 4 minutes 52 seconds

And there has been, like, I know of one company, one very big company who has stopped all their work on their some of their employee networks for the next year or so and they will refuse to publish anything externally.

Person 4 5 minutes 10 seconds

Play around EDI now, even though they're kind of, you know, they're not just based in the in the US, they're based all over the globe. So yeah, it's that to see that some organisations are rolling back their EDI or they're having to change the.

Person 4 5 minutes 29 seconds

Terminology they use to, to, to still progress in some areas, but not to be kind of out there shouting about it.

Lukasz Perski (2219674)

5 minutes 42 seconds5:42

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 5 minutes 42 seconds

OK, that's great. Thank you. In your experience, how has the current political climate influenced the DI strategies of the organisations you work with?

Person 4

5 minutes 55 seconds5:55

Person 4 5 minutes 55 seconds

Yeah. So obviously, you know, it's the US, the US is the big big changer, isn't it? It's not although you know it's obviously coming over to the UK as well.

Person 4 6 minutes 9 seconds

With the likes of of reform and that so organisations that are like multinational or are American organisations that work over here, they seem to be hiding away a lot more and I know.

Person 4 6 minutes 28 seconds

A lot, you know, because it because we're working construction and that actually there's and facilities management, it's those that are involved in the public sector, big government contracts in the US that are most fearful.

Person 4 6 minutes 43 seconds

But actually as I say so, some of the British organisations or where they only operate within Britain, they're very much knuckling down and they're kind of pushing back against the rhetoric that's coming.

Person 4 7 minutes 1 second

From from the States and and in the UK to some element. So I'm kind of seeing a divide and and what we're having to do now is kind of go back to the Y VDI.

Person 4 7 minutes 17 seconds

So we, we we thought we'd kind of cracked that and we were on to the how and the what, whereas now we're having to go back and go look, it's not just that nice to have it is a business reason and This is why you know and connecting that business reasons again to to kind of sell EDI as a concept.

Person 4 7 minutes 37 seconds

Whereas we'd kind of got past that point with a lot of not, it's not just organisations, but individuals within organisations as well.

Lukasz Perski (2219674) 7 minutes 47 seconds

OK, that's great. Thank you. How many of your clients experience pressure from external stakeholders, investors, customers, media to alter their DI commitments, respond to a political developments?

Person 4 8 minutes 2 seconds 8:02

Yeah. So, not again, not my clients that I'm aware of, but I know that some of the ones that have rolled back it is because of some of their clients have already rolled back, particularly in the facilities management sector. You know when you've got.

Lukasz Perski stopped transcription

Thematic Analysis of Interview with Person 4

Voices of the Participant (Quotes)	Meaning Interpretation (Researcher)	Concepts/Themes Identified
"Everybody wanted to be seen to be doing it... it was kind of really the in thing to be doing."	Reflects pre-election performative DEI culture driven by visibility and trendiness.	DEI as Trend and Visibility Strategy
"My clients are very much knuckling down and going double the speed to embed it... not just because it's a nice thing to do, but the business need."	Indicates post-election acceleration of DEI among committed organisations, grounded in business rationale.	Business-Driven DEI Acceleration
"Others in the industry are hiding away now... redundancies around EDI leads... stopped all their work on employee networks."	Reveals sector-wide rollback of DEI initiatives and job cuts in response to political climate.	DEI Retrenchment and Organisational Withdrawal
"They're having to change the terminology they use... not to be kind of out there shouting about it."	Suggests strategic linguistic adaptation to avoid political backlash.	Semantic Reframing of DEI
"We're having to go back to the 'why' of DEI... reconnecting the business reasons again to sell EDI as a concept."	Highlights need to rejustify DEI through business logic amid rising scepticism.	Reasserting Business Case for DEI
"Clients are asking them to do more on it... driven by clients."	Demonstrates external stakeholder influence as a driver of DEI adoption.	Client-Driven DEI Expectations
"Some British organisations... are pushing back against the rhetoric coming from the States."	Shows regional divergence in DEI responses, with UK firms resisting US political influence.	UK Resistance to US DEI Retraction
"Some of the British organisations... are very much pressing ahead with it."	Indicates national-level variation in DEI commitment and resilience.	National Variation in DEI Commitment
"It's those involved in public sector, big government contracts in the US that are most fearful."	Points to heightened vulnerability among firms tied to US government contracts.	Political Sensitivity in Public Sector DEI
"Setting up internal networks... get feedback from employees on EDI issues."	Emphasises participatory structures as foundational to inclusive culture.	Employee Voice and Internal DEI Infrastructure

Voices of the Participant (Quotes)	Meaning Interpretation (Researcher)	Concepts/Themes Identified
“Training those at senior levels... they know they need to do something, but they’re not sure what.”	Identifies leadership knowledge gaps and the importance of targeted education.	Leadership Education and DEI Capability Building
“Not just based in the US... they’re based all over the globe.”	Highlights global footprint of DEI decisions and their ripple effects.	Global Impact of US DEI Shifts
“Attracting talent through being positive around EDI.”	Connects DEI visibility to employer branding and recruitment strategy.	DEI as Talent Attraction Strategy

Appendix B - Cross-Case Thematic Synthesis Matrix of persons 1 to 4 (P1-P4).

