

A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF PROFESSIONAL  
SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE IN  
SUPPLIER DIVERSITY:  
A DELPHI STUDY

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A DISSERTATION

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This is to certify that the dissertation entitled:

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mom, Ruby Cole Keller, and my dad, Lawrence Cole. I see your shining stars in the sky everyday and I thank God for the time we had together. Thank you for your wisdom, guidance, support and love. Thank you for molding me into the person I am today. I celebrate and honor both of you.

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## Abstract

Today, many US corporations have made great strides to embrace supplier diversity as a social consideration, and most importantly, as a strategic business enabler. From the earlier years of mandating minority inclusion to the realization that diversifying the supply chain creates value by capitalizing on the diverse background and experiences of minority businesses, supplier diversity has emerged as a major business initiative. It is one of the initiatives that contribute to the welfare of the country by building minority communities and strengthening our society. By developing business coalitions and partnerships with minority suppliers there is tremendous opportunity to impact the economic development of minorities and make significant contributions to the growth and development of our nation. The goal of this research is to apply the Delphi methodology to a research study that identifies the skills and knowledge that marks a professional in supplier diversity in the private sector. Additionally, this study is intended to help shape the future of supplier diversity as a professional entity in the business environment. This research is honoring and advancing the cause and status of supplier diversity professionals who possess the drive and commitment to elevate supplier diversity to a profession.

The electronic version of this dissertation is at OhioLink ETD Center,  
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## Chapter I: Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of supplier diversity and a statement of the research question. This chapter establishes a rationale for the study and a statement of the problem by demonstrating how this research can be used to advance the field of supplier diversity. This chapter also establishes the basis for a review of related literature and the method that will be utilized for research investigation. The research assumptions and limitations are also included in this chapter.

### *Overview of Supplier Diversity*

The “browning of America” and the continuing shift from a white to a non-white population are evidenced by growing demographic trends in the United States today. The shift in U.S. demography has economic, political and social implications brought on by how the contributions of minority businesses are viewed in the private sector.

Minorities are the fastest-growing population in this country today, and they are emerging as a population majority. Research by the Minority Business Development Agency indicates that the minority population will represent 37.4 percent of the total U.S. population by the year 2020, and will yield purchasing power in excess of \$3 trillion dollars (MBDA, 2000). The growth rate of the minority population also reflects the growth of businesses owned by minorities. According to the U.S. Small Business Administration in 2002, minorities own approximately 18 percent of the 23 million U.S. firms, and the SBA predicts the growth rate of minority firms to double by 2010.

Since the 1980s, with support of government agencies and corporations committed to diversifying their purchasing activities, minority firms have seen their revenue rise above 10 percent annually and have enjoyed growth rates at three times higher than those

of traditional white businesses (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2006). Minority-owned businesses have produced goods and services, created innovations, absorbed labor, generated jobs, provided wages and salaries, and contributed to the support of government services through taxes. All of these business activities represent an important contribution to the American economy (Harrington & Yago, 1999).

Minority entrepreneurs are a recognized emerging market and a key source of wealth-building, economic development, and community contribution through job creation opportunities, and as such have formidable economic clout (Humphreys, 2004). The growth rate of minority businesses represents unprecedented opportunities for corporations willing and able to partner with minority suppliers for the purchase of goods and services in order to gain competitive advantages in the coming years.

U.S. corporations that have begun to develop strong partnerships with minority businesses have been rewarded with more than they expected. The corporations which have placed emphasis on minority suppliers have gained substantial business results. By looking at a broader base and more diverse suppliers and extending their partnerships toward purchasing awards to minority businesses, some companies have opened themselves up to discovering creative new ways of doing business in this new economy, and have gained a competitive edge in growing their businesses and increasing revenue. As corporations take action and explore different purchasing strategies to increase revenue, some of them have come to realize that ensuring the inclusion of minority businesses in their purchasing activities is not about “handouts,” but rather about “handshakes” that clinch good business deals and create a more diverse and globally competitive country (Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, 2000). Some corporations have also been

quick to grasp the realities of needing to be responsive to an ever-growing demographic segment of our society and a commitment and responsibility to corporate citizenship by partnering with minority-owned businesses.

Although minority business development first emerged as a national priority by the federal government in the early 1960s to ensure that minorities have access and equality to purchasing opportunities, there continues to be a gap in advancing purchasing opportunities for minorities in major corporations in America today. While the number of minority businesses has reached unparalleled levels, the distribution of these businesses does not fully reflect the growth of minority communities and the increase in the minority population in the United States today (Boston Consulting Group, 2005). There is still a tremendous amount of work that remains to be done to advance the agenda of minority business development.

In the context of minority business development, many corporations have established supplier diversity programs that are aimed at including minority-owned businesses in their supply base. Supplier diversity is used to describe a company that is at least 51% owned by minorities who are Asian, Black, Hispanic and Native Americans. Supplier diversity is a corporate business process that seeks to provide minority suppliers with equal access to purchasing opportunities in the private sector. Corporations spend billions of dollars every year purchasing goods and services with both large and small suppliers. Without a concerted effort to ensure that minority businesses are given a real opportunity to compete for these dollars, they will continue to be marginalized and left out of the purchasing strategies designed to promote economic development.

Supplier diversity can be viewed as both an emergent field of practice and an emerging academic domain. While neither perspective is fully mature, each has considerable promise. The future progress of each will be enhanced by and is ultimately dependent upon the other. Both academics and practitioners agree that efficient and effective supplier diversity management can lead to sustainable competitive advantages and gain substantial business results for major corporations. These competitive advantages and business results will be achieved because of the growing demographic trends in the minority population and economic development in minority communities.

Trade associations and practitioners in the field have strategically positioned supplier diversity as a growing phenomenon, and have made significant contributions to the field. Despite considerable attention in recent years, little empirical data focus on the issues of supplier diversity in major corporations. Literature published by professional trade associations on supplier diversity is significantly more substantial. Although the majority of published materials are conceptual in nature and lack empirical underpinning, they do provide a useful background for more research in this area.

Academic research in workforce diversity and corporate social responsibility are the key drivers for supplier diversity success. Corporations that have demonstrated a commitment to workforce diversity and that are socially responsible have a greater chance of successfully implementing supplier diversity programs, primarily because the value of diversity has already been instilled in the organizational culture. If supplier diversity is to mature as a profession, further progress is needed in clarifying its domain and understanding the professional requirements of individuals who implement business initiatives in this field of work and practice.

The problem is not related to a lack of consensus about the professional skills and knowledge needed for supplier diversity practitioners; but that no competencies currently exists which exemplifies supplier diversity as a profession. A secondary concern is what constitutes professionalism by those who work as professionals in the field of supplier diversity. Because of the recent increase and focus on supplier diversity, without some movement toward the establishment of professional principles for practitioners in this field, there will continue to be a lack of awareness and acknowledgement about the specialized and unique skills and knowledge inherent in the practice of supplier diversity in major corporations.

#### *Research Question*

This study seeks to uncover the professional skills and competencies for individuals who work in supplier diversity in the private sector. The main research question is: What are the required professional skills and knowledge for supplier diversity practitioners?

#### *Rationale for the Study*

Supplier diversity is a newly recognized and rapidly growing practice, and it is a new area for academic inquiry. Empirical research in supplier diversity appears to be a slowly emerging domain of inquiry as little attention has been given to this area. The research that does exist focuses primarily on problems, challenges, impediments, barriers and trends in supplier diversity. A good starting point to advance supplier diversity as a profession is to assess the required professional skills and knowledge of the individuals who work in this area – supplier diversity practitioners – in the private sector.

The hallmark of any profession is for its members to possess and exhibit certain critical skills associated with the profession. Professionalism is described as the standards

of conduct and qualities that characterize or marks a professional (Quiett, 2002). Based on this description of professionalism, supplier diversity practitioners must exhibit certain attributes to be considered true professionals in this field. The professionals who conduct themselves in accordance with the established expectations and attributes exhibit professionalism. To become a professional in supplier diversity, one must possess and conform to a set of professional skills and competence expected of qualified and experienced individuals in this field.

In order to meet the needs of this evolving and dynamic professional practice, it is critical that a clearly delineated and agreed upon set of competencies are identified. The rationale for this study is to confer a sense of professionalism on individuals who work in the area of supplier diversity and who carry out the daily business functions by identifying the professional skills and knowledge to perform the job.

#### *Statement of the Problem*

This research will identify the skills and knowledge required to be successful in supplier diversity. Although individuals in supplier diversity are being trained and educated for positions in this area, the professional requirements that promote leadership excellence have yet to be delineated for successful performance. Today, no agreed upon professional competencies currently exist for professionals in supplier diversity.

There are several forums, seminars, and independent consultants that focus specifically on training, interaction, and strategies for supplier diversity professionals. Each year, the National Minority Supplier Development Council, a professional organization that brings minority suppliers and corporations together for purchasing opportunities, convenes a project management seminar. These seminars are designed to

share essential information on corporate practices that impact minority business development, provide supplier diversity professionals with a forum to discuss strategies that will enhance performance, and create a platform for strengthening relationships between supplier diversity professionals.

The Alliance of Supplier Diversity is a non-profit corporation with members throughout the country which offers education and professional development opportunities, as well as a supplier diversity certification for professionals within the fields of management, supplier diversity, procurement, and other related career directions. Training and certification by the Alliance is intended to increase professional development, enhance customer relations, and facilitate the exchange of information.

While there are various common practices for educating supplier diversity professionals in how best to perform their job functions, these forums, seminars, and certification programs fail to identify the required competencies and skills necessary for the successful performance of supplier diversity professionals. The education and training that these forums and seminars do provide is geared specifically toward “how” to perform the job functions in supplier diversity, neglecting discussions of the professional skills and competencies required for successful performance of supplier diversity practitioners.

As corporations begin to realize the business advantages of establishing supplier diversity programs, it is critical that they understand the competencies required for supplier diversity professionals to be successful. In recent years, there has been a flurry of activity among supplier diversity professionals moving from one corporation to another without the benefits of being able to understand and assess their performance based on a set of predetermined skills and competencies required to perform the job. Traditionally,



individuals who work in supplier diversity have held positions as buyers and purchasing managers in the supply chain, individuals in workforce diversity and human resources and/or individuals who have had an interest or a passion for work in supplier diversity. These individuals have been hired to perform the work of supplier diversity based on a set of standards identified for world-class purchasing, human resources and other business entities. The risk of not having professional performance standards will diminish or erode the importance of supplier diversity and potentially create performance problems. These skills are vital to help achieve meaningful progress in supplier diversity.

### *Review of Literature*

An in-depth examination of literature in supplier diversity, minority business development, minority entrepreneurs, ethnic minority, minority-owned businesses, purchasing, procurement, and small business and economic development was reviewed to determine the relevance and application to the research question being proposed. This examination revealed that there were no studies which focused specifically on issues of competency development and performance in supplier diversity.

Although quite limited, empirical research on supplier diversity focuses primarily on problems, challenges, impediments, barriers and trends in the field. Other related research focuses on organizational culture and supplier diversity effectiveness, minority supplier issues in supply chain management and issues in buyer-supplier relationships in supplier diversity.

Supplier diversity literature published by trade associations generally focuses on best practices, program development and effectiveness, corporate solutions and competitive advantages. While the range of issues centers on a limited area of

concentration, the number of publications by trade associations is vast.

More than one hundred non-peer reviewed studies were uncovered for this dissertation, of which thirteen articles were selected for this research because of their applicability to supplier diversity. Many of these studies were contributed by trade associations, journal articles, practitioners and consultants in the field of supplier diversity.

To augment and strengthen this review of literature from a contextual perspective, publications and literature by trade associations and empirical research in the areas of corporate social responsibility, workforce diversity and supplier development were examined. This search revealed that unless the primary focus of the literature was intended to address supplier diversity directly, none of the findings in these areas offered insight into competency based issues related specifically to performance excellence for supplier diversity professionals.

As corporations continue to struggle to find new ways to gain the competitive edge by leveraging business opportunities with diverse suppliers, this is a domain of inquiry that is starving for scholarly attention.

### *Research Method*

For this dissertation, I have selected the Delphi research methodology. The Delphi method is defined as a method for structuring a group communication process so that the process is effective in allowing a group of individuals to deal with a complex problem (Linstone & Turoff, 1975). This method was used to identify and assess the required professional competencies for successful performance of supplier diversity professionals.

Delphi is one of several research methods employed to make estimates or predict future human behaviors or human conditions. Based on the philosophical premise that

“two heads are better than one” (Dalkey, 1972; Weaver, 1972), the Delphi method was selected for this dissertation because of its ability to gain consensus about the required professional skills and knowledge of supplier diversity practitioners.

Some of the distinctive features of Delphi include: the use of a panel of experts to collect data, the use of questionnaires and/or interviews, the systematic emergence of a concurrence of judgment or opinion, anonymity of the participants’ responses, the use of frequency distributions to identify patterns of agreement, and the use of iterative rounds in the collection of data which are summarized and fed back to the participants. The results of the previous rounds are communicated and evaluated by the participants (French, Yin-Yu & Lan-Suen, 2002).

Caves (1988) asserts that in studies where the goal is the identification of skills effectiveness, the use of Delphi improves the validity of the research because of its relevance to those who will potentially be affected by the research results. In this case, those who will be affected are experts in the field of supplier diversity. Additionally, Caves stated that “when consensus is achieved, there is evidence of concurrent validation because the experts themselves have both identified and agreed to the skills findings” (pp. 199-229). Because this dissertation followed the typical protocol of eliciting feedback from experts in the field of supplier diversity, validation can be assumed. This study included experts who are representative of a particular group, in this case, supplier diversity professionals, who have the expertise, skills and knowledge of the field of study (Goodman, 1987a).

In order to determine the value of Delphi for this dissertation, Fisher (1978) was consulted. He suggests that an in-depth understanding and review of the Delphi method is

required, as well as a review of some typical Delphi studies. A review of literature was performed on the Delphi method which satisfied the above-mentioned criteria.

Within the last few years, the Delphi method has shown to be a viable research method with broad application which is substantiated by the large number of studies conducted utilizing this method and the range of questions to which it has been applied. The Delphi method offers an excellent opportunity to engage experts in the field of supplier diversity in a true debate, independent of personalities to “freely express their opinions without undue social pressures to conform to others in the group” (Skulmoski, Hartman & Krahn, 2007, p. 2). Participants’ responses and “decisions are evaluated on their merit, rather than who proposed the idea” (2007, p. 2). Shelton, Lyons, Allen and Allensworth (1984) commented that the Delphi approach “ensures anonymity of the respondents in order to provide an unbiased framework for the purpose of identifying possible roles, feedback to the respondents so that they have data upon which to base subsequent decisions, and permits statistical analysis to be conducted so that the results can be useful in planning” (p. 962). Further, Landeta (2005, p. 468) contends that anonymity “aims to avoid the negative influence that could be exercised by factors in the individual answers in terms of personality and status of the participating experts.” Garavalia and Gredler (2004, pp. 375-380) contend that pressures to conform in a group setting can be eliminated by having participants respond anonymously. This is a critical element in the collection of data to identify and assess the professional skills for supplier diversity practitioners.

The Delphi method also features a controlled feedback mechanism whereby the “exchange of information between experts is not free, but is carried out by means of a

group coordinator so that all irrelevant information is eliminated” (Landeta, 2005, p. 469). Controlled feedback provides participants with the responses from other participants’ perspectives and provides the opportunity for participants to clarify or change their views between reiterative rounds. After several rounds of questionnaire iterations, all of the opinions of the participants form “part of the final answer and the questions are formulated so they can be process quantitatively and statistically” (Rowe & Wright, 1999, p. 366).

The Delphi technique produces convergence of opinions. This is accomplished by giving experts in the group a series of questionnaires that reiterate the same questions while providing feedback to the group of experts from the previous round until consensus is reached (Helmer, 1983). Duffield (1988) and McKenna (1994) indicate that consensus occurs when there is a convergence of opinion between the participants. Consensus is set at different levels, using different measurements such as percentages (Orton, 1981), median and mean scores (Mead, 1993) and standard deviations.

The Delphi method will allow structuring vast amounts of information for which there is some evidence; allows for the inclusion of large numbers of individuals with varying expertise located in diverse geographical areas in a group communication process; reduces the likelihood that an individual or group of individuals will dominate the process; and elicits and develops responses to a task over iterations of the questionnaire while refining views as the process occurs. The Delphi method represents the most economical and cost-efficient method of soliciting the opinions of experts and arriving at group consensus on an issue.

The Delphi method has also been plagued with many problems, many of which have been well documented. There are, however, a considerable number of issues to safeguard against and be cognizant of when undertaking a Delphi study.

Linstone and Turoff (1975) provided a list of issues that can arise during the Delphi process, including:

1. Researchers' bias and over-structuring the responses by not allowing new ideas to be generated,
2. Weak summarizing techniques which results in a lack of common interpretations of language and scales used in the process,
3. Ignoring or not exploring disagreements which can cause participants to become disinterested and withdraw from the process,
4. Underestimating the time it takes to conduct a Delphi methods study which can contribute to the loss of interested participants and result in participants' dropout rate,
5. Carefully choosing the participants to ensure that the panel is a group of "qualified experts," as knowledge doesn't necessarily demonstrate expertise in a field.