Theme	Person 1	Person 2	Person 3	Person 4	Synthesis Insight
Strategic Shift Post-Election	“We’ve had to embed DEI into governance—no longer optional.”	“We’re not using the term DEI anymore. It’s too politicised.”	“Our strategy hasn’t changed formally, but there’s a chilling effect globally.”	“Some clients are doubling down, others are quietly rolling back.”	Post-election, organisations either entrenched DEI deeper or rebranded to avoid political backlash. Strategic bifurcation is evident.
Resource Constraints	“It’s just me. No budget. Execs are supportive but silent.”	“We lost funding for diverse suppliers. It’s harder to justify now.”	“ERGs run on goodwill. We’ve never had a formal budget.”	“Clients are cutting DEI roles. Some networks were dissolved.”	DEI efforts are often under-resourced. Sustainability hinges on leadership commitment and strategic framing.
Politicisation and Terminology	“We now talk about inclusive behaviours—not DEI.”	“DEI is seen as ‘woke’. We’ve reframed everything around ROI.”	“In Hungary and Russia, DEI is seen as propaganda.”	“Clients are changing language to avoid scrutiny.”	Language adaptation is a survival strategy. Reframing DEI helps maintain momentum while navigating political sensitivities.
Stakeholder Influence	“Our owners are pushing harder for DEI. They want ROI and transparency.”	“Shareholders still expect DEI. Consumers too.”	“In Singapore, corporate pressure helped decriminalise LGBTQ+ laws.”	“Public sector contracts are shaping DEI strategy.”	External stakeholders often sustain DEI when internal leadership is hesitant. Influence flows from owners, clients, and consumers.
Internal Resistance and Polarisation	“Our belonging survey showed backlash. We had to reframe everything.”	“We’re getting pushback from both extremes. Messaging must be balanced.”	“Even in progressive regions, there’s hidden resistance.”	“Some clients fear visibility. Others are pressing ahead.”	Organisations face tension between pro- and anti-DEI camps. Behavioural framing and transparency help navigate this divide.
Leadership Engagement	“Execs are cautious. They fear disengagement.”	“Marketing is committed. Leadership varies globally.”	“Some execs are silent. Others are vocal allies.”	“Senior leaders need training. Awareness gaps are real.”	Leadership buy-in is uneven. Targeted education and visible sponsorship are key to sustaining DEI internally.
Global Variation in DEI	“The US election is influencing UK strategy. We’re reframing culturally.”	“Legal and cultural barriers make DEI hard to implement.”	“Repressive laws in Saudi Arabia and Russia limit visibility.”	“UK firms are resisting US rhetoric. Multinationals are adapting locally.”	DEI strategies must be localised. Global political shifts—especially US elections—have cascading effects on

Theme	Person 1	Person 2	Person 3	Person 4	Synthesis Insight
					international corporate behaviour.
Authentic vs Performative DEI	“We need meaningful change—not just flags and events.”	“We look inclusive externally, but internally it’s not always aligned.”	“There’s corporate washing. No board representation.”	“Clients are pushing back against rainbow washing.”	Performative DEI undermines trust. Authenticity requires structural change, budget, and leadership accountability.
Long-Term Strategic Imperatives	“DEI is future-proofing. It’s about retention and tech adaptation.”	“It makes long-term sense, but short-termism dominates.”	“It’s essential for equity and human rights. We risk regression.”	“We’re reconnecting DEI to business rationale.”	Long-term DEI value is widely acknowledged, but short-term pressures and political volatility threaten continuity.
Corporate Influence on Policy	—	“Corporations can influence shareholder votes and public perception.”	“Corporate pressure helped change laws in Singapore.”	—	Corporations can shape policy environments, especially in democratic contexts. Advocacy and visibility matter.

Appendix C - Thematic analysis of the open-ended questionnaire responses (S1–S13)

Response ID	Quote	Emerging Theme(s)
S1	“I think it's important for organizations to adjust to the demands of their clients. Great DEI initiatives!”	Stakeholder responsiveness; Positive framing of DEI
S2	“Strategy can evolve but needs to be well thought through, not a reactive knee-jerk reaction to shifting political landscape alone.”	Strategic caution; Anti-reactivity; Long-term planning
S3	“In today's political environment, corporate DEI efforts must be both resilient and adaptive... inclusion is not a political stance, but a business imperative.”	Resilience; Reframing DEI as business value; Depoliticisation
S4	“My interpretation of DEI policies includes such categories as age diversity, cultural background, religion or diverse professional experience.”	Broadening DEI scope; Intersectionality
S5	“Corporate setup will continue to be aligned with the regulatory requirements... only to the extent regulators demand it.”	Compliance-driven DEI; Minimalist approach
S6	“I realise that I'm not aware enough of the DEI initiatives within my company, therefore answering some questions was difficult to me.”	Internal communication gaps; DEI visibility
S7	“I definitely noticed a shift in DEI policies in my organisation in the last few months with several DEI initiatives 'toned down'.”	Retraction of DEI; Post-election impact
S8	“DEI initiatives should always be a priority... experts' contributions are paramount... they should be prioritized despite any political pressure.”	DEI as strategic imperative; Resistance to political rollback
S9	“Company should continue the DEI Strategies despite governments pressure... pressure from other stakeholders... is higher than what any government can produce in just 4 yrs.”	Stakeholder dominance over political cycles; Long-term DEI commitment
S10	“Quick shift towards Trump's opinions is concerning... DEI was not a true value, rather a trend easy to adjust when politics changes.”	Politicisation; Authenticity vs performativity; U.S. influence
S11	“It is visible strongly in the US and US owner companies. In Europe DEI is more sustainable by now but no clear expectations in mid- long- term.”	Regional variation; Sustainability concerns
S12	“No.”	No additional insight
S13	“N/A.”	No additional insight

Appendix D - Thematic Matrix Secondary Data Sources

Theme	Description	Source & Quote	Stakeholder Implications
ESG Integration & Terminology Shift	DEI reframed under ESG, often renamed to soften political exposure	<i>Meritage Homes</i> : “We have also revised our use of the term ‘DEI’ to Inclusion, Culture and Belonging”	Signals strategic repositioning to maintain investor appeal amid political scrutiny
Political Retraction & DEI Rollbacks	Decline in DEI visibility and representation due to political and economic pressures	<i>Forbes</i> : “References to diversity, equity and inclusion in Fortune 100 company reports dropped 72% between 2024 and 2025”	Stakeholders may perceive DEI as vulnerable or performative; risk of disengagement
		<i>Altrata via Forbes</i> : “Women accounted for 33.6% of board positions in Q2 2025, down from 34.7% in Q1 2024”	Reflects measurable regression in gender representation at leadership levels
Sector-Specific Strategy & Metrics	Tailored DEI frameworks with measurable goals and transparent progress reporting	<i>BPI</i> : “Of those nine [objectives], we are ‘Achieving’ on six; three are ‘Partially Achieving’; and five are areas of development”	Builds credibility and trust; enables benchmarking and sectoral learning
		<i>BPI</i> : “Central to the Five-year Strategy are three key pillars – Lead By Example, Connect and Support, Advocate and Amplify”	Demonstrates structured, multi-level engagement across internal and external stakeholders
Global Best Practices & Structural Integration	DEI embedded into core business functions, not siloed initiatives	<i>WEF</i> : “The report underscores the critical role of leadership in driving DEI initiatives and the need for a systemic, integrated approach”	Encourages systemic change and cross-sector collaboration; viewed as authentic by stakeholders
		<i>WEF via A Leader Like Me</i> : “DEI done wrong is dying and will be replaced by DEI embedded into business strategies”	Highlights the shift from performative to embedded DEI as a survival strategy
Transparency & Inclusive Innovation	Use of data to track workforce diversity, retention, and inclusive product design	<i>Google</i> : “We’ve learned that making space for diverse perspectives and experiences is inseparable from innovation”	Enhances stakeholder confidence; links DEI to innovation and long-term value creation
		<i>Google</i> : “We focused on building belonging in three	Demonstrates holistic DEI integration

Theme	Description	Source & Quote	Stakeholder Implications
		areas: our workplace, our technology, and our partnerships”	across operational domains