Successful Delphi studies depend on the quality and selection of the participants (Green, Jones, Hughes & Williams, 1999). Okoli and Pawlowski (2004) caution about neglecting this aspect of the Delphi as it is critical to the reliability of the results. Experts should be selected based on their familiarity with the subject under consideration and the information they bring to the process (Riggs, 1983). They should be experts in the field being studies (Jenkins & Smith, 1994).

Researcher bias may occur during the panel selection, while participant bias may occur during the rounds, as the participants could change their viewpoints based upon what other members of the panel are saying. Researchers utilizing the Delphi method should not underestimate the time it takes to implement a Delphi research study.

### *Summary of Chapters*

In chapter I, I have introduced the research study, the intent of this dissertation and a statement of the research question. Chapter I present a rationale for the study and how this research advances the field of supplier diversity. This chapter establishes the basis for a review of related literature and the method that will be utilized for this investigation.

Chapter II presents the background and origin of supplier diversity and positions supplier diversity in the content of an emerging profession. This chapter also represents an exhaustive critique of the literature in this field.

Chapter III explores the approach that was used to investigate this study and outlines the selection criteria and the selection of the participants. This chapter also lays the foundation for the Delphi method process and management.

Chapter IV presents the Delphi pilot study undertaken for this research.

Chapter V analyzes and summarizes the data that surfaced from the research.

Chapter VI discusses the conclusions and implications relevant to the research findings and presents future research recommendations.

## Chapter II: Review of the Literature

In this chapter I review what has been published on this topic by researchers and professional trade associations. I begin with a review of the background and origin of supplier diversity, and describe supplier diversity as an evolving practice. A review of the literature will follow a discussion on the professional status of supplier diversity.

### *Background and Origin of Supplier Diversity*

Many corporations have established supplier diversity programs that are aimed at including minority-owned businesses in their supply base. A minority business is a for-profit enterprise located in the United States which is at least 51% owned, operated, and controlled by one or more minorities who are Asian, Black, Hispanic or Native Americans. Minority business development in the United States can be attributed to executive orders and federal legislation that played an active role in shaping opportunities for minority businesses. Government initiatives were the impetus for establishing today's corporate supplier diversity programs to specifically foster the establishment and growth of minority-owned businesses. Exposure to the procurement bureaucracy in the federal government and reaching key decision-makers on the federal, state, and local levels provided a solid foundation for the development of supplier diversity in major corporations today.

In the mid-1960s, policymakers actively designed a wide range of programs in education, housing, employment, and business, seeking to assist ethnic minorities "in building competitive capability by providing access to previously inaccessible opportunities" (Boston Consulting Group, 2005, p.6). It was also in the mid-1960s that "corporate America strongly focused on employment practices aimed toward a greater inclusion of minorities and women" (Williams, 1984, p. 1).



On the corporate level, in the mid-1960s, purchasing from minorities was not a well known practice, although several corporations began some limited early initiatives (Williams, 1984). Today, the vast majority of Americans continue to be unaware of supplier diversity as a practice.

The 1970s saw the beginning of large urban centers throughout the country developing programs for minority-owned firms and providing access to purchasing opportunities with governmental agencies, along with limited funding. At the same time, major corporations began to recognize that urban communities were critical to their continued economic growth and development. Corporations began to create similar programs to provide procurement opportunities to minority-owned suppliers located near their headquarters and major facilities. Federally mandated requirements for prime contractors increased the pressure on major corporate suppliers to find ways to incorporate minority-owned businesses in contract awards (Boston Consulting Group, 2005).

In 1972, President Richard M. Nixon signed Executive Order 11625 (Federal Register, 1971, p. 616), which states that “the opportunity to fully participate in our free enterprise system by socially and economically disadvantaged persons is essential if we are to obtain social and economic justice for such persons and improve the functioning of our national economy.” Executive Order 11625 greatly facilitated the strengthening and expansion of the minority enterprise program. In order to take full advantage of resources and opportunities in the minority enterprise field, Executive Order 11625 was signed to build on the foundation of the Office of Minority Business Enterprise by clarifying the authority of the Secretary of Commerce to: (a) implement federal policy in support of the minority business enterprise programs, (b) provide technical and management assistance to

disadvantage businesses, and (c) coordinate the participation of all federal departments and agencies in an increased minority enterprise effort (p. 616).

In 1978, Congressman Parren J. Mitchell authored an amendment to President Jimmy Carter's \$4 billion public works bill. This amendment required state, county, and local governments seeking federal grants on public works projects to set aside ten percent of contracts for minority-owned firms. The passage of Public Law 95-89 increased loan authorizations and surety bond guarantee authority to minority businesses. Congress then enacted the Community Reinvestment Act which was intended to encourage depository institutions to help meet the credit needs of minority firms in the communities in which they operated, including low- and moderate-income neighborhoods. Congressman Mitchell's legislation led to the passage of Public Law 95-507, mandating that bidders for federal contracts in excess of \$500,000 for goods and services, or \$1,000,000 for construction contracts, submit and have approved a subcontracting plan for minority businesses. This law required percentage goals for the utilization of minority businesses. The law also contained several amendments to the Small Business Investment Act of 1958.

In 1979, Executive Order 12138 (Federal Register, 1979, p. 393), signed by President Carter, required federal agencies to take affirmative action in support of businesses owned by women. This executive order created a national women's business enterprise policy for coordinating, developing, and implementing programs for women business owners. Although non-minority women-owned businesses experience many of the same issues as minorities, they "are a separate group not to be confused with minorities" (Williams, 1984, p. 5), and are not a consideration for this dissertation.

During the 1980s, several Circuit Court cases were filed regarding set-aside programs and requirements in public contracting. Many of these cases were found to be invalid or insufficient for establishing under-representation of minority businesses and were the result of discrimination. Further, many cases were argued without having exhausted racially neutral means; the use of target goals amounted to quotas and represented constitutional threats (Boston Consulting Group, 2005).

Other significant legal actions that laid the foundation for today's supplier diversity initiatives included Executive Order 12432 (Federal Register, 1983, p. 198), signed by President Ronald Reagan in 1983, which required all federal agencies to develop specific goal-oriented plans for expanding procurement opportunities to minority businesses.

Again, in 1985, Congressman Mitchell, one of the most vocal and committed advocates of minority business development, introduced House Resolution 1961. This resolution established criminal penalties for companies or persons who engage in fraudulent deceptive programs intended for minorities. These non-minority companies, referred to as "fronts" represent one of the most serious complaints voiced by both detractors and supporters of minority business development. As a result of these deceptive practices, a process for certifying minority-owned businesses was established to verify ownership, control, and active management of minority-owned businesses.

It was during the mid-1960s that the National Minority Supplier Development Council (NMSDC) was organized to represent and certify minority-owned businesses. In addition to NMSDC, today's minority-owned businesses can also be certified by federal, state, or local government agencies. Certification verifies and ensures ownership, control, and management of minority-owned businesses. The certification process varies across

regions but usually involves an initial application and processing fee, accompanied by on-site visits, interviews, and an examination of a vendor's capability. The benefits of certification for minority-owned businesses vary from state to state.

In addition to certifying the legitimacy of minority-owned businesses, NMSDC provides a direct link between private corporations and minority-owned businesses. Headquartered in New York City, the NMSDC has 39 regional councils across the country with 3,500 corporate members and more than 15,000 minority-owned businesses in its network. The Council also represents privately-owned and foreign-owned companies, as well as universities, hospitals, and other institutions with buying authority (<http://www.nmsdcus.org>, 2008).

The NMSDC came into existence when three Chicago organizations participated in the city's first minority business trade fair. In subsequent years, the annual trade fair has attracted more than 600 minority-owned businesses and more than 200 large corporations. Because of the success of this initiative and on behalf of the minority business community, a number of other cities began to setup prototype trade fairs. During this same period, the Office of Minority Business Enterprise in the Department of Commerce opened up a number of local offices in various cities throughout the country to promote minority business development in the private sector.

In 1974, the Office of Minority Business Enterprise entered into a contract with the NMSDC to "pursue the single objective of encouraging major corporations to adopt and implement programs to increase their purchase of goods and services from minority businesses" (<http://www.nmsdcus.org>, 2008). The result of this action was the establishment and funding of network Councils which today sprawls across the country as

the Regional Minority Supplier Development Councils in nearly every major metropolitan area in the U.S.

As a result of the NMSDC's efforts, the amount of purchases by its corporate members from minority businesses has grown from \$86 million in 1972 to more than \$94.6 billion in 2005 (<http://www.nmsdcus.org>, 2008). Today, while minorities make up 28 percent of the U.S. population, minority businesses represent only 18 percent of total businesses with 3 percent of gross receipts and 4 percent of total corporate purchases (<http://www.nmsdcus.org>, 2008).

In 1986, Public Law 99-661 required affirmative action efforts by all government contractors to establish a five percent goal over a three-year period for minorities participating in the Department of Defense procurement activities. Extending further than any state or local minority initiative in the establishment of viable program effort, verification of racial or gender ownership status of suppliers, and the adoption of formal complaint procedures was California General Order 156. As a result of this action, the California Public Utility Commission was authorized to withhold actions on utility rate cases brought before it, in which the affected utilities companies were in non-compliance with the general order.

One final action which impacted minority businesses was Public Law 106-50, the Veterans Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development Act, signed by President Bill Clinton in 1999. This law established procurement assistance for disabled-veteran-owned businesses requiring federal agencies to take the necessary steps toward establishing a three-percent goal for prime contracts and subcontract awards to service disabled-veteran-owned small businesses. Today, because many companies track and report purchases with

veteran-owned businesses separately from minority-owned businesses, this classification of individuals is not a consideration for this dissertation.

During the period between 1990 and 2000, the challenges facing minority businesses increased dramatically. Previous provisions in federal law allowed set-asides to provide opportunities for socially and economically disadvantaged business enterprises to win federal contracts. Today, government pressures to dismantle set-aside programs for minority suppliers have escalated and corporations as well as the public sector have abandoned set-aside provisions in favor of defining goals and objectives.

As we navigate through the 21<sup>st</sup> century, other groups claiming to be disadvantaged have surfaced, each trying to gain a piece of the American dream. Some corporations are recognizing the inclusion of gays, lesbians, and transsexuals who have proclaimed themselves as disadvantaged. Minority business leaders hold the key to enhanced economic success as they bridge the gap between the corporate world and minority business development. Although there has been considerable progress with regard to minority supplier development, minority-owned businesses continue to struggle to reach parity with majority-owned firms in the United States.

Supplier diversity is a vibrant, dynamic practice that is valued by its clients and is critical to bringing about economic development to minority entrepreneurs and minority communities. As such, with its high degree of perceived value and large body of like-minded practitioners who carry out the work to ensure that minority businesses are part of the supply chain, supplier diversity appears well positioned to take on the ever-evolving business environment and to qualify itself among the ranks of a unique body of knowledge that is consistent with the practice of becoming a true profession.

*Supplier Diversity: From Practice to Profession*

It is difficult to establish consensus about a definition of profession “given the diversity of professional groups and their proclivity to define the term in their own way” (Curry and Wergin, 1993, p. 342). Given the intense debate about its definition, those who have offered to define a profession have described it as an occupation with some common traits (Greenwood, 1962; Lansbury, 1978; Osigweh, 1986). It is however, widely agreed that the common traits or essential elements of a profession include a unique body of knowledge, standards for entry, codes of ethics, professional culture, service orientation, identification with the professions, external recognition, and membership in professional associations.

The establishment of a profession typically begins with a process by which an occupation has been identified, a method for education and training established, a professional organization formed, legal support for exclusion gained, and a formal code of business conduct promulgated. According to Curry and Wergin, “the professions encompass occupational groups that share specialized skills requiring extensive systematic and scholarly training, restrict access with rigorous entrance requirements, and because of their importance to society, claim high social prestige” (1993, p. xiii). There is a simple contract between the professions and society. The professions “guarantee the competence of their registered members in exchange for professional control over all aspects of their profession” (Curry & Wergin, 1993, p. 345).

The history, culture, and recent activities in supplier diversity have proven to be a growing and ever-evolving phenomenon. The landscape for supplier diversity is rapidly changing as minorities will make up the majority population in the coming decade in the

United States. The changing demographics have led to an increase in the number of businesses started by minorities. Major corporations that understand the value generated by these minority businesses have focused attention on developing corporate supplier diversity programs and initiatives. To facilitate relationships with minority businesses, develop corporate business strategies for supplier diversity, and carry out other functional work related to minority suppliers, corporations have hired supplier diversity professionals. These individuals have formed an informal professional community responsible for the oversight and monitoring of work in the practice of supplier diversity.

According to Van Maanen and Barley (1984), a professional community is a group of people who are engaged in the same sort of work and whose identity is drawn from that work. A professional community also shares with its members a set of values, norms, and perspectives that extend beyond work-related matters. The community's social relationships also blend together work and social interactions. Supplier diversity practitioners have built a professional community as they share social conversations about professional issues, practices, challenges, successes, values, and beliefs.

In order for an occupation to reach the status of a profession, it must experience a long process of professionalization in which its technical expertise begins to take on an identity of a professional community based on common and essential values and beliefs. While supplier diversity is an occupation defined by its practice, the attributes of the practice mirror that of a profession in many areas and offer considerable promise that the practice can elevate itself to the status of profession.

To understand how the practice of supplier diversity might become a profession, it is useful to examine a critical factor driving this change. Supplier diversity has grown



significantly in both sophistication and scope. This growth has been spurred on by challenges from corporations, government agencies, and minority businesses. During the last few years there has been considerable movement of supplier diversity professionals from one corporation to another. Corporate managers are hiring supplier diversity professionals without the benefits of knowing and understanding the professional skills required to be successful in performing the work of supplier diversity. Certain skills and knowledge requirements that were basically nonexistent years ago have become requirements for survival in today's business environment. Practitioners in supplier diversity need to be equipped with skills and knowledge to be successful and carry out the functions of supplier diversity. Today, there are no job requirements or associated knowledge or skills required of practitioners in this field, as these professional skills have yet to be delineated.

As an important first step toward legitimizing this practice and transforming it into a profession, it is important that professional skills and knowledge be identified for supplier diversity practitioners so that hiring requirements are consistent throughout the industry, and so that supplier diversity practitioners can adequately and successfully perform the functions of the practice. It is also important to have consistent performance measures and a platform for career development.

Members of a profession are referred to as professionals. When we comment that someone is a professional, we bestow high praise on that individual. "Professional" refers to someone who is an expert in a field, who performs the task at hand, and who can be trusted to assess and act on important matters. Professionals are assumed to have extensive knowledge and possess skills based on the knowledge that they are able to apply in

practicing their occupation. These characteristics of a professional emerge to support and help supplier diversity professionals assert their sense of worth in order to foster continuous commitment and convey to others and society the value of their work.

According to Gardner and Shulman (2005), the challenges of professional work center on the need for education and practice so that professionals will be able to make complex decisions and judgments which very often lead to actions under conditions of uncertainty. This means that professional judgment, actions and decision making requires professionals to learn from their experiences and grow more skilled through education, training and engaging in their professional practice through reflection, thoughtfulness and exchanging experiences with other professionals so that the professional community can benefit from their insight and experiences.

Today, supplier diversity professionals have developed a specialized body of knowledge which enables them to apply this knowledge to their professional work. They are perceived as experts in the field of supplier diversity based on their practice, commitment, experiences and knowledge. A critical step toward a legitimate professional status based on the characteristics mentioned above is the acquisition of professional skills and knowledge in this field.

Supplier diversity is an identified practice under supply chain management. It has its own needs for specialized knowledge, skills and training. The academic community and professional associations has given less than adequate attention to these specialized needs. Whether professional associations are lacking in recognizing the professional needs of supplier diversity practitioners and bringing these needs to the attention of the academic community or whether the academic community should be in the forefront of leading the

effort of recognizing the professional needs of supplier diversity practitioners, the need to identify skill requirements for supplier diversity professionals is evident.

The purpose of this research is to identify professional skills for practitioners in supplier diversity. This work will make a significant contribution to the body of knowledge for supplier diversity and move the practice closer to becoming a recognized profession.

### *Inquiry Process*

Despite considerable attention in recent years, few empirical studies focus on issues of supplier diversity in corporations and the federal government. Articles appearing in peer-reviewed journals are sparse. While the literature published by trade associations is significantly more substantial, most of it is conceptual in nature and lacks empirical underpinning. Trade associations and practitioners in supplier diversity have strategically positioned it as a growing phenomenon, and have made significant contributions to the field. While the small number of peer-reviewed journal articles is inadequate to support this research study, the vast amount of literature published by trade associations is extremely useful and makes a significant contribution to this study. Research data on professional skills for supplier diversity practitioners are nonexistent. However, the literature that does exist provides a useful background and a good starting point from which to draw inferences or conclusions about the required professional skills for supplier diversity practitioners.

Because supplier diversity typically resides in the supply chain management organization in most corporations, an examination of literature in supply chain management was conducted to ascertain the relationship to skill requirements for supplier diversity professionals. The search revealed that unless the primary focus of the literature

was intended to address supplier diversity directly, none of the literature focusing on the supply chain was aligned to skills or competencies in supplier diversity as a domain of inquiry relevant to this dissertation. Although there were several studies in supply chain management that focused on skills for supply managers, buyers, and purchasing professionals, there were no studies which surfaced that address the skills aspect of supplier diversity.