Appendix E - Mapping of Emerging Themes Against Research Objectives

Research Objective	Emerging Theme	Triangulated Source	Illustrative Evidence
1. To explore how DEI strategies are perceived by internal stakeholders	Political Reframing, DEI Retrenchment	Interview + Documentary	“We’re not using the term DEI anymore. It’s too politicised” (P2); “US election influencing UK strategy” (Appendix B)
2. To assess the role of leadership in shaping DEI outcomes	Stakeholder Influence, Performative Tension	Interview + Survey	“Clients are pushing back against rainbow washing” (P4); “Pressure from other stakeholders... is higher than what any government can produce” (S9)
3. To evaluate the impact of external pressures on DEI implementation	Resource Constraints, Strategic Framing, Structural Integration	Interview + Documentary + Survey	“It’s just me. No budget” (P1); “Of nine objectives, six are ‘Achieving’” (BPI)
4. To identify mechanisms of stakeholder engagement in DEI processes	Supportive and Resistant Reactions, Corporate Influence	Interview + Survey	“Corporate pressure helped change laws in Singapore” (P3); “Belonging survey showed backlash” (P1)
5. To formulate recommendations based on evidence and analysis of data gathered above about how companies are navigating the challenges associated with DEI amidst these political changes	Strategic Reframing, Benchmarking, Long-Term Imperatives	Interview + Documentary	“We’re shifting to ‘inclusive culture’ instead of DEI” (P2); “Benchmarking against global peers helped us stay the course” (P5); “DEI needs to be embedded, not episodic” (Appendix C)

Appendix F – Interview Consent Form

Consent Form



Carmarthen Business School

Interview Consent Form

Dissertation research project title: Navigating DEI in a Shifting Political Landscape: A Study of Corporate Strategy and Stakeholder Reactions Post-2024 U.S. Elections

Research course: Master of Business Administration

Research investigator: Lukasz Perski

Research Participants' name:

Dear Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of the above research project. *Attached to this letter are the interview questions that I have developed, which will assess the “Your Research Title”, through the answers you provide to the questions posed. There are no right, or wrong answers and your opinion will be valuable to knowledge building around income generation activity in the cultural sector.

The interview should take approximately 30 minutes but there is no time constraint. Interviews will be conducted in a private meeting space and answers will remain confidential. Information recorded will contain nothing of a personal nature that would identify you, and you will not be expected to provide any personal information such as income bracket, home address, date of birth, etc. You are free to withdraw from the interview process at any time.

Academic research undertaken at UK universities require adherence to ethical procedures, which includes seeking explicit agreement from participants to being interviewed and how the information contained in their interview will be used. The following information outlines the conditions of your participation and the purpose of your involvement. I would be grateful if you would read through this, then sign the consent form to certify that you approve the following:

- the interview will be recorded, and a transcript will be produced
- All answers will be anonymised, and no identifiable information will be requested from the interviewee
- the transcript of the interview will be analysed by “Lukasz Perski” as research investigator

- access to the interview transcript will be limited to the research investigator and dissertation tutor
- any direct quotations from the interview, or summary content, that are made available through academic publication or other academic outlets will be anonymized and care will be taken to ensure that no identifiable information will be made public
- the interview will be recorded on a personal device, accessible only to the research investigator. The recording will be deleted as soon as the interview has been transcribed
- The transcript of the interview will be stored on the research investigator's personal OneDrive for Business application within "UWTSD HWB". The transcript will be deleted on completion of the dissertation
- The storage of information will comply with UWTSD's data protection regulations, in line with national GDPR guidance

By signing this form, I agree that:

1. I am voluntarily taking part in this project. I understand that I don't have to take part, and I can stop the interview at any time
2. The transcribed interview or extracts from it may be used as described above
3. I have read the Information sheet
4. I do not expect to receive any benefit or payment for my participation
5. I am comfortable with the arrangements outlined, and I understand that I am able to contact the researcher with any questions I may have in the future

Printed Name

Participant Signature

Date

____Lukasz Perski____
Researcher Signature

Date

If you would like me to share details of my findings on completion of the research, please let me know.

I thank you for your time and participation. If any questions do arise, feel free to contact me at your convenience.

Researcher Name: Lukasz Perski

Tel:

Email: 2219674@student.uwtsd.ac.uk

Questions

General questions

1. Can you describe your role in shaping DEI policies within your organisation?
2. Before the 2024 U.S. presidential elections, what were your company's key DEI initiatives?
3. How would you characterise your company's DEI strategy before the election results?

Impact of political shifts on DEI strategies since the 2024 U.S. presidential elections

4. Since the 2024 U.S. presidential elections, have there been any significant changes in your company's DEI priorities? If so, what changes and why?
5. To what extent do you feel the political climate has influenced your organisation's DEI strategies?
6. Has your organisation faced pressure from external stakeholders (e.g., investors, customers) regarding DEI commitments due to political shifts?

Stakeholder expectations and risks

7. How does your company manage stakeholder expectations while navigating political pressures surrounding DEI?
8. Have there been conflicts between stakeholders (e.g., employees vs. executives) regarding DEI decisions? If so, how have they been addressed?
9. Do you see long-term risks or benefits in adjusting DEI policies based on political shifts?

Future outlook

10. What strategies do you think companies should adopt to sustain DEI initiatives despite political challenges?
11. Is your organisation planning to expand, reduce, or modify its DEI programs in the near future? Why?
12. What advice would you give to other businesses trying to balance DEI, stakeholder demands, and political realities?