More than 30 empirical studies were uncovered for this literature review which relates directly to supplier diversity initiatives, minority business development and buyer/supplier relationships. The scope was narrowed to articles which focused on successful supplier diversity programs, challenges and approaches to purchasing from minority-owned businesses, barriers and impediments of supplier diversity, supplier development from the minority supplier's perspective, and key success factors in purchasing from minority businesses.

More than 100 studies published by trade associations, practitioners, and consultants were sought out for this review because of their direct applicability to supplier diversity. Most of these articles cover many of the same subject areas listed above for the peer-reviewed articles selected and are included in the referenced literature.

Several dissertations were selected for use in this literature review because they were generic to the nominative subject. The focus of these dissertations is on successful business partnerships with minority and women-owned business enterprises and large corporations (Carolin, 1990); minority vendor and corporate purchasing programs (Singleton, 1995); minority purchasing programs (Giunipero, 1980); federal procurement policy and the effect of minority-owned businesses (Wilson, 2001); culture and the

effectiveness of supplier diversity programs (Whitfield, 2003); a mid-range theory in supplier diversity management (Santos, 2004); and assessing minority entrepreneurship (Barnett, 2001).

The topography of academic and trade association literature is independently focused and is not fully integrated into a domain of inquiry that adequately provides the breadth and depth of research literature that specifically addresses the professional skills required for supplier diversity practitioners. The majority of the empirical research reviewed for this study utilizes a quantitative survey methodology and concentrates on a range of issues from challenges, approaches, trends, benefits, and impediments of minority business development.

The review of literature that follows represents an exhaustive examination of issues in supplier diversity to ascertain their relevance to skill requirements. I have extrapolated key issues identified in the literature that focus specifically on minority businesses, buyer/supplier relationships, and supplier diversity initiatives where I can make assumptions or draw conclusions about the required professional skills required for this professional practice in major corporations and the federal government.

The work and function of individuals who promote and develop supplier diversity programs as a professional practice are typically supplier diversity professionals and coordinators. These individuals typically work within an organization's purchasing group. Not all organizations have employed supplier diversity professionals and coordinators to carry out the work of this practice. In the absence of supplier diversity professionals and coordinators in many corporations, buyers, purchasing managers and individuals in workforce diversity have assumed this functional role.

The perceptions about the value of supplier diversity programs from minority suppliers and major corporations are vastly different in terms of barriers and impediments associated with successful program management. Supplier diversity programs are designed to increase the amount of purchases from minority firms which in turn contributes to economic development in minority communities and increased sales for major corporations. Some of these programs have worked well and some have not.

In summary, because supplier diversity professionals have the ultimate responsibility for ensuring the inclusion of minority suppliers in the supply chain, the fact that some believe that these programs do not function as intended (Dollinger, Enz, & Daily, 1991, pp. 9-10) or that problems exist suggests that the underlying issues associated with barriers to program success could potentially be attributed to the absence of professional skills for supplier diversity practitioners. The programs that have worked well are staffed with supplier diversity professionals who are highly motivated, satisfied with their jobs, exhibit professional skills required for good performance, and work under a successful program construct of minority inclusion and corporate social responsibility.

Successful programs have placed emphasis on: top management commitment and support, buyer/supplier relationships, organizational culture, and training and education.

*Top management support and commitment.*

There is no shortage of agreement in the literature that the key driver for supplier diversity success is top management commitment and support (Adobor & McMullen, 2007; Carter, 2004; Carter, Auskarnis, & Ketchum, 1999; Dozbaba, 2000; Giunipero, 1981; Krause, Ragatz, & Hughley, 1999; Pearson, Fawcett, & Cooper, 1994; Roth & Hernandez, 2001; Shah & Ram, 2006; Yuva, 2003).

Carter et al. (1999) conducted research to examine key success factors that contribute to successful purchasing from minority businesses by utilizing case studies, focus groups, and mail questionnaires to validate the success factors for these programs. The study confirmed that “top management commitment and support, in the form of leadership, was the single most important success factor for supplier diversity” (p. 31).

The Institute of Supply Management published a report by John Yuva (2003) which confirms top management as an important element for supplier diversity program development. Yuva (2003) stated that “commitment from all levels of a supply management organization... creates a win-win environment for the organization and its minority business partners” (p. 1). This sentiment is echoed across many publications by trade associations and practitioners who seek to identify the essential factors for successful supplier diversity initiatives. In a study to investigate the rationale for supplier diversity and identify key challenges involved in implementing these programs, Shah and Ram (2006) conducted research that included a case study experiment with three U.S. multinational corporations. The findings suggest that in addition to the rationale for implementing supplier diversity initiatives, there should be total commitment to the program from top management demonstrated by executive measurement scorecards and advisory councils responsible for planning and controlling the execution of supplier diversity at the business unit levels (p. 79).

Shah and Ram (2006) sought to understand the operations of supplier diversity initiatives in leading U.S. corporations. Contacts were made with 18 firms selected on the

basis of their supplier diversity initiatives, the nature of their industry, and their customer base. Procurement and supplier development professionals were interviewed using questions on a range of topics relating to the history, operation, and experience of running supplier diversity initiatives in their firms. Key findings suggest that the widespread acceptance of a business case for supplier diversity has a variety of motivations. The majority of firms interviewed indicated that the motivation for developing supplier diversity initiatives was sparked by a conscious effort to promote social responsibility within their supply chain. A small segment of the firms interviewed indicated that it was “politically correct” to develop supplier diversity initiatives. The rationale outlined by Shah and Ram on the motivations for developing supplier diversity initiatives is supported by substantial literature from trade associations and practitioners in the field. Shah and Ram’s (2006) research also suggests that achieving acceptance of supplier diversity can sometimes be difficult, including “securing senior management acceptance, communication of program goals and measurements to track supplier performance and internal goals” (p. 78). Gaining top management commitment and support, as well as communication, is a recurring theme throughout the majority of the literature about supplier diversity, and it is noted in Dollinger et al. (1991), Adobor and McMullen (2007), and Dozbaba (2000).

The role of top management is to motivate supplier diversity professionals, buyers, and purchasing managers to develop an environment that is viewed by minority suppliers and employees as supportive with a committed management team and adequate operational resources to support supplier diversity. Top management should communicate the importance of the programs, both verbally and through written policies, and confer a sense



of legitimacy on supplier diversity programs in bringing about new ideas, innovations, and accepting standards to support these initiatives. If purchasing management and employees accept supplier diversity as a legitimate strategy, their commitment to ensuring its success will increase. Additionally, employees tend to embrace or react positively to issues or strategies when they know that these issues or strategies are supported by senior management in the organization.

Top management should ensure the establishment of supplier diversity objectives, conduct management reviews, and ensure the availability of resources to develop, implement, and strengthen supplier diversity programs. Visibility of top management is also a critical success factor. They should participate in meetings with minority suppliers and attend supplier diversity conferences and meetings. Leadership by example will demonstrate organizational commitment and support for supplier diversity.

What emerges in the literature is that some information is required, as input to management, to garner their support and commitment and to keep them well abreast of issues and concerns that may surface. Supplier diversity professionals should be aware of these issues and work toward aligning supplier diversity initiatives with corporate initiatives. Also, taking ownership and responsibility for the program and fostering collaboration is a critical element for skills training of supplier diversity professionals.

Supplier diversity professionals should be able to assess the political landscape on issues that could potentially impact the organization when dealing with minority suppliers, and provide that information to management. Top management support is probably the most widely accepted and most critical element for developing a supplier diversity program.

*Buyer/supplier relationships.*

There is a multitude of issues in the research regarding the relationships between buyers and suppliers, and these issues have been the “subject of rigorous theory building and testing for many years” (Fynes & Voss, 2002, p. 589). The importance of managing buyer and supplier relationships is fundamental for continued organizational success, as well as the success of supplier diversity.

To put this issue in perspective, buyers are concerned with purchasing the right products at the right price, while suppliers are concerned with supplying the right products at a price that is profitable. The perceptions about these relationships vary widely among buyers and minority suppliers. The goal of this section, however, is to explore the issues which relate specifically to the need for skill requirements which exists in the relationships between minority suppliers and their corporate counterparts: buyers, purchasing managers, and supplier diversity professionals.

In a study by Pearson, Fawcett, and Cooper (1994), the authors examined the impediments and approaches to buyer/minority supplier relationships among Fortune 500 firms that have developed supplier diversity programs. A self-administered questionnaire was sent to 620 corporate purchasing managers and 135 minority suppliers. Follow-up interviews were also used to determine the applicability of the modified questionnaire. According to the study, the magnitude of the impediments that prevent successful relationships is underscored to a greater degree with minority suppliers than with buyers and purchasing managers. Minority suppliers feel they have more at stake in developing relationships with purchasing managers and buyers, and that these relationships offer considerable challenges to be successful.

Key findings in the study by Pearson et al. (1994) focused on corporate bureaucracy. The study revealed that minority suppliers feel that there are “hurdles inherent in doing business with large corporations which is a particularly pervasive problem” (p. 78). Working through the maze of corporate infrastructure causes disillusionment with the process. Minority suppliers view corporate purchasing programs as cumbersome and problematic to deal with. Supplier diversity professionals should be skilled at developing processes and procedures for supplier diversity and communicating these procedures to minority suppliers to make it easier to act on business opportunities.

Minority suppliers believe that buyers utilize minority suppliers to produce the desired statistics rather than to engage in meaningful relationships that will benefit the corporation and minority suppliers as well (Pearson et al., 1994). The study reveals that minority suppliers feel that large corporations lack commitment to supplier diversity and that the corporations “use such programs merely as a means of meeting government regulations and creating a favorable public image” (p. 78). This issue is highlighted in a study by Dollinger et al. (1991) who conducted research using a survey questionnaire from 169 minority suppliers and 746 corporate purchasing employees including buyers, purchasing managers, and other purchasing professionals. The study revealed that minority suppliers feel that there are “barriers that hamper opportunities to increase sales to the corporate community” (p. 10), and that the possibility of winning a contract was unlikely simply because “going through the motions” with buyers often “looks good on the buyer’s performance review” (p.11).

These issues suggest a potential lack of commitment with corporate supplier diversity programs. If these programs are to grow and flourish, there must be a committed

effort within the entire corporation, and this effort should begin with top management and filter down to all employees, particular those employees within the corporate supply chain. According to Varmazis (2006), “when suppliers sense that diversity is a priority, they respond accordingly” (p. 57).

Minority suppliers continue to argue that there is a lack of access to information about purchasing and bid opportunities (Dollinger et al., 1991). This is a major area of concern and this issue continues to surface in the research. In a study by Krause et al. (1999), the authors argue that smaller firms which are typically minority suppliers have “difficulty advertising their products to the customer firms and obtaining information about bidding for the customer’s business” (p. 37). This view is consistent with a study by Wallace (1999), which examined minority purchasing in the government arena. Although this study is limited to the public sector, it supports the importance of access to information for minority suppliers and emphasizes the lack of information regarding contract bids is the primary problem for minority businesses. The study was conducted utilizing a case study approach to examine minority purchasing as an efficient tool for minority economic development. The study underscores and is supported by Clay (2007) regarding how critical it is for minority businesses to have access to information and its direct impact on economic development in minority communities. According to Clay (2007), minority suppliers have direct knowledge of market demands in minority communities, which allows them the opportunity to provide targeted goods and services to minority communities. Minority firms are more likely to provide better services to their own communities than non-minority firms. Additionally, minority firms are a source of

employment through job creation and wealth, and these firms can impact the country's overall unemployment rate in many minority communities.

Access to information correlates directly with communication and building better relationships. Information-sharing is critical to operational efficiency. Communication is at the heart of every organization, whether information is given or received. The arguments presented in this section overwhelmingly point to the need for better communication between minority suppliers and their corporate counterparts. If minority suppliers are to succeed in this ever-changing corporate environment, the sharing of information has never been more important. Along with information-sharing, the findings in these studies present an opportunity to build better relationships between minority suppliers and supplier diversity professionals. In order to continuously escalate the intent of supplier diversity programs, it is important to create an environment that is open to sharing information and providing feedback.

All relationships are two-way and each party needs to do its part to make the relationship work, especially when the environment and culture are not open to dialogue. From a skills requirement perspective, supplier diversity professionals should be tasked with working to build better relationships with minority suppliers. As well, they should ensure that the lines of communication are open so that minority suppliers can become an integral part of the supply chain and realize some of the benefits derived from supplier diversity programs.

The issue of communication takes several forms in the literature. In Dozbaba (2000), the study states that "educating all departments about supplier diversity and its importance to the organization" (p. 1) is one of many areas that highlight communication

as a key skill set required in supplier diversity. Roth and Hernandez (2001) support Dozbaba (2000) in suggesting that communicating the goals and objectives of supplier diversity contributes to its success. He goes a step further and suggests that communication should be a process continuous with sharing minority business successes with the organization, and with developing a communication plan to ensure that the organization has a process in place for supplier referrals to the buying teams. Another factor associated with success in supplier diversity in the context of communication is noted by Duffy (2004). She stresses that the concepts of supplier diversity should be conveyed to employees in the organization so that they will be able to appreciate and embrace the concept.

In a discussion about minority businesses not being ready, Gravelly's (2003) call to "...improve the readiness of minority businesses and bridge the gap in relationships..." (p. 102) suggests that creating a basis for working with minority suppliers is critical if the goal is ultimately to include minority suppliers in the supply chain. This underscores the importance of building relationships as a key success factor and as a skills requirement for supplier diversity professionals.

Collaboration, another key factor, is defined as working together through team work or partnership to achieve a goal or an objective. The literature emphasizes the need for collaboration between minority suppliers and those with whom they interface in corporations. Malone (2007) defines collaboration as an effort by stakeholders to "recognize both the economic and social value of building stronger and more sustainable minority firms within minority communities," and argues that corporations "must collaborate to create the triangle of growth for minority firms with the right value

proposition” (p. 3). Although Morrissey and Pittaway (2004) use collaboration to define working relationships with minority suppliers, they stress that the manner in which it is defined in the purchasing literature is questionable. This assessment is based on how collaboration is defined by Quayle (2000). Quayle (as cited by Morrissey & Pittaway, 2004) defines collaboration as a concept embedded in corporate behavior which is aligned with maximizing profit. They suggest that more research is required to fully understand the specific motives beneath collaboration in procurement behaviors.

*Organizational and corporate culture.*

This section seeks to develop a framework for organizational and corporate culture in the context of the skills required for supplier diversity professionals. Those who have explored this area have presented numerous definitions of corporate culture. Some of the common elements offered by researchers to define culture include (1) shared meanings and understandings about the issues, objectives, and practices in organizations, (2) the cultural personality of the organization, and (3) the diverse views, held by employees, which may or may not align with the organization’s view of its own culture. According to Schein (1999) “culture matters...because decisions made without awareness of the operative cultural forces may have unanticipated and undesirable consequences” (p. 3). In an effort to direct or guide an organization’s culture in a particular direction, there “needs to be consistency” in these efforts by both internal and external stakeholders (McAfee, Glassman, and Honeycutt (2002, p. 546). Researchers and practitioners alike have noted the importance of corporate culture in implementing successful supplier diversity programs (Carter et al., 1999; Min, 1999). In essence, they have indicated that a corporate culture supportive of diversity in general is vital to successful supplier diversity programs.

One of the most significant contributions to understanding the cultural aspects and practice of supplier diversity is research conducted by Whitfield & Landeros (2006). This study examines the influence of organizational culture on supplier diversity effectiveness. To conduct the research, Whitfield utilized an instrument, the Organizational Culture for Diversity Inventory (OCDI), to measure shared and enduring behavior expectations within 12 business units for 112 buyers in a corporate manufacturing environment. The OCDI is a self-reporting-based attitude scale that has been used in more than 100 organizations to analyze issues of culture on a scale that measures 12 sets of cultural beliefs within organizations. The study compared the spending levels of individual business units with diverse suppliers to the overall spending levels with minority suppliers for the entire organization in three general types of culture: constructive, passive-defensive, and aggressive-defensive. These three cultural types indicate the manner in which buyers of an organization approach their work and interact with others. Key findings in this study suggest that constructive cultures, in which “members are encouraged to interact with others to meet higher-order satisfaction needs, are necessary for high spending levels with diverse suppliers... and are considered the most productive for diversity” (2006 p. 21). Further, Whitfield and Landeros (2006) argue that corporations that have a diverse culture will have effective supplier diversity programs. Organizational culture influences behaviors and, consequently, it impacts the way in which buyers interact with minority suppliers.

Dyer and Ross (2002) examined the relationships between ethnic minority businesses and their co-ethnic customers. A one-hour interview with each of the 33 black business owners was followed by a qualitative analysis of the findings. While the research



did not offer a definition of co-ethnic customers, an assumption is being made that this research explores the relationships between minorities as suppliers and minorities as customers. This study seeks descriptions of the types of interactions between minority business owners and their corporate customers as they marketed themselves, their products, and their services.

Three significant dimensions surfaced from this research: (1) the coincidental roles of minority business owners and co-ethnic individuals, (2) the flow of communications between co-ethnics, and (3) the symbolic aspects of ethnicity. Key findings suggest that the competitive advantages derived from ethnic ties are very often tempered by the strength of these ties being ethnic. Business opportunities face little competition from non-minority suppliers and customers who are often uninterested in ethnic needs for products and services. To support this assertion, a study by Waldinger, Aldrich, and Ward (1990) noted a Cuban-American business which attributed its success to providing personalized service to co-ethnic clients. Its entire operation was in Spanish and it served the Cuban community, thus demonstrating its inside knowledge of Latino needs and services.

Co-ethnic procurement is a feature of many minority businesses, although the scope of business growth and development offered by this niche strategy is limited (Dyer & Ross, 2002). The fact that minority suppliers fail to offer the range of business services and products required by major corporations is a circumstance which has emerged in the research (Pearson et al., 1994).

From a communications perspective, there appears to be more of an ease of communications between ethnic groups who speak the same language and who understand the same ethnic culture, thus breaking down common barriers to communication.

Although no research data from trade associations surfaced to support this phenomenon, it is certainly safe to assume that minority suppliers feel a greater chance of conducting business successfully when dealing with corporate buyers who are themselves minorities. Hiring more minority buyers will have a positive effect on workforce diversity in the supply chain and create an environment in which minority suppliers feel genuinely encouraged to engage in business relationships with minority suppliers. Additionally, a hiring policy to incorporate more diversity into the workforce will result in a supplier base that looks and operates more like the customers who are being served.

The issue of organizational or corporate culture linking to successful supplier diversity initiatives is underscored in several articles published on the subject of supplier diversity. According to Schwartz and Davis (1981), culture guides behaviors and provides a sense of direction in terms of what people should or should not do. Adobor and McMullen (2007) assert that “culture expresses a firm’s orientation not only to internal stakeholders but to outsiders, including its suppliers” (p. 223). Supplier diversity involves collaboration, and the norms of cooperation must be part of the corporate and organizational culture. In the study by Duffy (2004), the author argues that “encouraging and promoting culturally diverse practices can stem from supply management showing a firm’s excellence for social responsibility” (p. 19). Cultural practices in the supply chain will create an environment in which employees are committed to working with minority suppliers to generate ideas and new approaches to purchasing.

If supplier diversity professionals and buyers place emphasis on cultural practices which promote opportunities for minority suppliers, their behavior will become visible in the corporation’s bottom line. Promoting diversity in the supply chain must begin with top

management in the development of a clear vision for supplier diversity and a corporate culture that embraces supplier diversity. Top management must ensure that employees internalize this vision as being in the firm's best interest. This is an area that provides ample opportunities for skills development for supplier diversity professionals.

Giunipero (1981) identified a number of variables in the development of effective minority purchasing programs. The study surveyed 190 minority purchasing program coordinators in manufacturing corporations. The findings suggest that the keys to developing successful supplier diversity programs include (1) providing managerial and financial assistance to minority suppliers, (2) implementing programs in a constructive, programmatic manner so that successful programs would change with experience, (3) managing programs in such a way that they result in larger programs experiencing higher spending levels, and (4) utilizing a price differential with corporations that already have an active program to develop relationships with more minority vendors (p. 33). These variables are consistent with the vast majority of research that provides effective development and implementation techniques for supplier diversity programs. Effective program management of supplier diversity will ultimately result in demonstrating a corporation's commitment to social responsibility. Supplier diversity professionals should be skilled in project/program management techniques to effectively carry out the goals and objectives of supplier diversity programs.

Singleton (1995) undertook a case study of the conflicting expectations for corporations and minority suppliers who are members of the National Minority Supplier Development Council. The research revealed that minority businesses believe that corporate members lack commitment to supplier diversity, and that they continue to suffer

discrimination because they are expected to meet higher performance standards than their non-minority counterparts. Conversely, corporate members believe that they are highly committed to minority business development and that minority firms expect too much, often lack professional skills, and are unfamiliar with corporate culture. This is a debate that will probably continue until corporations bridge the cultural divide with minority suppliers. Demonstrating sensitivity to cultural issues provides opportunities for skills development of supplier diversity professionals.

The issues surrounding the perception of discrimination by minority suppliers suggest that some corporations behave in a manner that is detrimental to the success of supplier diversity. In other words, the cultural orientation of the supply chain in some corporations continues to be an issue. This is highlighted in several studies that reflect the sentiments of minority suppliers who believe that buyers continue to rely on the “old boy” networks for suppliers (Bates, 2001; Krause et al., 1999; Shah & Ram, 2006). The “old boy” network reflects the desire of buyers and managers in organizations who utilize non-minority suppliers based on long-standing relationships, and makes it difficult for minority suppliers to get purchasing opportunities and break into new markets. This impediment to supplier diversity continues to exist in some corporations today, and in all likelihood will continue until buyers, supplier diversity professionals, and purchasing managers begin to embrace diversity in the supply chain, understand the benefits derived from supplier diversity, and place emphasis on strong communication, collaboration, and relationship-building with minority suppliers.

*Training and development.*

The goal of this section is to review the literature to ascertain what has been written about training and development requirements for supplier diversity. The vast majority of the literature offers training as a key to the successful management and implementation of supplier diversity. However, the literature is limited to behaviors and characteristics that make the success of these programs possible, and is also limited in terms of identifying key skills for success. This examination will contribute to the need to identify skills that are reflective of the dynamic and interactive nature of individuals who manage and implement supplier diversity programs.

Teague and Hannon (2005) observe that while the goals of supplier diversity are different and sometimes appear to be in conflict, they share the ultimate objective of “delivering value” to the corporation (p. 55). Supplier diversity seeks to expand the supply base with minority suppliers, while purchasing is tasked with reducing the number of suppliers in the supply chain. If the goals of two organizational entities are different, it would stand to reason that the skill set for these two entities would also be different. While there may be some overlapping skills required, supplier diversity is a unique entity within the supply chain and requires specialized skills for dealing with minority suppliers.

According to Williams (1997),

training must be focused on the following specific areas: (1) sourcing to identify, pre-qualify and utilize minority business sources; (2) interpersonal skills to understand and address behavior obstacles; (3) practice and procedures to identify the paperwork and documentation and tactical requirements to track and ensure minority business utilization, and (4) legal and regulatory issues to ensure the avoidance of regulatory compliance issues involving government regulations. (p. 5)

Williams (1997) also noted team-building with prime suppliers and creating relationships with strategic partners as major training requirements.

Throughout the discussions about barriers, impediments, challenges, and opportunities for supplier diversity, the literature consistently notes that building relationships, fostering communication in the form of information access for minority suppliers, and two-way communication are all critical to managing and implementing supplier diversity (Dollinger et al., 1991; Duffy, 2004; Fernandez, 2006; Krause et al., 1999; Pearson et al., 1994; Ram & Smallbone, 2003; Varmazis, 2006; Wallace, 1999; Yuva, 2003). Significant data support the need for communication and relationship-building. The need for continuous communication between minority suppliers and supplier diversity professionals is a critical element noted and supported throughout the literature.

Roth and Hernandez (2001) provide various approaches to communication for supplier diversity. They stress that “communication needs to be on-going by sharing success stories in a particular commodity area, noting an internal best practice, providing industry-specific business case data on customer diversity and reporting on the success of a second tier program” (p. 8). In this study, the authors emphasize the impact of e-commerce on the skill sets for supply management staff and supplier diversity programs, and encourage skills development by using the internet for a host of applications that involve minority suppliers.

Training for supplier diversity is also supported by Carter et al. (1999), who present key success factors for purchasing from minority businesses. One of the factors that significantly impacts successful supplier diversity programs is training which will assist employees in meeting their goals and in particular, demonstrate that management is committed to supplier diversity by dedicating the time, cost and resources necessary to achieve the program’s goals. The literature does not identify specific skills required for

supplier diversity professionals, although the implication is that there is a need for training in many different areas.

Much of the previous research has focused on educational preparedness through training and development. The peer-reviewed literature is sparse in this area and does not provide adequate data on specific skill requirements for supplier diversity professionals.

The recent increase and focus on supplier diversity has placed greater emphasis on codifying the ideal skill set required for excellence in supplier diversity. Given the new strategic goals and objectives of supplier diversity in corporations today, it is vital that corporations employ the right people with the right skill set necessary to maximize the efforts of supplier diversity. If the skills for success in supplier diversity are not identified, corporations will continue to rely on purchasing skills for managers, buyers, and those whose work functions are in workforce diversity to manage supplier diversity initiatives.

The focus point of the literature presented on supplier diversity specifically highlights the strategies necessary to combat the barriers and impediments which prevent supplier diversity success. Also, the literature represents an exhaustive list of behaviors and characteristics that contribute to program success; it has focused on the need for training to address these behaviors and characteristics, but has not identified specific skill requirements. While a few studies have highlighted a limited number of skills associated with supplier diversity success, the list does not extend far beyond communication, collaboration, and relationship-building skills. With the exception of these three skills, the literature avoids outlining a basic skill set for supplier diversity professionals. There are, however, other skills that must be acknowledged and incorporated into supplier diversity for excellence in this practice. Training strategies have been derived from the literature that

exists and are based on the conditions and settings that prevail, the directions and goals of supplier diversity programs, and barriers and impediments to supplier diversity. These training strategies must be translated to a set of skill requirements in order for supplier diversity professionals to be successful in their performance.

This research project is an opportunity to expand the training theories and strategies suggested by researchers, practitioners, and professional organizations. Until this point, this area has had limited exposure. The need is clear and compelling.

### *Summary*

Supplier diversity is a domain of inquiry that provides enormous opportunities for minority suppliers. As the minority population in the United States continues to grow, shifting the country's demographic makeup to a significant increase in minority-owned businesses, there will be substantial opportunities to tap into the needs of the minority business community. These opportunities will help to stabilize our economy by creating new jobs, developing innovative products, and introducing new business practices and services to the market. Corporations that publicly proclaim their desire to be a positive force in minority communities will also be more likely to incorporate minority firms into their supply chain.

Supplier diversity endeavors to increase the number of minority firms that supply goods and services to U.S. corporations. The practice of supplier diversity is gaining traction not just in the United States, but in corporations around the globe. Increasingly, corporations are concluding that in addition to being the right thing to do from a social responsibility perspective; supplier diversity can also make good business sense.



World-class corporations that understand and have internalized the value of supplier diversity will look beyond the numbers and position their supplier diversity programs to advance the corporate strategic agenda. More and more corporations have embraced the concept as an economic development strategy that is no longer tied to good corporate citizenship or social responsibility, but is simply a critical business imperative.

The intent of this dissertation is to lay the foundation for the importance of identifying the required professional skills for supplier diversity practitioners and to frame a discussion of supplier diversity within the context of a practice with significant promise of being viewed as a profession. According to Dean (1995, p. 3), “a profession is built upon special skills and knowledge that are developed through long, continuous training in order to serve clients effectively.” A profession is characterized by the power and high prestige it has in society. It is this power, prestige, and value that society confers upon a profession that more clearly defines an occupation. Supplier diversity professionals have developed skills and knowledge; however, a core set of education and training requirements in the context of skills identification for supplier diversity professionals has yet to be defined.

Empirical peer-reviewed research in supplier diversity is limited primarily because of its new entry into the corporate business environment. Despite efforts by trade associations and practitioners in the field and earlier government mandates, corporations are slowly moving toward entry into this discipline. Although the bulk of the limited empirical data focuses primarily on the benefits of supplier diversity, corporations are slowly beginning to conceptualize and embrace supplier diversity as a sustainable business

model and, most importantly, as a practice that has the potential and promise of becoming an elite branch of the professions.

There appears to be a large gap between the theory and practical applications of supplier diversity, which is evident by the disproportionate amount of literature from trade associations as compared to the empirical research data. This is a domain of inquiry which is starving for scholarly attention and empirical research. Although the limited research that does exist represents a variety of research approaches, a very small number of research articles can empirically stand the test of a researchable approach. In many instances, articles were written with literally no data to substantiate their claims, and many of the articles appear to be lacking adequate test applications and methods. However, those articles do provide a plethora of information on supplier diversity. It is difficult to ascertain whether the approaches presented in this review represent a consideration of knowledge claims without questioning the full impact and scope of approaches and methods presented. However, many of the findings and claim assertions in this review have been validated. For instance, top management support and communication in supplier diversity is certainly a critical factor that contributes to the success of the practice. As well, cultivating relationships between corporate buyers and minority suppliers is an essential element of supplier diversity. Lastly, firms that are grounded in a culture that promotes workforce diversity are likely to be successful in promoting and developing supplier diversity initiatives.

As interest in supplier diversity increases, it brings with it an opportunity to increase the amount of scholarly research on the subject, bridge the gap between theory and practice, and move toward the recognition owed to a legitimate profession based on its

contribution to society. Today's business environment has created the need and demand for a skill set required for excellence in the professional practice of supplier diversity.

Identifying a required set of professional skills and knowledge is important if supplier diversity is to achieve professionalism, growth, and influence in the private sector.

The underlying logic, drivers, and benefits of supplier diversity require close attention as corporations begins to embrace issues related to supply-chain diversification. Both academics and practitioners agree that efficient and effective supplier diversity management can lead to sustainable competitive advantages and gain substantial business results for corporations. These competitive advantages and business results will be achieved because of the growing demographic trends in the minority population and economic development in minority communities.

The application of research in this field suggests that relative to the limited amount of empirical literature available, supplier diversity is a continuously evolving field of study and researchers are constantly looking at various approaches and aspects of supplier diversity to "understand how a proposed study adds to, or extends prior research" (Creswell, 2003, p. 1). Whitfield (2003) suggests that continued growth in the minority population in the coming years will likely keep the interest in supplier diversity high, thus creating opportunities for further research in this area.

### Chapter III: Research Methodology

The primary purpose of this research is to apply the Delphi research methodology to gain consensus about the required professional skills and knowledge for supplier diversity practitioners. This section includes the selection of and justification for using the Delphi method approach, the selection of participants and panel size, the survey instruments, and the data collection process for this research study.

There are several advantages in utilizing the Delphi method for this research study: (1) providing a framework by which a group of individuals with a lack of propinquity can work together, (2) eliminating the psychological factor of face-to-face meetings to gather data, (3) providing documentation using simple statistical analysis, (4) eliminating the opportunity for some participations to persuade others owing to their position or status, and (5) minimal cost.

#### *Selection of and Justification for Using Delphi*

The Delphi method has been defined as a method for structuring a group communication process so that the process is effective in allowing a group of individuals to deal with a complex problem (Linstone & Turoff, 1975). This method will be used to determine the required professional skills and knowledge for successful performance of supplier diversity practitioners. It is one of several research methods employed to make estimates or predict future human behaviors or human conditions. The Delphi method creates a well-defined process for research in this area, and it can be described and applied quantitatively, as well as qualitatively. In this case, because statistical analysis will be developed, a quantitative approach will be utilized to gain consensus about the professional skills for supplier diversity practitioners.

The Delphi method includes the use of a panel of experts to obtain data, the use of questionnaires and/or interviews, the emergence of judgments or opinions, anonymity of the participants' responses and the use of iterations of responses by rounds in the collection of data which are summarized. The results of the previous rounds are communicated to and evaluated by the participants (French et al., 2002).

In order to determine the value of Delphi for this research, Fisher (1978) was consulted. He suggests that an in-depth understanding and review of the method is required as well as a review of some typical Delphi studies. A thorough review of literature on the Delphi method satisfied the above-mentioned criteria.

In studies where the goal is to identify skills and knowledge, the use of Delphi improves the validity of the research because of its relevance to those whom the skills effectiveness will potentially impact. Caves (1988) stated that "when consensus is achieved, there is evidence of concurrent validity because the experts themselves have both identified and agreed to the skills findings" (p. 199). This dissertation will include experts who are professionals in supplier diversity, and who have the expertise and requisite knowledge of the field of supplier diversity. Because this research dissertation will follow the typical protocol of eliciting feedback from experts in the field of supplier diversity, validity is assumed.

The Delphi method is a practicable and worthwhile research method with broad applications which are substantiated by the number of studies conducted using it and the range of questions to which it has been applied. The Delphi research method is a flexible research process and has been successfully used to explore new concepts in the business community as well as in many industry sectors including education, defense, health care,

information technology, engineering, and transportation. For these reasons the Delphi method was chosen for this research study, which seeks to identify the required professional skills and knowledge for supplier diversity practitioners.

The Delphi method is a repetitive process (Landeta, 2005, p. 469); the objective is to obtain a reliable response to a problem or question from a group of experts. This is accomplished by giving experts in the group a series of questionnaires that reiterate the same questions while providing feedback to the group of experts from previous rounds (Helmer, 1983, p. 135) until consensus is reached. This research study is structured as a repetitive process which will include obtaining the responses of supplier diversity professionals over three iterative rounds that reiterate the same question to reach consensus.

The Delphi technique produces convergence of opinion among the participants. The issue of convergence is discussed by Dagenais (1978) who states that while convergence does occur, there is no way to “ensure that the responses will converge on the correct answer” (p. 308). While convergence of opinion will usually occur during the final round of Delphi, there doesn’t appear to be a firm rule for establishing when consensus is reached. While there has been much debate about what constitutes consensus in a Delphi study, a number of studies leave the interpretation of consensus to the discretion of the reader (Bond & Bond, 1982; Gabbay & Francis, 1988; Gibson, 1998; Lindeman, 1975). However, some authors believe that consensus is set at different levels using different measurements such as percentages (Orton, 1981), median and mean scores (Mead, 1993), and standard deviations. For the purpose of this research, consensus was achieved for the skills and knowledge dimensions that received a standard deviation of less than 1.0.