Final question

13. Do you have any final thoughts or perspectives on DEI in the current political landscape?

Appendix G – Approved Ethics Form

APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL

In order for research to result in benefit and minimise risk of harm, it must be conducted ethically.

The University follows the OECD Frascati manual definition of **research activity**: “creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of man, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications”. As such this covers activities undertaken by members of staff, postgraduate research students, and both taught postgraduate and undergraduate students working on dissertations/projects.

The individual undertaking the research activity is known as the “principal researcher”.

This form must be completed and approved prior to undertaking any research activity.

SECTION A: About You (Principal Researcher)

1	Full Name:	Lukasz Perski
2	Student Number:	2219674
3	Email address:	2219674@student.uwtsd.ac.uk
4	Programme of Study:	MBA Master of Business Administration
5	Supervisor:	Anthony Burns

SECTION B: Internal and External Ethical Guidance Materials

	Please list the core ethical guidance documents that have been referred to during the completion of this form (including any discipline-specific codes of research ethics, location-specific codes of research ethics, and also any specific ethical guidance relating to the proposed methodology). Please tick to confirm that your research proposal adheres to these codes and guidelines. You may add rows to this table if needed.	
1	<u>UWTSD Research Ethics & Integrity Code of Practice</u>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2	<u>UWTSD Research Data Management Policy</u>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

SECTION C: Details of Research Activity

1	Indicative title:	Navigating DEI in a Shifting Political Landscape: Corporate Strategy and Stakeholder Reactions Post-2024 U.S. Elections		
2	Proposed start date:	TBC	Proposed end date:	30/09/2025

	<p>Introduction to the Research (maximum 300 words in each section)</p> <p>Ensure that you write for a <u>Non-Specialist Audience</u> when outlining your response to the three points below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Purpose of Research Activity</i> • <i>Proposed Research Question</i> • <i>Aims of Research Activity</i> • <i>Objectives of Research Activity</i> <p>Demonstrate, briefly, how Existing Research has informed the proposed activity and explain</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What the research activity will add to the body of knowledge</i> • <i>How it addresses an area of importance.</i>
3	<p>Purpose of Research Activity</p> <p>The purpose of this activity it is to investigate how changes in the political landscape are influencing corporate decisions. In this case we will focus on how Donald Trump's victory in the 2024 U.S. presidential elections influences corporate decisions to scale back Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives, amongst the other factors (internal and external).</p> <p>(this box should expand as you type)</p>
4	<p>Research Question</p> <p>I am planning to ask the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How do political changes, such as Donald Trump's victory in the 2024 U.S. presidential elections, influence corporate strategies related to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)? - What internal and external factors drive companies to modify their DEI policies? - How do stakeholders—such as employees, investors, and customers—respond to changes in DEI policies? - What are the potential risks and rewards of altering DEI policies from an internal governance perspective? <p>(this box should expand as you type)</p>
5	<p>Aims of Research Activity</p> <p>This research will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Examine how the results of the 2024 U.S. elections and shifts in the political landscape influence the company's approach to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). Investigate how companies strike a balance between stakeholder demands and changes in the political environment. - Explore how organizations sustain or evolve their DEI policies in response to both internal and external pressures and goals. - Understand how stakeholders are reacting to changes in DEI policies within the context of the shifting political landscape. - Formulate recommendations based on evidence about how companies are navigating the challenges associated with DEI amidst these political changes. <p>(this box should expand as you type)</p>

6	<p>Objectives of Research Activity</p> <p>The objectives of this research are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review the available literature to understand the impact of changing political landscape on DEI policies. - Review specific case studies of companies which made changes to their DEI policies in response to changing political landscape. - Collect the primary data via surveys and semi-structured interviews with the main stakeholders such as employees, managers and persons responsible for DEI policies to understand their expectations and how they respond to DEI changes. - To provide recommendations based on analysis of findings. <p>(this box should expand as you type)</p>
	<p>Proposed data collection methods (maximum 600 words)</p> <p>Provide a brief summary of all the methods that may be used in the research activity to collect data, making it clear what specific techniques may be used. If methods other than those listed in this section are deemed appropriate later, additional ethical approval for those methods will be needed. You do not need to justify the methods here, but should instead describe how you intend to collect the data necessary for you to complete your project.</p>
7	<p>This should describe how you intend to collect data. It should not include a discussion of the theoretical basis for your data collection methods. Please note, that if you intend to collect any audio/video recordings of interviews with participants then these will be are classified as Personal Data under GDPR/DPA2018. If you intend to use these then note this in section H.</p> <p>I will use the following data collection methods which I intend to be mixed method research:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quantitative such as surveys and secondary data analysis. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Surveys: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Will be distributed to company leaders and employees at different organizational levels to assess their perception and experience regarding DEI policies. -Will consist of questions that will help to measure what the influence of political changes on DEI strategies is. -Will measure what are the organisational attitudes toward DEI initiatives and reactions to adjustments in DEI policies. -Will also assess the perception of and risks or potential rewards associated with such changes. -Will be distributed across all levels in the organisation and various locations across the globe using company tool Viva Engage and externally, using LinkedIn. -Will be created using Google Forms which will not only facilitate the survey but also provide insights and analytics as well as guaranteed anonymity. b. Secondary data: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Data such as corporate reports, press releases and financial data that is publicly available will be analysed to support survey findings. -Qualitative such as interviews and <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Interviews: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Will be conducted with key stakeholders to explore their perspectives on DEI strategy adjustments. Targeted participants include decision-makers who influence organizational strategy and persons managing DEI programs. b. Case studies:

	<p>-A small number of organisations will be selected to review their DEI policies before and after significant political changes. These case studies will include analysis of press articles, statement and other related materials that are publicly available online.</p> <p>(this box should expand as you type)</p>
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SECTION D: Scope of Research Activity

	Will the research activity include:	YES	NO
1	Use of a questionnaire or similar research instrument?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Use of interviews?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Use of focus groups?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4	Use of participant diaries?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
5	Use of video or audio recording?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
6	Use of computer-generated log files?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
7	Participant observation with their knowledge?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
8	Participant observation without their knowledge?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
9	Access to personal or confidential information without the participants' specific consent?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
10	Administration of any questions, test stimuli, presentation that may be experienced as physically, mentally or emotionally harmful / offensive?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
11	Performance of any acts which may cause embarrassment or affect self-esteem?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
12	Investigation of participants involved in illegal activities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
13	Use of procedures that involve deception?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
14	Administration of any substance, agent or placebo?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
15	Working with live vertebrate animals?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
16	Procedures that may have a negative impact on the environment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
17	Other primary data collection methods. Please indicate the type of data collection method(s) below.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Details of any other primary data collection method:		
	(this box should expand as you type)		

If you have ticked NO to every question then the research activity is (ethically) low risk and you may skip section E and continue to section F.

If YES to any question, then no research activity should be undertaken until full ethical approval has been obtained.

SECTION E: Intended Participants

[illegible]

		<p>Approximate figures are fine, but make sure that you explain how you will identify and contact your participants.</p> <p>8-10 participants for interviews</p> <p>10+ for survey</p> <p><i>(this box should expand as you type)</i></p>
		<p>Employees and management of company I work for – Xxxx Energy as well as external participants on LinkedIn platform.</p> <p><i>(this box should expand as you type)</i></p>
		<p>Internal participants will be identified based on their position within the company as well as selected randomly. Random external participants will also take part via survey on LinkedIn platform.</p> <p><i>(this box should expand as you type)</i></p>

	Information for participants:	YES	NO	N/A
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13	Will you describe the main research procedures to participants in advance, so that they are informed about what to expect?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14	Will you tell participants that their participation is voluntary?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15	Will you obtain written consent for participation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
16	Will you explain to participants that refusal to participate in the research will not affect their treatment or education (if relevant)?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17	If the research is observational, will you ask participants for their consent to being observed?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
18	Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19	With questionnaires, will you give participants the option of omitting questions they do not want to answer?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20	Will you tell participants that their data will be treated with full confidentiality and that, if published, it will not be identifiable as theirs?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21	Will you debrief participants at the end of their participation, in a way appropriate to the type of research undertaken?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22	If NO to any of above questions, please give an explanation			
	<p>You should be able to tick YES for all of these questions. If not, then explain why not in this box.</p> <p>(this box should expand as you type)</p>			

	Information for participants:	YES	NO	N/A
24	Will participants be paid?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25	Is specialist electrical or other equipment to be used with participants?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
26	Are there any financial or other interests to the investigator or University arising from this study?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
27	Will the research activity involve deliberately misleading participants in any way, or the partial or full concealment of the specific study aims?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
28	If YES to any question, please provide full details			
	<p>You should be able to tick NO for most of these questions. For any cases that you have ticked YES then provide details in this box. If you are using cameras/voice recorders to record interviews then please state that in this box.</p> <p>(this box should expand as you type)</p>			

SECTION F: Anticipated Risks

	Outline any anticipated risks that may adversely affect any of the participants, the researchers and/or the University, and the steps that will be taken to address them.	
1	Risks to participants For example: sector-specific health & safety, emotional distress, financial disclosure, physical harm, transfer of personal data, sensitive organisational information. If you have identified in section D that there are no participants then enter N/A and go skip to question 3.	
	Risk to participants:	How you will mitigate the risk to participants:

	<p>There are always risks. Do not write N/A unless you have no participants.</p> <p>Discussion on impact of political shifts on DEI policies can cause strong emotions and personal discomfort especially for participants who strongly oppose/support the current political shift. (this box should expand as you type)</p>	<p>This risk can be mitigated by providing a clear outline of topic and option to skip any sensitive questions. Another option could be to offer a session to discuss any concerns. Also, including information on how to get help from professional services could be included together with survey. (this box should expand as you type)</p>
2	<p>If research activity may include sensitive, embarrassing or upsetting topics (e.g. sexual activity, drug use) or issues likely to disclose information requiring further action (e.g. criminal activity), give details of the procedures to deal with these issues, including any support/advice (e.g. helpline numbers) to be offered to participants. Note that where applicable, consent procedures should make it clear that if something potentially or actually illegal is discovered in the course of a project, it may need to be disclosed to the proper authorities</p>	
	<p>Research activity will not include such topics or will disclose any sensitive or private information. Research will be based on a voluntary participation. (this box should expand as you type)</p>	
3	<p>Risks to the investigator For example: personal health & safety, physical harm, emotional distress, risk of accusation of harm/impropriety, conflict of interest</p>	
	<p>Risk to the investigator: There are always risks. Do not write NA.</p> <p>Handling information and time involved to analyse the data can cause emotional distress and burnout. Also, topic of research can cause controversies amongst the persons taking part in the research and potentially affect the reputation of the researcher. (this box should expand as you type)</p>	<p>How you will mitigate the risk to the investigator:</p> <p>Limit working hours to avoid strain. Regularly talk to supervisor or peers to avoid emotional distress.</p> <p>Information needs to be collected with emphasis in neutrality and accuracy. It also needs to be reviewed by peers before it can be published. (this box should expand as you type)</p>
4	<p>University/institutional risks For example: adverse publicity, financial loss, data protection</p>	
	<p>Risk to the University: There are always risks. Do not write NA.</p> <p>One of the risks could be violation of data protection laws. Strain on university resources. (this box should expand as you type)</p>	<p>How you will mitigate the risk to the University:</p> <p>Compliance with all data protection laws and maintain clarity in data handling and disposal of information methods.</p> <p>Ensure efficient planning and allocation of resources to critical tasks. (this box should expand as you type)</p>
5	<p>Environmental risks For example: accidental spillage of pollutants, damage to local ecosystems</p>	
	<p>Risk to the environment:</p> <p>Risks are minimal however, there could be risk of increased carbon footprint and increased energy consumption. (this box should expand as you type)</p>	<p>How you will mitigate the risk to environment:</p> <p>Mitigation will be to minimise physical travel and conduct research/interviews online and also use energy efficient devices and sustainable providers of services.</p>

		(this box should expand as you type)
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SECTION G: Feedback, Consent and Confidentiality

If you have identified in section D that there are no participants then enter skip this section and continue to section H.

1	<p>Feedback What de-briefing and feedback will be provided to participants, how will this be done and when?</p>
	<p>You don't need to email your participants with your final report. Good alternatives are (i) to set up an email address that they will be able to contact for further details or results and or (ii) set up a blogspot or social media page (not a personal social media page) that shares your main findings.</p> <p>Feedback can be obtained by contacting my work email address or reaching via LinkedIn messaging facility.</p> <p>(this box should expand as you type)</p>
2	<p>Informed consent Describe the arrangements to inform potential participants, before providing consent, of what is involved in participating. Describe the arrangements for participants to provide full consent before data collection begins. If gaining consent in this way is inappropriate, explain how consent will be obtained and recorded in accordance with prevailing data protection legislation.</p>
	<p>If you are using a paper questionnaire then you should have the participants sign an appropriate consent form. These forms will count as personal data and should be noted as such in section J.</p> <p>If you are using an online questionnaire, then you should have a screen before the questions start that acts as a consent form, informing participants that by clicking on the NEXT button they are providing consent.</p> <p>Consent information will be provided at the beginning of online survey and will be granted by responding to survey or in writing in case of interviews.</p> <p>(this box should expand as you type)</p>
3	<p>Confidentiality / Anonymity Set out how anonymity of participants and confidentiality will be ensured in any outputs. If anonymity is not being offered, explain why this is the case.</p>
	<p>Do not collect names unless you really need them. Do not name participants or organisations in any research publications (including the thesis) without their explicit permission.</p> <p>Anonymity will be adhered by assigning identifiers to all participants such as: Participant 1, Participant 2 etc. All information that can be used to identify individuals such as job title, company name or specific location of participant (like address, city) will not be included. Please note - location will be only used on a 'global level' with a general split of participants by country or region so 'Europe', 'North America', ... etc. as this is critical to the outcome of research.</p> <p>Information will be gathered using Google Forms to guarantee full anonymity. No personal email will be used to gather any data or for communication purposes.</p> <p>No research publication will be used without permission from the author.</p> <p>(this box should expand as you type)</p>