A primary reason for the continued popularity of the Delphi method is its unique strengths in planning and forecasting as a decision-making tool. As a learning and data-gathering exercise, the Delphi method adopts the philosophy that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts by facilitating group decision-making and teamwork. Delphi also promotes independent thinking (Gutierrez, 1989) as opposed to the responses being influenced by other participants since one of the most significant strengths of Delphi is anonymity of the participants with no face-to-face contact.

The quality of the participants is an important consideration when undertaking a Delphi study (Green et al., 1999). Dawson and Brucker (2001) agree that “one of the most important considerations when carrying out a Delphi study is selecting the panel of experts” (p. 127). According to Delbecq, Van de Ven, and Gustafson (1975), potential participants should meet the following four criteria:

1. Is personally involved in the problem of concern,
  2. Have important information to share,
  3. Be motivated enough to include the Delphi task in their schedule of competing tasks, and
  4. Feel that judgments or opinions of the panelists will include information which they will value that they otherwise would not have access too
- (p. 87-88).

While use of a panel of experts is what distinguishes the Delphi technique from other forms of survey research, selection of participants is an important issue (Clayton, 1997; Hasson, Keeney, & McKenna, 2000; Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004). Hasson et al. (2000) suggest that there is considerable debate with regard to the term “expert” and

recommend adequate identification and definition of the expert role. Okoli and Pawlowski (2004) caution about neglecting this aspect of the method as it is critical to the reliability of the results. Clayton (1997) contends that the selection process for Delphi panel members is critical to its validity and its superiority over other, less rigorous, survey procedures. With the goal being the adoption of results by those who will ultimately use the data, a less rigorous panel-selection process could compromise the goal of this research study. It is for this reason that experts should be selected for their familiarity with the topic under consideration and the information they bring to the study (Riggs, 1983). They should be experts in the field being studied (Jenkins & Smith, 1994). The participants in this study are experts in supplier diversity.

Goldschmidt (1975), in Adler and Ziglio (1996), contends that designers of Delphi research must ensure that expert responses are more meaningful than if just anyone completed the questionnaire. Selection criteria must be explicit, with expertise, defined as knowledge and practical experience in the subject matter, being a primary consideration (Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004). Achieving a level of “representativeness” is the aim of panel selection and the use of criterion sampling would assist in providing this representativeness (Clayton, 1997). Typically, “experts” are selected to participate in the panel through a purposeful sampling process or criterion sampling.

Supplier diversity is a new and emerging field. Because the research that does exist is very sparse, the Delphi method provides an excellent opportunity to seek expert opinions on professional skills and knowledge for supplier diversity practitioners while contributing to the body of knowledge in this field.



### *Selection of Participants*

The participants for this study are individuals who work in the field of supplier diversity and are considered to be supplier diversity experts. The following criteria formed the basis for panel selection. Expert panelists must:

1. Have more knowledge about supplier diversity than most people and possess certain work experiences in the field of supplier diversity,
2. Be regarded by their peers as an expert in the field,
3. Hold or have held a position specifically in supplier diversity,
4. Work at least 75% of the time in the field of supplier diversity,
5. Have a minimum of five years of experience specifically in supplier diversity, and
6. Be ethical and professionally responsible.

For the purpose of this research, the participants were selected based on my knowledge of experts in the field of supplier diversity. Because random selection of experts is not recommended or even acceptable when performing a Delphi study (Ludwig, 1997), I utilized on-line resources of the National Minority Supplier Development Council (NMSDC) for supplier diversity practitioners identification and contacts.

The NMSDC is the premier professional trade association which represents corporations and minority suppliers. With a membership of 3,500 corporations and more than 15,000 minority suppliers, the NMSDC provides a direct link between corporate America and minority businesses to increase procurement and business opportunities. The NMSDC network includes a national office in New York City and 39 regional councils located in large urban cities across the country. Every year, each of the 39 regional

councils selects a “Corporation of the Year” based on the amount of procurement dollars spent with minority suppliers, exemplary performance in supplier diversity, exceptional leadership qualities and commitment to supplier diversity. A list of the 39 corporations who received this award in 2007 was compiled along with the supplier diversity contact person in each of these corporations. A letter requesting panel nominations was sent to the supplier diversity contact person in each of the 39 corporations requesting that they identify a person in their organization who they regarded as an expert in supplier diversity to participate in this study based on the criteria outlined above. Appendix A is a copy of the letter sent to the supplier diversity contact person. Responses to the letter provided a list of 24 potential nominees who might be willing to participate in the study. Each of the nominees was sent an invitation to participate. The correspondence advised the nominees of the proposed study, its purpose, and the criteria for selecting a panel of experts. Appendix B is a copy of the letter of invitation to potential panel members. Accompanying each letter was a participant consent form (Appendix C) and a participant data profile sheet (Appendix D).

Of the 24 nominees who received an invitation to participate as an expert panelist, 14 participants accepted the obligation to participate in this study. Ten invitees declined to participate for a variety of reasons. The most widely held reason for non-participation was the current state of the economy. A number of invitees responded that their corporation was only participating in activities that would generate revenue. This position is consistent with staggering profit losses, plant closings, and downsizing, and is a sign of the dwindling economy that many corporations are faced with today. A large number of corporations

have cut internal organizational budgets and are reluctant to engage in business activities that do not generate revenue.

### *Panel Size*

The Delphi study panel sizes vary depending on the study. Adler and Ziglio (1996) contend that panel sizes as low as 10 to 15 participants can yield solid results while Delbecq et al. (1975) suggest that the group size of the panel can vary from 10 to 30 people, depending upon the background of the experts and the nature of the subject being explored. One consideration with regard to the size of the panel is that the larger the participant pool size, the greater the opportunity for generation of data, which requires that the researcher maintain vigilance in the handling of the data and can make summarizing the information difficult (Ludwig, 1997; Moore, 1987). According to Reid (1988), the largest Delphi study participant pool ranged from 10 to 1685. A review of literature indicated that panel size can ideally be as few as seven (Dalkey & Helmer, 1963) and as many as 450 (Cyphert & Gant, 1970).

For this study, 14 panel experts were invited to participate in this research. The panel size was chosen because it allows for participant dropout while remaining large enough to allow for solid research results.

### *Profile of the Expert Panel*

Profiles of the panel experts were collected to identify the degree of expertise within the group. The profile included the following: (1) job title, (2) total years of service in supplier diversity, and (3) total percentage of supplier diversity workload. The instrument for collecting the participants' profile data is attached as Appendix D.

### *The Delphi Process*

The Delphi process for this study began with a clear statement of purpose and a researchable question to direct and guide the investigation. An outline of the process, with timelines, was developed for my personal use to track and record activity steps to complete this research. A cover letter was sent to potential panelists that included the purpose of the study, a definition of the Delphi method, expectations of the panelists, a request for profile data, and an informed consent agreement. This information was packaged and forwarded to the expert panelists. The criteria used in the selection of panel experts were also included.

The process consisted of three rounds of iterative open-ended questions over a seven week period to gain consensus on the required professional skills and knowledge for supplier diversity practitioners. This open-ended style was considered suitable as it provided minimal direction to the participants.

The data were collected via SurveyMonkey, a web based online survey for rounds two and three, and a customized survey instrument developed in Microsoft Word for round three. The website for SurveyMonkey is <http://surveymonkey.com>. The participants were sent the web link to access SurveyMonkey with detailed instructions to complete and submit the survey. Specific instruments were included in the survey questionnaire sent to the participants via MicroSoft Word.

### *The Delphi Rounds*

The round one questionnaire was developed and sent to the expert panelists. The questionnaire included the findings from the pilot study which formed the basis for skills and knowledge identification. See Chapter IV for pilot findings. The panelists were instructed to review the data elements of the pilot findings, and list ten professional skills

and knowledge that the experts believe are requirements for professionals in the field of supplier diversity. The participants were also instructed to include professional skills and knowledge not listed in the round one survey questionnaire. Appendix E is a copy of the round one survey instrument.

From round one, 140 data elements were amassed into 39 competencies. This information was analyzed and condensed into non-redundant or overlapping items.

Follow-up email reminders were sent to all participants as encouragement to complete the survey as per the timeline established.

In round two, the participants were instructed to rate each of the 39 competencies according to a five-point priority-of-importance scale and provide their opinion on the level of priority for each item. The rating scale used to evaluate round two was:

- 5 - Essential
- 4 - Very Important
- 3 - Moderately Important
- 2 - Somewhat Important
- 1 - Of Little Importance

Follow-up email reminders were sent to the participants as encouragement to complete the survey as per the timeline established. Appendix F is a copy of the survey instrument used in round two.

The intent of round three was to define consensus by allowing for a second opinion, and comments as to why the participants either agreed or rejected the majority opinion. The mean scores for each item collected, together with the individual panelists' mean score for each item in round two was used to develop the instrument for the round three

questionnaire. The questionnaire was returned to the panel members and they were instructed to re-rank each of the data elements in light of the statistical mean score provided for each of the skills listed, in comparison to their own mean score. They were instructed to use the same rating scale they utilized in round two by compare their mean score with the overall mean score of all of the participants for each skills element.

Follow-up email reminders were again sent to all participants as encouragement to complete the survey as per the timeline established.

The data from round three were analyzed and a core list of skills was determined and compiled from the participants' response, which included the final mean score and a standard deviation for each of the skills and knowledge. Because SurveyMonkey would not accommodate the survey design for round 3, a customized survey questionnaire was developed utilizing Microsoft Word. Appendix G is a copy of the survey instrument used in round three.

### *Delphi Management*

There are a number of management issues to be aware of when employing the Delphi method. Many process and procedural considerations were made, e.g., the instructions to the panelists, the wording of the questions, and the number of questions used in the survey questionnaire. Management issues are particularly important in Delphi studies because they are often overlooked by the inexperienced researcher (Keeney et al., 2006). These questions must be taken into consideration and appropriately managed so as not to impact the responses of the panelists (Jenkins & Smith, 1994; Scheele, 1975; Ziglio, 1996). The implementation of the process according to the prescribed format is very important to the success of a Delphi study.

For this research study, I took special care in managing the timelines. The length of time a study will take can be difficult to anticipate and is often underestimated. Keeney, Hasson and McKenna (2006) stated that a Delphi study could take anywhere from four months to 16 months. Delbecq et al. (1975) estimated that the average Delphi study could potentially take from 45 days to six months, while Skulmoski et al. (2007) stated that “quick turnaround times help to keep enthusiasm alive and participation high” (p. 11). McKenna (1994) commented that a higher response rate can be achieved by using a personal touch with the participants. As such, during this study, I inquired about anything that I can do to assist in the process. Also, email reminders were sent to the participants about the importance of the turnaround time.

Some of the above-mentioned management issues surfaced during the Delphi pilot study. Chapter IV highlights some of the management issues.

#### *Research Procedures*

The Antioch Institutional Review Board (IRB) application was completed, submitted and approved. A copy of the IRB application has been inserted in this dissertation as Appendix H.

## Chapter IV: Delphi Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to improve comprehension of the Delphi method and work through procedural problems and issues that could potentially surfaced in the development of dissertation research. The research pilot was also an opportunity to test and make adjustments to the Delphi process that was used to gain consensus about the required professional skills and knowledge for supplier diversity professionals.

The pilot study was administered using Microsoft Word. The survey instruments were developed and forwarded to the survey participants. Three rounds of iterative open-ended questions were sent to the pilot participants. The results were analyzed and the findings were shared with the participants.

### *Selection of Participants*

The participants for this pilot study were individuals who work in the field of supplier diversity and are considered to be supplier diversity experts. The first stage in the formulation of a Delphi study is the selection of an expert panel. The experts in a Delphi study should possess knowledge and expertise in the area of study being considered. For the purpose of this pilot, the participants were randomly selected based on the research's knowledge of experts in the field of supplier diversity having held several positions herself in this field. However, random selection of experts is not recommended and acceptable in performing a Delphi study because it does not always guarantee expertise of participants.

The following criteria formed the basis for panel selection. Expert panelist for this pilot must:

1. Have more knowledge about supplier diversity than most people and possess certain work experiences in the field of supplier diversity,



2. Be regarded by their peers as an expert in the field,
3. Hold or have held a position specifically in supplier diversity,
4. Work at least 75% of their time in the field of supplier diversity,
5. Have a minimum of five years of experience specifically in supplier diversity,
6. Be ethical and professionally responsible.

### *Panel Size*

Because this is a preliminary pilot investigation, a small number of participant's was deemed appropriate to determine a meaningful outcome. Therefore, a panel of seven experts was selected to participate in this pilot study. The panel size of seven participants fits within the guidelines recommended for a Delphi study.

### *Profile of the Expert Panel*

A profile of the seven panel experts was developed to identify the degree of expertise within the group. An analysis was prepared summarizing job titles, total years of experience in supplier diversity, and the percentage of supplier diversity workload for each participant. Table 4.1 shows a summary of the profile of the panelist for the pilot study.

Table 4.1

### *Summary of the Participants Profile in the Pilot Study*

Expert Panelist	Job Title	Total Years of Service	Total % of SD Workload
#1	Manager, Supplier Development	16	100%
#2	Director, Supplier Diversity	5	100%
#3	Manager, Supplier Diversity	16	100%
#4	Supplier Diversity Manager	19	100%
#5	Director, Supplier Diversity	7	100%
#6	Supplier Diversity Coordinator	11	100%
#7	Manager, Minority Business Development	8	100%

An analysis of the summary above indicated the following:

- A. Supplier diversity professionals hold a variety of job titles and are responsible for wide range or job functions within the domain of supplier diversity.
- B. The expert panelist represents an average of 12 years of service specifically in supplier diversity.
- C. The expert panelist spends 100% of their time working in the field of supplier diversity.

### *Delphi Pilot Process*

The Delphi pilot process began with a clear statement of purpose and a research question to direct and guide the research pilot study. An outline of the process with timelines was developed. The process consisted of a cover letter to potential panelists which included the purpose of the pilot, a definition of the Delphi method, a detailed review of the pilot process, what was expected of the panelists, a request for profile data, and a participants consent form. The criteria used in the selection of panel experts were also included.

The pilot process consisted of three rounds of iterative open-ended questions over a five month period to gain consensus about the required professional skills for supplier diversity professionals. This open-ended style was considered suitable as it provided minimal direction to the participants.

#### *Round 1.*

The round one questionnaire was developed and sent to the expert panelists. The panelists were instructed to list ten professional skills and knowledge that they felt were

required for professionals in the field of supplier diversity. To facilitate and stimulate their thoughts on the topic, they were asked to consider the following:

1. The criteria used for the selection of the expert panelist,
2. The basic job responsibilities that are performed on a regular basis and are repeated daily, weekly, monthly, and/or annually in accordance with the role or work activities carried out by a supplier diversity professional, and
3. The definition of professional skills and knowledge as those competencies which are required to perform one's job function.

An email was sent to the participants requesting that they access SurveyMonkey, an online survey tool, to complete the survey. None of the participants were able to access the questionnaire via SurveyMonkey because of the researcher's lack of knowledge about how to operate the survey tool. To facilitate completion of the pilot study, given the time considerations, the survey questionnaire was sent to the participants via Microsoft Word.

A total of 70 professional skills and knowledge were collected from round one. The data were analyzed and condensed into non-redundant and non-overlapping items that formed the basis for the development of the round two instrument. Thirty-nine competencies were identified. It was considered that these 39 skills and knowledge would be used as the basis for establishing priorities by the panel of experts selected for this pilot study.

Follow-up email reminders were sent to all participants. One hundred percent of the panel members completed round one.

*Round 2.*

The goal of round two was to rate each of the 39 competencies on a five-point priority of importance scale. The participants were instructed to rate each of the 39 items according to a five-point priority of importance rating scale and provide their opinion on the level of priority for each item. The round two rating scale was as follows:

4.50 – 5.00	Essential
3.50 – 4.49	Very Important
2.50 – 3.49	Moderately Important
1.50 – 2.49	Somewhat Important
1.00 – 1.49	Of Little Importance

The pilot identified 39 data elements which represent professional skills and knowledge required for supplier diversity professionals. Using the above scale to analyze the round two questionnaires for the pilot study, the following are the priority ratings for the 39 competencies in round two.

Table 4.2

*Summary of Priority Ratings in Pilot Study for Round 2*

Priority Ratings	# of Items	% of Total
Essential	3	7.69%
Very Important	31	79.48%
Moderately Important	5	12.82%
Somewhat Important	0	0.00%
Of Little Importance	0	0.00%
Total	39	100.00%

A total of 32 data elements or 87.17% of the professional skills and knowledge were rated “essential” and “very important.” Skills and knowledge in the “moderately important” range accounted for 12.83% of the data elements. There were no data elements identified in the “somewhat important” and “of little importance” categories. The response rate for round two was 100%.

### *Round 3.*

The intent of round three was to define consensus and allow for a second opinion. The mean score for each of items together with the individual panelist’s score for each item in round two was used to develop the instrument for the round three questionnaire. The questionnaire was returned to the seven panel members and they were asked to re-rate each of the 39 competencies in light of the statistical mean score provided. The panelists were advised that they could change the score that they had previously assigned to the items in round two if they wished. They were instructed to use the same rating scale they utilized in round two. They were also asked to comment about why they either rejected or accepted the majority opinions. Email reminders were sent to the panelist in round three; and 71% of the participants responded to the round three questionnaire. None of the seven participants changed their rating scores in round three. The following table 4.3 highlights those data elements which were rated “essential”, “very important” and “moderately important.”

Table 4.3

*Summary of Skills and Knowledge in each Priority Rating Scale in the Pilot Study for Round 3*

Item #	Essential Skills/Knowledge Dimensions	Mean Score
1	Inspire Trust, Honesty & Behave Ethically	5.00
2	Report Business Performance	4.71
3	Networking Skills	4.57

  

Item #	Very Important Skills/Knowledge Dimensions	Mean Score
4	Organization Skills	4.42
5	Alignment of Corporate Initiatives w/SD	4.42
6	Results Oriented/Drive for Results	4.42
7	Time Management	4.42
8	Establish Plans	4.42
9	Build Relationships	4.42
10	Lead Courageously	4.42
11	Demonstrate Passion for Work	4.42
12	Professional Industry Experience	4.28
13	Strategic Planning and Thinking	4.28
14	Speak with Impact	4.28
15	Write Effectively	4.28
16	Take Ownership and Responsibility	4.28
17	Leverage Individual & Cultural Diversity	4.28
18	Listen to Others	4.14
19	Analytical Skills	4.14
20	Problem Solving Skills	4.14
21	Influence Others	4.14
22	Manage Conflict	4.14
23	Use Sound Judgment	4.14
24	Engage and Inspire People	4.14
25	Use Key Financial Performance Indicators	4.00
26	Understand and Plan Group Resources	4.00
27	Business Skills	3.85
28	Facilitation Skills	3.85
29	Management Skills	3.71

Item #	Very Important Skills/Knowledge Dimensions	Mean Score
30	Contract Negotiation Skills	3.71
31	Purchasing Skills	3.71
32	Computing/Technical Skills	3.71
33	Manage and Champion Change and Transition	3.57
34	Manage Learning and Self Development	3.57
Item #	Moderately Important Skills Dimensions	Mean Score
35	Manage and Improve Processes	3.42
36	Delegation Skills	3.42
37	Foster Collaboration	3.42
38	Coach, Train and Develop People	3.42
39	Build Talent Pool	3.00

### *Pilot Analysis and Findings*

The intent of this pilot study was to provide a sound basis for analysis from which future and more detailed studies regarding professional skills and knowledge requirements for supplier diversity practitioners could be planned and completed. Participants in the pilot provided feedback suggesting that a skills inventory would have been helpful to stimulate their thinking about the skill requirements, and that it would have been easier to select skills from an inventory, if such a list had been included.

Before the implementation process begins for this research study, it is mandatory to become intimately familiar and comfortable with all phases of the Delphi design process and make decisions early in the process about how data will be collected. In the pilot, I started the process with little knowledge of SurveyMonkey. As a result of the lack of knowledge about this online survey tool, the implementation process was aborted; and an email process was initiated to complete the pilot. It is critical that the data collection tool be thoroughly examined and intimately understood before the dissertation research begins.

A tremendous amount of time was lost with the implementation of SurveyMonkey because of the lack of operating knowledge about the tool. As a result, feedback from some participants in the pilot revealed that they became discouraged and loss interest after an attempt to use SurveyMonkey failed.

As a supplier diversity practitioner, I should be cognizant of the risk of becoming personally involved in this quantitative research. Researchers using Delphi should always remain objective (Rauch, 1979). I will resist the tendency and desire to become involved, which stems from my background, skills, and knowledge of supplier diversity, so that the data will not be compromised. Interjecting my opinions or being biased could potential influence the way in which some experts might respond to the survey or inhibit some practitioners from being confident in their responses. I will guard again this temptation by being cognizant of the impact that my opinion could potentially have on some practitioners and view this as an ethical violation to the Delphi process and the research study.

### *Summary*

The findings and research for the pilot provide sufficient evidence to support undertaking a Delphi research study to identify the required professional skills for supplier diversity professionals. While there are many advantages and well as disadvantages to utilizing the Delphi method, the research suggests that the use of Delphi methodology is a valid instrument for the identification of competencies and supports decision-making. The Delphi method, as suggested in this pilot study, clearly demonstrates its value and use not as a method for predicting the future, but as a method for polling experts in the field of



supplier diversity to determine the required professional skills and knowledge for supplier diversity practitioners. Research utilizing the Delphi method will add to the body of knowledge and research in the field of supplier diversity.

## Chapter V: Data Analysis and Research Findings

The purpose of this study was to gain consensus about the professional skills and knowledge required for supplier diversity practitioners. While achieving group consensus on most issues is difficult, in the case of this study, group consensus occurred because the views and opinions of the participants converged through a process of informed decision-making about the skills and knowledge required for supplier diversity practitioners. This chapter presents the findings that resulted from the research and an analysis of the data collected along the path to consensus.

The research design used in the collection of data was a three-round Delphi method administered through SurveyMonkey, a web-based survey tool, used for rounds one and two, and a customized survey instrument, designed using Microsoft Word for round three. The Delphi research method offers the potential for obtaining the best thinking about a particular subject and in this case resulted in reaching consensus about the skills required for successful performance of supplier diversity professionals. The participant population for this study was a group of 14 experts nominated by individuals who work in the field of supplier diversity. Contacts were made with corporations who received the “2007 Corporation of the Year” award from 39 Regional Councils of the National Minority Supplier Development Council. An email was sent to representatives of these award recipients asking them to identify an employee who works in the area of supplier diversity and who might be willing to participate as an expert panelist in this study. Self-nominations were also accepted. A Request for Panel Nomination form (Appendix A) and criteria for panel selection were sent to the 39 corporate representatives.

Several individuals declined to participate in this research because of pressing business issues and cited limited involvement in activities that are not directly related to generating revenue as the reason for not participating. This corporate position is significant given the current state of the economy. Many corporations have experienced various degrees of crisis during the past decades. New stories emerge daily about layoffs, downsizing, rightsizing and plant closing which have cost hundreds of thousands of jobs. Increased global competition, ineffective leadership, unproductive investments and demanding customers are forcing American businesses to rethink and evaluate how they do business and the contributions and involvement in activities of their employees. Additionally, many corporations have sought out different ways of generating revenue and adding value to their company. The types of products and services corporations offer and how quickly they must bring the products and services to market in the most cost effective manner has had a profound impact on many of corporations today.. Supplier diversity professionals who are well trained and possess the required skills and knowledge in various aspects of the business will be able to help their corporations achieve its objectives and increase revenue.

Of the 39 corporate individuals identified who were asked to participate, 14 supplier diversity experts agreed to serve as a panelist for this study. An Invitation to Potential Panel Members (Appendix B) was sent to these individuals.

The 14 nominees who formed the expert panel are a representative sample of experts and form the core of expert opinion required for this Delphi study. The nominees were asked to complete and submit a signed Participant Consent form (Appendix C), as well as a Participant Data Profile sheet (Appendix D). Personal phone calls were made to

each of the 14 participants to let them know how much their participation in the survey was appreciated and to ascertain their availability over the seven-week period during which the survey would be open for the collection of responses for rounds one, two, and three. Additionally, I provided a “personal touch” by offering my assistance to the participants, making it easier for them to respond to the survey. Two participants indicated that they would be on vacation during the period in which the surveys for rounds 1 and 2 would be open. They requested that they be allowed to provide their responses via phone or email as opposed to completing the on-line survey via SurveyMonkey. This was agreed upon.

#### *Profile of the Expert Panel*

As indicated above, the participants were asked to complete a Participants’ Data Profile to identify the degree of expertise within the group. They were also asked to complete a Participants’ Consent form. An analysis was prepared which summarizes the participants’ specific job titles and their years of experience in supplier diversity at their current company and at all previous companies. Additionally, participants were asked to estimate the total percentage of their workload in supplier diversity in their job function, and if the percentage was less than 100%, they were asked to identify their other job responsibilities. Table 5.1 highlights the information derived from the summary of the expert panelist profile.

Table 5.1

#### *Profile of the Expert Panel*

Expert Panelist	Job Title	Total Yrs. of Service	% of Workload in SD	% of Workload in Other Areas
#1	Supplier Diversity Director	24	100%	
#2	Executive Director, MBE	5	100%	

Expert Panelist	Job Title	Total Yrs. of Service	% of Workload in SD	% of Workload in Other Areas
#3	Manager, Supplier Diversity	10	100%	
#4	VP, Supplier Diversity	13	100%	
#5	Sr. Manager, Supplier Diversity	10	100%	
#6	Director, Supplier Diversity	13	100%	
#7	Supplier Diversity Manager	5	100%	
#8	Director, Supplier Relations	7	50%	50%
#9	National Procurement Mgr.	5	75%	25%
#10	Manager, Supplier Diversity	5	100%	
#11	Director, Supplier Diversity	11	50%	50%
#12	Supplier Diversity Director	11	100%	
#13	Director, Supplier Diversity	9	100%	
#14	Supplier Diversity Coordinator	6	100%	

An analysis of the participants' profiles indicates the following:

1. The expert panelist represents an average of 9.6 years of service specifically in supplier diversity at his or her current company and at previous companies.
2. The expert panelist devotes approximately 78% of his or her job performing functions and duties in supplier diversity, with 22% devoted to performing other job functions in the supply chain and in other business units.
3. Supplier diversity professionals hold a variety of job titles and are responsible for a range of job functions within the domain of the supply chain.

As mentioned above, SurveyMonkey, an on-line web-based survey tool, was used to collect the responses for rounds one and two. Because SurveyMonkey could not accommodate individual customized responses, round three was sent to each participant by email. Table 5.2 represents the number of surveys sent and returned for each of the three rounds of this Delphi research study.

Table 5.2

*Summary of Survey Responses*

Questionnaire Rounds	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3
Total Surveys Sent	14	13	13
Total Surveys Returned	13	13	13
Percentage Returned	92%	100%	100%

The round one questionnaire was sent to 14 participants, of whom 13 responded. This represents a 92% response rate for round one. Friedrich (1985) presents a view, based on previous Delphi studies, that a response rate of 50% for all rounds is highly satisfactory. Eldredge (1978), in similar Delphi studies, stated that a return rate in excess of 50% is considered good. Since there are no previous studies in the literature regarding skill requirements for supplier diversity professionals, no specific response-rate comparisons can be made.

Researchers using Delphi have warned of the amount of time it takes to conduct a Delphi study. Although Delbecq et al. (1975) estimated that the average Delphi study could potentially take from 45 days to 6 months, Skulmoski et al. (2007) stated that “quick turnaround times help to keep enthusiasm alive and participation high” (p. 11). As a result, five business days were allotted for the completion and submission of data in round one. Additionally, a five-day turnaround time yielded a 92% response rates for round one; and 100% for rounds two and three.

*Round 1*

The round one questionnaire sent via SurveyMonkey asked panelists to identify ten professional skills and knowledge required for the successful performance of supplier

diversity practitioners. Table 5.3 is a list of the competencies which were used to form the basis for the round one survey. The round one survey instrument is listed as Appendix E.

Table 5.3

*List of Skills and Knowledge Dimensions Used in Round 1*

Item #	Skills and Knowledge Dimensions
1	Inspiring Trust and Honesty and Behaving Ethically
2	Reporting Business Performance
3	Networking Skills
4	Organization Skills
5	Alignment of Corporate Initiatives with Supplier Diversity Initiative
6	Results Oriented/Drive for Results
7	Time Management
8	Establishing and Developing Plans
9	Building Relationships
10	Leading Courageously
11	Demonstrating Passion at/for Work
12	Professional Industry Experience
13	Strategic Planning and Thinking
14	Speaking with Impact
15	Writing Effectively
16	Taking Ownership and Responsibility
Item #	Skills and Knowledge Dimensions
17	Leveraging Individual and Cultural Diversity
18	Listening to Others
19	Analytical Skills
20	Problem Solving Skills
21	Influencing Others
22	Managing Conflict
23	Using Sound Judgment
24	Engaging and Inspiring People
25	Using Key Financial Performance Indicators
26	Understanding and Planning Group Resources
27	Business Skills
28	Facilitation Skills
29	Management Skills
30	Contract Negotiation Skills
31	Purchasing Skills
32	Computing/Technical Skills

Item #	Skills and Knowledge Dimensions
33	Managing and Championing Change and Transition
34	Managing Learning and Self Development
35	Managing and Improving Processes
36	Delegation Skills
37	Fostering Collaboration
38	Coaching, Training and Developing People
39	Building Talent Pool

These 39 skills and knowledge sets identified were used to establish the basis for rating the competencies required for successful performance of supplier diversity professionals. The responses of the expert panelists were evaluated and analyzed and duplicate responses were eliminated. Of the 39 competencies sent to the panelists in round one, two competencies were eliminated and two were added. The two elements eliminated from the initial list were contract negotiation and time management skills. The additional new skills added to this list were marketing skills and linking supplier diversity to profitability. Contacts were made with the participants who offered both of these additional skills to ascertain if either could be incorporated into any of the original base-line listing of 39 skills, based on their understanding and definitions of the skills and knowledge identified in this round. The participants who identified the additional skills indicated that these skills should not be incorporated into any of the other skills because they reflect different functional and operational meanings.



As the completion date approached for the collection of data, four follow-up emails were sent to the participants who had not responded as a reminder to complete and submit their responses within the timeline allotted for the collection of data.

Table 5.4 represents a summary of the results from round one, and includes the skills and knowledge identified and the number of participants' responses for each skill and knowledge. Round one produced 140 data elements which represented 39 skills and knowledge. The data were plotted into an Excel spreadsheet, verified for accuracy and reported in table 5.4.

Table 5.4

*Summary of Results from Round 1*

Item #	Skills and Knowledge	Total # Identified By Participants
1	Building Relationships	7
2	Establishing and Developing Plans	6
3	Influencing Others	6
4	Aligning Corporate Initiatives w/SD Initiatives	6
5	Strategic Planning and Thinking	6
6	Networking Skills	5
7	Business Skills	5
8	Managing Conflict	5
9	Managing and Championing Change, Transition	5
10	Engaging and Inspiring People	5
11	Speaking with Impact	5
12	Leading Courageously	5
13	Fostering Collaboration	4
14	Writing Effectively	4
15	Listening to Others	4
16	Demonstrating Passion at/for Work	4
17	Inspiring Trust, Honesty and Behaving Ethically	4
18	Analytical Skills	4
19	Problem Solving Skills	4
20	Organizational Skills	3
21	Facilitation Skills	3
22	Leveraging Individual and Cultural Diversity	3
23	Professional Industry Skills	3

Item #	Skills and Knowledge	Total # Identified By Participants
24	Management Skills	3
25	Results Oriented/Driving for Results	3
26	Coaching, Training and Developing People	3
27	Using Key Financial Performance Indicators	3
28	Managing and Improving Processes	3
29	Purchasing Skills	2
30	Computing/Technical Skills	2
31	Delegation Skills	2
32	Taking Ownership and Responsibility	2
33	Using Sound Judgment	2
34	Reporting Business Performance	2
35	Managing Learning and Self Development	2
36	Building Talent Pool	1
37	Understanding and Planning Group Resources	1
38	Marketing Skills	1
39	Linking Supplier Diversity to Profitability	1

The data collected in round one show that supplier diversity professionals require skills in many different areas to be successful in their job function and to be proficient as a professional. The skills and knowledge that received the highest number of participant responses in order of frequency are listed in Table 5.5.

Table 5.5

*Skills and Knowledge Receiving the Highest Number of Participant Responses in Round 1*

Item #	Skills and Knowledge (in order of frequency)
1	Building Relationships
2	Establishing and Developing Plans
3	Influencing Others
4	Aligning Corporate Initiatives and SD Initiatives
5	Strategic Planning and Thinking

*Round 2*

The round two questionnaire instrument (Appendix F) was designed using SurveyMonkey and included a five-point priority of importance rating scale. The questionnaire instructed participants to rate each of the 39 skills and knowledge sets listed, and provide an opinion as to their priority of importance, based on the following priority ratings:

1. Essential
2. Very Important
3. Moderately Important
4. Somewhat Important
5. Of Little Importance

The round two questionnaire was sent to 13 participants, of whom all 13 responded. This represents a 100% response rate for round two. Five business days were allotted for the completion and submission of data in round two. Ten participants responded within two days. As the completion date approached for the collection of data, three follow-up emails were sent to participants as a reminder to complete and submit their responses within the timeline allotted for the collection of data.

Table 5.6 revealed the following priority rating for skills and knowledge utilizing the five-point priority of importance rating scale for round two.