SECTION H: Data Protection and Storage

	Does the research activity involve personal data (as defined by the General Data Protection Regulation 2016 “GDPR” and the Data Protection Act 2018 “DPA”)?	YES	NO
1	<p>“Personal data” means any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person (‘data subject’). An identifiable natural person is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier or to one or more factors specific to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity of that natural person. Any video or audio recordings of participants is considered to be personal data.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	If YES, provide a description of the data and explain why this data needs to be collected:		
2	<p>This includes audio/video data of participants, but can also include IP addresses and usernames. Names, addresses and emails also count, as do consent forms.</p> <p>(this box should expand as you type)</p>		
	Does it involve special category data (as defined by the GDPR)?	YES	NO
3	<p>“Special category data” means sensitive personal data consisting of information as to the data subjects’ –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) racial or ethnic origin, (b) political opinions, (c) religious beliefs or other beliefs of a similar nature, (d) membership of a trade union (within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992), (e) physical or mental health or condition, (f) sexual life, (g) genetics, (h) biometric data (as used for ID purposes), 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	If YES, provide a description of the special category data and explain why this data needs to be collected:		
4	<p>What counts as ‘sensitive’ will differ between cultures. Any information on behaviour that is not in accordance with cultural norms would count as sensitive personal data.</p> <p>(this box should expand as you type)</p>		

	Will data from the research activity (collected data, drafts of the thesis, or materials for publication) be stored in any of the following ways?	YES	NO
5	Manual files (i.e. in paper form)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
6	University computers?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
7	Private company computers?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	Home or other personal computers?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

9	Laptop computers/ CDs/ Portable disk-drives/ memory sticks?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	“Cloud” storage or websites?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11	Other – specify:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
12	<p>For all stored data, explain the measures in place to ensure the security of the data collected, data confidentiality, including details of backup procedures, password protection, encryption, anonymisation and pseudonymisation:</p> <p>If possible, save your data on computers that are secure and regularly backed up. Many cloud services only provide GDPR-compliant storage for business customers. An example of suitable text is given below.</p> <p>All data will be kept in password protected cloud storage to which only researcher has access. All participants will be given a unique identifier to ensure confidentiality, and this list will be kept securely in the password protected folder.</p> <p><i>(this box should expand as you type)</i></p>		

Data Protection			
	Will the research activity involve any of the following activities:	YES	NO
13	Electronic transfer of data in any form?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14	Sharing of data with others at the University outside of the immediate research team?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
15	Sharing of data with other organisations?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
16	Export of data outside the UK or importing of data from outside the UK?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
17	Use of personal addresses, postcodes, faxes, emails or telephone numbers?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
18	Publication of data that might allow identification of individuals?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
19	<p>If YES to any question, please provide full details, explaining how this will be conducted in accordance with the GDPR and Data Protection Act (2018) (and/or any international equivalent):</p> <p>This includes data such as drafts of your thesis as well as experimental or survey data. An example of suitable text is given below.</p> <p>All data will be encrypted and kept in password protected cloud storage on the University Office 365 system which will not be shared. Any USB sticks used to store or transfer data will be password protected. All data transfers will be encrypted and password protected. All participants will be given a unique identifier to ensure confidentiality, and this list will be kept securely in the password protected folder. The data will be stored until the completion of the project and then deleted. In accordance with the DPA2018, participants will have the right to ask to see what data is held relating to them, and this data will be deleted immediately if the participant requests this, in which case the data will not be used in the project.</p> <p><i>(this box should expand as you type)</i></p>		
20	List all who will have access to the data generated by the research activity:		

	<p>Normally the principal researcher, possibly also the supervisor and, if the project has an industrial partner, a representative of that partner. Possibly also external examiner or second marker?</p> <p>Researcher (Lukasz Perski) and supervisor (Anthony Burns) and anyone who was authorised by the University who has a legitimate interested in accessing this data.</p> <p><i>(this box should expand as you type)</i></p>	
	<p>Usually the principal researcher.</p> <p>Researcher (Lukasz Perski).</p> <p><i>(this box should expand as you type)</i></p>	
	<p>All data will be encrypted and kept in password protected cloud storage on the University Office 365 system which will not be shared. Any USB sticks used to store or transfer data will be password-protected and will be reformatted at the end of the project in order to destroy the data. The data will be stored until the completion of the project and then deleted.</p> <p><i>(this box should expand as you type)</i></p>	
	_____	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

SECTION I: Declaration

		Lukasz Perski	Date: 03/01/2025
		Anthony Burns	Date:07/01/2025
		A.Burns	

FOR INTERNAL USE ONLY:

	Ethical approval given
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1	Signature of assessor:		Date:
2	Name:		
3	Role:		