Table 5.6

*Summary of Round Two Results with Mean Scores*

Ranked Item #	Essential Skills/Knowledge Dimensions	Mean Score
1	Building Relationships	4.8
2	Leading Courageously	4.7
3	Influencing Others	4.7
4	Establishing & Developing Plans	4.7
5	Speaking with Impact	4.7
6	Inspiring Trust, Honesty and Behaving Ethically	4.6
7	Strategic Planning and Thinking	4.5
8	Fostering Collaboration	4.5
9	Demonstrating Passion at/for Work	4.5
10	Networking Skills	4.5
Ranked Item #	Very Important Skills/Knowledge Dimensions	Mean Score
11	Problem Solving Skills	4.4
12	Engaging and Inspiring People	4.3
13	Listening to Others	4.3
14	Taking Ownership and Responsibility	4.3
15	Using Sound Judgment	4.3
16	Business Skills	4.2
17	Aligning Corporate Initiatives w/SD Initiatives	4.2
18	Managing & Championing Change and Transition	4.2
19	Writing Effectively	4.2
20	Reporting Business Performance	4.1
21	Analytical Skills	4.1
22	Results Oriented/Driving for Results	4.1
23	Linking Supplier Diversity with Profitability	4.1
24	Marketing Skills	3.9
25	Management Skills	3.9
26	Coaching, Training and Developing People	3.9
27	Managing Conflict	3.8
28	Organizational Skills	3.8
29	Leveraging Individual and Cultural Diversity	3.7
30	Managing and Improving Processes	3.7
31	Facilitation Skills	3.7
32	Understanding and Planning Group Resources	3.5
33	Computing/Technical Skills	3.5

Ranked Item #	Moderately Important Skills Dimensions	Mean Score
34	Building Talent Pool	3.4
35	Using Key Financial Performance Indicators	3.3
36	Professional Industry Experience	3.2
37	Purchasing Skills	3.1
38	Delegation Skills	3.1
39	Managing Learning and Self Development	3.0

Of the 39 items, 33, or 85%, of the skills and knowledge were rated “essential” and “very important.” Skills and knowledge in the “moderately important” range accounted for 15%, or a total of six competencies. None of the skills were rated “somewhat important” or “of little importance.” Table 5.7 shows a summary of priority ratings for round two.

Table 5.7

*Priority Rating Results for Round 2*

Priority Rating Scales	# of Items	% of Total
Essential	10	26%
Very Important	23	59%
Moderately Important	6	15%
Somewhat Important	0	0.00%
Of Little Importance	0	0.00%
Total	39	100.00%

*Round 3*

The purpose of round three was to determine consensus about the professional skills and knowledge required for successful performance of supplier diversity practitioners. Because SurveyMonkey would not accommodate the required design for round three, a customized survey was designed utilizing Microsoft Word. The participants’

responses to round two were recorded in an Excel spreadsheet with the mean score calculated for all of the participants. Continuing the Delphi protocol, in this round each panelist was provided with his or her own mean score for each skill and knowledge dimension identified in round two, as well as a mean score for each skill and knowledge dimension for all of the other participants. Participants were asked to reconsider their responses in light of the responses from other participants and to re-rate each of the competencies using the five-point priority of importance rating scale. They were advised that they could change their mean score ratings if they wished. Space was provided on the instrument to enable the participants to make comments about why they accepted or rejected the consensus. The round three survey instrument is listed as Appendix G.

As in the previous round, the turnaround time for round three was set at five business days to keep the participants interested and participation high. Four participants responded within 48 hours of opening the questionnaire for responses. Email reminders were sent to six participants, and four responded within the timeline allotted. A second reminder was sent to the final two participants who had not responded within the timeline. The deadline for the collection of responses was extended an additional 48 hours to ensure a response rate of 100% and, most importantly, to ensure sufficient responses from a representative number of panelists. The remaining two participants responded before the extended deadline. In all, 100% of the participants responded to the round three survey.

The results of the priority ratings in round three are displayed in Table 5.8.

Table 5.8

*Priority Rating Results for Round 3*

Priority Rating Scale	# of Items	% of Total
Essential	10	26%
Very Important	22	56%
Moderately Important	7	18%
Somewhat Important	0	0.00%
Of Little Importance	0	0.00%
Total	39	00.00%

All of the competencies were rated in the “essential, very important and moderately important” categories. There were no competencies rated in the “somewhat important” and “of little importance” categories in round three.

There was very little movement of skills and knowledge within the priority rating scales in round three. The only competency that shifted down from the “very important” priority rating category to “moderately important” in round three was computing/technical skills. There is no clear explanation for this competency’s lower rating in round three.

Of the 13 participants who responded to the round three survey, only seven, or 53%, actually made changes to any of their ratings to accept or reject majority opinion. Six participants accepted majority opinion without making any changes. It is difficult to determine whether they did so because they agreed with the majority opinions or because they did not take the time to review the priority ratings and it was easier to accept their previous ratings despite their commitment to participate fully in all three rounds of this survey.

Table 5.9 summarizes the majority opinions accepted by participants in each of the skills and knowledge dimensions.

Table 5.9

*Summary of Percentage Ratings of Consensus Acceptance by Participants*

Item #	Skills and Knowledge Dimensions	At/Or Accepted Consensus	Maintained Rating	Percentage Accepted Consensus
1	Leading Courageously	10	3	77%
2	Building Relationships	11	2	87%
3	Influencing Others	9	4	69%
4	Establishing and Developing Plans	10	3	77%
5	Speaking with Impact	9	4	69%
6	Networking Skills	8	5	62%
7	Inspiring Trust, Honesty, Behave Ethically	9	4	69%
8	Strategic Planning and Thinking	9	4	69%
Item #	Skills and Knowledge Dimensions	At/Or Accepted Consensus	Maintained Rating	Percentage Accepted Consensus
9	Fostering Collaboration	8	5	62%
10	Demonstrating Passion at/for Work	7	6	53%
11	Engaging and Inspiring People	8	5	62%
12	Listening to Others	9	4	69%
13	Problem Solving Skills	7	6	53%
14	Using Sound Judgment	6	7	46%
15	Business Skills	8	5	62%
16	Aligning Corporate Initiatives & SD	6	7	46%
17	Managing and Championing Change	4	9	30%
18	Writing Effectively	9	4	69%
19	Taking Ownership & Responsibility	5	8	38%
20	Reporting Business Performance	8	5	62%
21	Analytical Skills	7	6	53%
22	Results Oriented/Drive for Results	6	7	46%
23	Linking Supplier Diversity w/Profitability	9	4	69%
24	Marketing Skills	9	4	69%
25	Managing Conflict	5	8	38%
26	Management Skills	8	5	62%
27	Coaching, Training and Developing People	10	3	77%
28	Managing and Improving Processes	7	6	53%
29	Organizational Skills	7	6	53%
30	Leveraging Individual and Cultural Diversity	7	6	53%
31	Understanding & Planning Group Resources	0	13	0%
32	Facilitation Skills	8	5	62%



Item #	Skills and Knowledge Dimensions	At/or Accepted Consensus	Maintained Rating	Percentage Accepted Consensus
33	Computing/Technical Skills	1	12	7%
34	Building Talent Pool	4	9	30%
35	Using Key Financial Performance Indicators	8	5	62%
36	Professional Industry Experience	6	7	46%
37	Purchasing Skills	6	7	46%
38	Delegation Skills	5	8	38%
39	Managing Learning and Self Development	12	1	92%

The highest number of participants who agreed with the majority opinions was in the following competency areas displayed in Table 5.10.

Table 5.10

*Summary of Skills and Knowledge with Highest Percentage Acceptance by Participants*

Item #	Skills and Knowledge Dimensions
1	Managing Learning and Self Development
2	Building Relationships
3	Leading Courageously
4	Establishing and Developing Plans
5	Coaching, Training, and Developing People

The skills and knowledge dimensions receiving the lowest rate of acceptance to consensus were in the following table 5.11.

Table 5.11.

*Summary of Skills and Knowledge with Lowest Percentage Acceptance by Participants*

Item #	Skills and Knowledge Dimensions
1	Understanding and Planning Group Resources
2	Computer/Technical Skills
3	Building Talent Pool
4	Managing and Championing Change
5	Taking Ownership and Responsibility

Participants declining to join consensus in round three were asked to provide the reason for retaining their views. Five comments were provided by four participants. While some of the responses were not very specific or detailed, they did provide some justification for either joining or rejecting consensus:

Speaking Effectively:

“I spend time discussing and communicating supplier diversity strategies with senior management.”

Delegation Skills:

“It is important that we learn to delegate some of the workload to other business units because resources are an issue.”

Coaching, Training, and Developing:

“Is this the same as developing and building talent pool?”

Aligning Corporate Initiatives and Supplier Diversity Initiatives:

“This is important.”

Marketing Skills:

“Marketing skills are essential.”

In round three, 41 changes were made to 25 skills and knowledge dimensions. The skills and knowledge dimensions receiving the most changes were marketing skills, reporting business performance, building talent pool, linking supplier diversity to profitability, facilitation skills and coaching, training and developing people. An analysis of the responses indicates that there was only a slight change in the mean scores in round three. In fact, the majority of the changes—14 competencies—involve only one tenth of a

percentage difference in scoring in round three. The rating scores for facilitation skills were decreased by two tenths of a percentage point in round three.

Table 5.12 summarizes the results of round three and includes the mean score and the standard deviation for each skill and knowledge rated. For the purpose of this study, consensus is defined as those skills and knowledge dimensions with a standard deviation of less than 1.0.

Table 5.12

*Summary of Round 3 Results*

Ranked Items #	Essential Skills and Knowledge Dimensions	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
1	Leading Courageously	4.8	0.43
2	Building Relationships	4.8	0.59
3	Influencing Others	4.7	0.48
4	Establishing and Developing Plans	4.7	0.48
5	Speaking with Impact	4.7	0.48
6	Networking Skills	4.6	0.50
7	Inspiring Trust, Honesty & Behaving Ethically	4.6	0.50
8	Strategic Planning and Thinking	4.5	0.87
9	Fostering Collaboration	4.5	0.51
10	Demonstrating Passion at/for Work	4.5	0.66
Ranked Items #	Very Important Skills and Knowledge Dimensions	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
11	Engaging and Inspiring People	4.4	0.50
12	Listening to Others	4.3	0.48
13	Problem Solving Skills	4.3	0.63
14	Using Sound Judgment	4.3	0.85
15	Business Skills	4.2	0.59
16	Aligning Corporate Initiatives w/SD Initiatives	4.2	0.72
17	Managing and Championing Change	4.2	0.98
18	Writing Effectively	4.2	0.55
19	Taking Ownership and Responsibility	4.2	0.92
20	Reporting Business Performance	4.0	0.81
21	Analytical Skills	4.0	0.70
22	Results Oriented/Drive for Results	4.0	0.91
23	Linking Supplier Diversity with Profitability	4.0	1.00

Ranked Items #	Very Important Skills and Knowledge Dimensions	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
24	Marketing Skills	3.9	0.75
25	Managing Conflict	3.8	0.80
26	Management Skills	3.8	0.80
27	Coaching, Training and Developing People	3.8	0.68
28	Managing and Improving Processes	3.7	1.03
29	Organizational Skills	3.7	1.03
30	Leveraging Individual & Cultural Diversity	3.6	0.65
31	Understanding and Planning Group Resources	3.5	0.77
32	Facilitation Skills	3.5	0.64

  

Ranked Item #	Moderately Important Skills and Knowledge Dimensions	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
33	Computing/Technical Skills	3.4	0.65
34	Building Talent Pool	3.3	1.18
35	Using Key Financial Performance Indicators	3.2	0.59
36	Professional Industry Experience	3.2	0.72
37	Purchasing Skills	3.1	0.75
38	Delegation Skills	3.0	1.08
39	Managing Learning and Self Development	3.0	0.59

Using an excel spreadsheet, the final mean scores were calculated for the participants responses in round three. The standard deviation of the round three scores were also calculated using an excel spreadsheet. Table 5.13 summarizes the data. Using the standard deviation calculation, the competency areas with the most dispersion around the mean, and thus showing the least dispersion around consensus are listed in Table 5.13.

Table 5.13

*Skills and Knowledge with the Least Dispersion Around Consensus*

Item #	Skills and Knowledge Dimensions
1	Building Talent Pool
2	Delegation Skills
3	Managing and Improving Processes
4	Organizational Skills
5	Linking Supplier Diversity with Profitability

All of the other competencies identified in this study had standard deviations less than 1.00, which is considered to be within the realm of consensus.

The final chapter of this dissertation is a discussion of conclusions and recommendations for future research.

## Chapter VI – Conclusions, Discussion, and Recommendations

This chapter provides a recapitulation of the Delphi method used in this study, as well as conclusions, limitations and assumptions, implications for leadership and change, and recommendations for future research.

The purpose of this research study was to reach consensus about the required professional skills and knowledge for successful performance of supplier diversity practitioners. A review of the literature in this area revealed no previous research that specifically identifies competencies in supplier diversity. While there is a paucity of published research regarding supplier diversity, the bulk of the materials have been contributed by professional associations.

Supplier diversity is a newly recognized practice and a growing phenomenon in minority business development and within the corporate supply chain. Supplier diversity has yet to be recognized as a profession as little attention has been given to empirical research in this area.

### *Research Methodology*

The Delphi method of investigation was employed for this research study to elicit and refine the opinions of a selected panel of experts made up of supplier diversity practitioners in major corporations throughout the country.

Thirty-nine leaders in supplier diversity were asked to nominate an expert in their organizations to participate in this survey. Of the potential list of 39 nominees, 14 supplier diversity professionals were identified. These 14 individuals were contacted and asked to participate in this study. They were selected as a representative sample of expert leaders in supplier diversity.

The criteria for expertise were established and each of the 14 panel members was sent an invitation to participate as a panelist, a participant's consent form, and a participant's profile form to complete. Fourteen panel members completed round one and 13 panel members completed rounds two and three.

A three-round Delphi survey was employed using SurveyMonkey for the first two rounds and a customized survey instrument for round three. The round one survey asked the participants to identify ten skills and types of knowledge required for the successful performance of supplier diversity professionals. The result of this round was a list of 140 data elements in 39 skill and knowledge dimensions. The data were analyzed and fed back to the participants in round two with instructions to rate each of the skills and knowledge dimensions according to a priority of importance scale. The round three survey consisted of a mean score for each participant's rating, as well as the mean score for all other participants with instructions to either accept or reject the majority opinions from round two. If they rejected the majority opinions, the panelists were requested to re-rate the skill dimensions according to the same five-point priority of importance scale. The results of round three were calculated with an overall mean score and a standard deviation for each skill dimension.

### *Discussion and Conclusions*

The skills and knowledge identified in this research study reflect what it means to be a professional in the field of supplier diversity. It is essential that supplier diversity practitioners acquire the skills and knowledge central to their practice to be successful as professionals. First of all, education is the cornerstone of all professional practices, and it

plays an integral role in the development of professionals by stimulating new thinking and new ways of working. Secondly, education provides a means for professionals to socialize and transfer their learning. Professionals learn from other professionals by putting their learning into practice. Education is fundamental to developing as supplier diversity professionals.

The nature of business in America has changed radically. The complexity and uncertainty of the business world demands and requires that professionals have a repertoire of skills and knowledge that are vital to leading change in today's global climate. Supplier diversity professionals must convey that they can have a positive impact and help transform their practice and add value to their corporations. By building a strong repertoire of skills to lead change in the practice of supplier diversity, practitioners will acquire the status and the wisdom associated with being a true professional.

Over the last few years, supplier diversity practitioners have gained entry into this practice by a variety of means, and are being trained and educated for careers in this area without the benefit of clearly defined and validated requirements or standards for successful performance, status, or professional acceptance. This research moves supplier diversity as a practice closer to becoming a profession by identifying competency requirements that are necessary for successful performance in supplier diversity. Without this research, practitioners in this field may be unaware of the competencies required to adequately support many of the challenges that corporations will face in this new global economy. This research can be useful for assessing performance and promoting the career development of supplier diversity professionals in the private sector.



A key attribute of a professional is the ongoing acquisition of skills and knowledge. Professionals are committed to obtaining new skills and continuous knowledge not only in their professional practice but in many other areas as well. They seek out continuing education and training through seminars and education courses, and work toward self-development through involvement in professional associations and interaction with other professionals. Learning and self-development for supplier diversity professionals should continuously evolve. This analysis will be useful to supplier diversity practitioners as they seek out professional opportunities and move closer to achieving professional status.

The mark of a professional is the ability to lead courageously by demonstrating personal courage, decisiveness, and a willingness to adhere to professional values and ethics. By leading courageously, supplier diversity practitioners will be capable of meeting the challenges of leading change in a complex environment by fostering innovation, creativity, and risk-taking.

Cultural sensitivity is one of the most important aspects of the coaching, training, and development of people working in supplier diversity. Coaching and training are essential to getting people to act and think inclusively and to understand the value that supplier diversity can bring to an organization.

By establishing and developing plans, supplier diversity professionals are able to achieve goals and objectives which will diversify the supply chain. This is an essential competency because without developing plans, there is no meaningful way to attain goals and objectives or to understand if they have been reached.

Communications skills in the form of speaking with impact, listening to others, and writing effectively were identified by the participants as vital to the professional practice of

supplier diversity. Communications are required in virtually every profession as a competency that consists of far more than just writing grammatically correct sentences or speaking the correct or the right words. For supplier diversity professionals, communication involves making meaningful connections with others for the exchange of ideas, information, influence, and feelings. It requires actively listening and formulating ideas in a clear and succinct manner. Success in this practice requires creating an environment that fosters communication by being open, relevant, and encouraged.

Strategic planning and thinking, problem solving, and analytical skills are prerequisites for professionals in supplier diversity. Mastering these skills will enable supplier diversity professionals to survive in an environment in which complex situations require sound decisions and in-depth analysis of problems.

The findings in this study reveal that 87% of the skills and knowledge dimensions fell within the range of consensus. This tells us that a multitude of professional skills and knowledge are required for successful performance of supplier diversity practitioners. As the need for professional skills and knowledge accelerates, it becomes increasingly important for supplier diversity professionals to focus their attention and effort on ensuring that they acquire the appropriate skills to be successful and most importantly, to survive in this rapidly changing economy. The skills identified have considerable potential for supplier diversity and thus gives credence to the professional practice and emphasizes the critical need for such skills and knowledge.

There was little movement or change in the rating priorities in round three. Some participants chose to retain their mean scores in round three without making comments as to why they either accepted or rejected consensus. This could be explained as participants

not giving the survey their most serious consideration, or perhaps other pressing business issues became a priority during the survey period. Another possibility could be that, since the practice of supplier diversity is relatively new, there is little knowledge about the required professional skills for supplier diversity practitioners. The practice may not be developed enough for consensus on competencies for its practitioners.

Another reason for the lack of significant movement or changes in the mean scores in round three could be the thinking or mind-set of the expert panelists, who are considered leaders in supplier diversity. This could be viewed as the tendency of some leaders to make decisions without providing a rationale or explanation for those decisions. Also, highly self-confident leaders may be more adept at making decisions and influencing others than they are at changing their opinions. Holding firm to an opinion or decisions could imply a weakness in leadership style, and in today's competitive environment, no one wants to be perceived as not being able to lead courageously.

Delegation skills fell outside of consensus and resulted in a standard deviation of higher than 1.0. Perhaps this rating is due to the fact that some supplier diversity practitioners may have sufficient resources to delegate work tasks, as opposed to others who may have limited resources. Conversely, the competency associated with understanding and managing group resources was rated within the range of consensus. It is unclear why this rating occurred, given the fact that corporations typically provide supplier diversity with a minimum of resources, and it often becomes difficult and challenging to plan activities when few resources are available. With few resources, supplier diversity practitioners should be proficient at delegating tasks to others to ensure that these tasks are

completed. Had the participant's profile for this survey included a question relating to staff resources, it could have revealed information helpful in assessing the panelists' attitudes toward delegation skills.

There were three skills which are very closely related in terms of definition: coaching, training, and developing people; managing learning and self-development; and building talent pool. Of the three skills, building talent pool received a standard deviation score of 1.18 which fell outside the range of consensus, while managing learning and self-development received the lowest priority of importance rating in round three. One explanation for the low mean score of this competency, although within the range of consensus, could be that the participants may have confused the definitions of the three competencies. Because they are so closely related in terms of definitions, there could have been a lack of understanding regarding the meaning of this competency. It is unclear how the use of competency definitions in the survey could have affected the outcome of the survey results. It could be argued that providing definitions would enable participants to respond in a timelier manner while reducing confusion and uncertainty about the definitions of the competencies. However, providing definitions to participants may bias or limit how the participants respond to the survey and may limit their ability to be creative and innovation in their thinking.

It is not surprising, however, that the skill dimensions for leading courageously and building relationships are listed in the top-rated category, as well as scoring in the top percentage of participants who accepted consensus, given the strong emphasis placed on leadership development in the corporate sector. The ability to build relationships is a professional trait and a fundamental skill requirement for supplier diversity practitioners.

Efforts toward building relationships are critical to creating a vibrant climate, a healthy working and professional environment, and a high level of productivity for people within the organization, as well as with minority suppliers. Through these relationships, supplier diversity practitioners will be able to bring different perspectives, thought, and creativity to the practice which will ultimately result in good business for corporations seeking to exhibit good stewardship and inclusion of minority suppliers in their supply chain.

In the priority rating results, computing/technical skills fell from “very important” to “moderately important” in round three. Proficiency in computing and technical skills has created and will continue to create massive changes in the workplace. As organizations become more complex and professional skill requirements demand ever-changing capabilities, technological skills are increasingly important. Although computing/technical skills are essential to supplier diversity, there is no clear rationale for the competency’s decrease in priority rating.

The skill related to managing learning and self-development was accepted by 92% of the participants. This could account for the fact that supplier diversity professionals are cognizant of the importance of learning and self-development to their careers, performance, and the success of supplier diversity.

In examining the individual participants’ ratings in round three, it became clear that the data were skewed in the following skills dimensions that fell outside of consensus -- organizational skills, managing and improving processes, delegation skills, building talent pool, and linking supplier diversity to profitability. These skills were rated by some participants as being “of little importance.” This priority rating caused the competencies to

fall outside of consensus. Additionally, 85% of one participant's responses were rated as "essential" and 15% as "very important," which skewed the results.

In the context of this study, 39 professional skills and competencies were identified as a requirement for the successful performance of supplier diversity practitioners. While it can be argued that all of these skills are required, none of these skills is unique to supplier diversity as they can all be applied to other business practices. However, in examining the list of 39 skills and knowledge, it became clear that the following are critical skill requirements for supplier diversity practitioners as distinguishing factors that will help to define the practice of supplier diversity. These skills represent the cornerstone of supplier diversity as a professional practice and significantly contribute to a sense of professionalism for its practitioners by fostering continuous commitment to the practice and conveying the value of their work.

Building effective relationships has become a sustainable competitive advantage and a core competency in many business environments and professional practices. The challenge for supplier diversity practitioners is to develop collaborative relationships with minority suppliers as well as with internal organizational clients that will result in greater economic success and increased revenue. Developing effective relationships depends upon the level of comfort and rapport that exist between supplier diversity professionals and other critical interfaces required to be successful in performing the job. When the comfort level is high, extraordinary things can occur that are beneficial to leveraging and promoting business opportunities. Relationships work when there is open dialogue, respect and integrity between the parties communicating. Building relationships is the single most

important skills dimension required for supplier diversity professionals, and can lead to substantial business results.

The ability to influence is a critical management asset which requires sophisticated skills at winning support for ideas. In today's business environment, supplier diversity professionals must be equipped with the ability to build coalitions and alliances to garner support and negotiate persuasively in order to create "win/win" situations for all persons involved.

The United States is experiencing a profound and deep-rooted transformation in its population, its culture, and the manner in which its business is conducted. To successfully compete in this new global economy, corporations must place strong and aggressive emphasis on diversity management. Supplier diversity professionals must be skilled in leveraging individual and cultural diversity by understanding, valuing, and managing ethnic differences in the workplace, as well as with diverse suppliers which whom they conduct business.

In reviewing the list of 39 skills and competencies, it is surprising that the list did not include globalization and bilingualism. As corporations extend business opportunities beyond the borders of the United States, it is critical that supplier diversity professionals be equipped with or acquire the skills to operate and manage their job functions on a global basis and from a global perspective. Whether a corporation is manufacturing its products in other countries, sourcing materials from other parts of the world, marketing its products internationally, or competing from abroad, the prospects of globalization will continue to grow and have a tremendous impact on the global economy.

Competing effectively for business opportunities requires breaking down communication barriers and possessing the ability to communicate in languages other than your own. Supplier diversity professionals will be tasked with multicultural awareness, thinking, planning, and developing the necessary skills to be successful on a global scale.

The skills and knowledge identified in this study are relevant in today's business environment and will continue to play an integral role in defining future skills and knowledge requirements. The future needs of supplier diversity from a skills and knowledge perspective will hinge on the ability to operate in a global marketplace. As integrated global supply operations become the norm, these rich experiences will elevate the practice of supplier diversity and better position its practitioners to drive corporate performance by bringing greater economic value to minority communities both at home and abroad.

#### *Limitations and Assumptions*

There are some limitations of this study that have been highlighted in the content of the dissertation. This study is limited to the deployment of the Delphi method. There are other methods that could have been used to reach a similar conclusion.

This research is limited to the private sector and includes only the input of supplier diversity professionals who work for major corporations. The professionals who have been surveyed were recognized by their peers as experts in their field, possessing certain work experiences in the practice of supplier diversity. These professionals were required to have worked in supplier diversity for at least five years and spend at least 75% of their time carrying out the job functions of supplier diversity.



*Future Research*

From discussions with experts in the supplier diversity community, I discovered that more concrete data regarding the critical skills and knowledge needs of supplier diversity professionals could be obtained by researching work tasks and specific functional activities of supplier diversity practitioners. By identifying functional work task and activities, the competencies required of supplier diversity professionals could be drawn from and aligned with the demonstrated requirements of the job.

The most critical recommendation stemming from this research is that universities reconsider their current curriculum in supply chain management and adjust it to encompass the current and future needs of supplier diversity. A large number of university curricula merely provide the standard supply chain course offerings. Given the recent increase in challenges that corporations face regarding minority business development and the value of supplier diversity, the university curriculum should be expanded to meet the growing needs of the field of supplier diversity. Supplier diversity has grown, evolved, and matured as a practice. By increasing the focus of supplier diversity in the supply chain management curriculum, corporations will realize the benefits and the value proposition that supplier diversity can bring to the supply chain through gaining a competitive edge in growing their businesses and increasing revenue.

Future studies could provide tremendous value by including women business owners, as well as the perspectives of minority suppliers, in supplier diversity research that investigates specific skills and knowledge.

*Implications for Leadership and Change*

This study has many implications for the kind of training required in order for supplier diversity practitioners to adhere to a professional standard of training and development. These implications mirror the skills and knowledge identified in this study.

The supplier diversity leaders of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be individuals with broad experience and in-depth skills and knowledge in a variety of subject areas. The business community will demand a cadre of supplier diversity professionals with knowledge and skills in technology, business operations, interpersonal relations, leadership, and a host of other competencies, to effectively lead business integration and transformation.

The rationale for this study was to investigate the practice of supplier diversity in the context of professional skills and knowledge required for successful performance of supplier diversity practitioners. The characteristics of a profession have generally included its exclusivity, skills and specialized knowledge of a specific domain, service to society or public benefit, a code of ethics or conduct established by the profession, and a professional association. This study argues that a critical first step toward moving the practice of supplier diversity toward becoming a profession is the identification of skills and knowledge for its practitioners. The skills and knowledge identified in this research study represent what it means to be a professional in supplier diversity, and can serve as a building block of competency requirements for supplier diversity practitioners. It is my hope that as a result of this research others will recognize the value inherent in supplier diversity and continue to strengthen the practice that current exists to a professional status.

Change, either personal or professional, is not an option. It's an imperative. Not to change is a dangerous proposition in today's rapidly changing world. The question is not

whether we should or can change, but how we are to change. Supplier diversity professionals cannot afford to become stagnant and stuck in their practice without continuously upgrading and acquiring new competencies necessary to survive in the global business environment. As the rapid pace of change impacts all professions and practices, supplier diversity professionals must grasp every opportunity to equip themselves with the right skills and knowledge to apply in their practice and be ready for change when change occurs.

This study has provided a broader understanding of research methods and has helped me to question information and data from an empirical perspective. Secondly, it has provided an opportunity for me to continuously examine and understand my own values and beliefs, challenge my assumptions about others and challenge displays of intolerance from others. As a scholar-practitioner, I am committed and encouraged to lead change.

APPENDIX

## Appendix A

## Request for Panel Nomination

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

I am a doctoral student at Antioch University in Yellow Springs, Ohio. I am conducting a research study as part of a doctoral dissertation to identify the required professional skills for supplier diversity practitioners. I am requesting your assistance to identify a panel of subject-matter experts in the field of supplier diversity who can lend their expertise in the identification of skills required for supplier diversity professionals. This research will ultimately lead to a contribution to the body of knowledge in the field of supplier diversity and is intended to be used by major corporations, professional organizations, and practitioners of supplier diversity.

The study will be conducted using the Delphi research method. The Delphi research method was selected because of its flexible research process. It has been successfully used to explore new concepts in the business community as well as in many industry sectors including education, defense, health care, information technology, engineering, and transportation. The Delphi method requires the assembly of a panel of experts who are willing to participate by answering three iterative rounds of questions designed to allow the panel to reach consensus about the required skills for supplier diversity professionals.

For the purpose of selecting the panel of experts, please use the following criteria for selection:

1. Subject-matter expert:
  - a. an individual who has more knowledge about supplier diversity than most people, or who possesses certain work experiences in the field of supplier diversity, and
  - b. an individual who is regarded by his or her peers as an expert in the field.
  
2. Position(s) held:
  - a. an individual who holds or has held a position specifically in supplier diversity, e.g., supplier diversity coordinator, manager, director, or vice president, and
  - b. an individual whose supplier diversity responsibilities make up at least 75% of his or her total workload.
  
3. Years of experience:
  - a. an individual who has a minimum of five (5) years of experience specifically in supplier diversity.

4. Professional responsibility:
  - a. an individual who is ethical and professionally responsible.

Currently, there are no educational requirements for supplier diversity professionals and it is fully recognized that there is no objective method of assessing an individual's qualifications except by referral.

Please nominate one (1) individual in your corporation who you feel is a supplier diversity subject-matter expert according to the criteria listed above. (Please note that you can nominate yourself in accordance with the criteria listed above).

Please email the information below to me at (email address). Please list the subject of your email to me as "Delphi Panel Nomination," and include the following information:

1. Name
2. Title
3. Name of corporation
4. Email address
5. Phone number

All experts selected for the panel will remain anonymous, except to the researcher. There will be no obligations on the part of the panelist other than to assist by participating in the survey.

The findings of this research can be used by each individual and corporation in assessing the training and development needs for supplier diversity professionals. It will ultimately be used to qualify the practice of supplier diversity as a profession, rather than an occupation. The time commitment for each participant will be approximately 15 to 20 minutes for each of the three rounds. The total time needed to complete all three rounds of the study is dependent on the participants' timely responses to the question in the individual rounds, but should not extend past the end of July 2008.

I would appreciate your assistance in this research by nominating an individual for the panel or by participating yourself as a panelist. I look forward to hearing from you by **(date)**. If you require additional information, you can email me at **(email)** or reach me by phone at **(telephone)**.

Regards,

Mia Cole  
Doctoral Student  
Antioch University  
Ph.D in Leadership and Change

## Appendix B

## Letter of Invitation to Potential Panel Members

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

I am writing to ask for your assistance with a research study that will identify critical professional skills required for successful supplier diversity professionals. I am a supplier diversity professional myself, and I have held senior-level positions in supplier diversity at two major corporations and have consulted on matters of supplier diversity with both public and private organizations. This research study will be part of my doctoral dissertation work in Antioch University's Ph.D. Program in Leadership and Change.

The study will survey a panel of experts in the field of supplier diversity. Since supplier diversity is a relatively new field within corporate supply chains or workforce diversity, it does not yet have criteria for establishing expertise. Identifying required professional skills that are unique to professionals in the field of supplier diversity will be necessary if our profession is to grow and significantly contribute to the economic development of minority suppliers. The findings from this study can be used to assess the training and development needs of supplier diversity professionals.

The research process used for this study is known as the Delphi method. Delphi is a survey-based method that assembles a panel of experts who answer questions in three (3) iterative process rounds to gain consensus on an issue or problem. In this case, the question will be to identify the professional skills and knowledge required for successful supplier diversity professionals; there will be three rounds of questions to answer.

As a panelist in this research study, you will not be required to leave your work location, incur any expenses, or participate in meetings or other outside work. Your only responsibility is to answer three questionnaires that will be sent to you over a three-month time period. Your responses to the survey will be collected by utilizing SurveyMonkey, a secure internet-based survey tool for creating and collecting responses to surveys. In the next few days, you will receive full instructions for accessing SurveyMonkey and a timeline for the entire study.

The panelists will remain anonymous, except to the researcher. The time commitment for each participant will be approximately 15 to 20 minutes for each of the three (3) rounds of questions. The total time needed to complete the research study questionnaire is dependent upon the participants' timely responses to the questions in each round, but should not extend beyond (date). There will be no further obligations on your part other than to assist by participating as a panel member.

If you are willing to participate in this research study, kindly complete the attached Participant Consent Form and the Participant's Data Profile Sheet, and email to me by **(date)**. My email address is (blank). Please list the subject of your email to me as "Supplier Diversity Research – Panel Member."

If you require any additional information, do not hesitate to contact me, at (telephone), or the chairman of my dissertation committee, Dr. (name), at (telephone).

Again, thank you in advance for participating in this survey. I appreciate your interest in participating in this research study.

Regards,

Mia Cole  
Doctoral Student  
Antioch University  
Ph.D Program in Leadership and Change



## Appendix C

## Participant Consent Form

**Study Overview:** This study will identify critical professional skills and knowledge for successful supplier diversity practitioners. The study will assemble a panel of experts who will be required to answer questions in three (3) iterative process rounds about the professional skills and knowledge required for supplier diversity professionals.

I agree to participate in this study, which I understand to be part of a dissertation to be submitted in partial fulfillment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Antioch University.

I understand that if I have any additional questions regarding my rights as a research participant, I can contact the researcher, Mia Cole, at (email address) or her advisor, (chairman), at (email address), Antioch University, (telephone number).

I understand that my opinions may be utilized for research purposes but that I will not be identified by name or other identifying characteristics in the final written document.

I understand the research findings may benefit others in the field of supplier diversity.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and I may discontinue participation at any time during this research study. I have the right to express my concerns and complaints to the University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects at Antioch University.

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D

## Participant Data Profile Sheet

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Kindly complete the information below and email to me at (email address). miacole@austin.rr.com.

1. Name:
2. Title:
3. Company Name:
4. Address:
5. Phone Number:
6. Email Address:
7. Total years of experience in supplier diversity:
  - a. At current company:
  - b. At other/previous company:
8. Total percentage of supplier diversity workload: (circle appropriate workload percentage):
  - a. 100%
  - b. 75%
  - c. 50%
  - d. 25%
9. If you work on supplier diversity issues less than 100% of the time, what are your other responsibilities?
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  - d.
  - e.

## Appendix E

## Round 1 Cover Letter and Survey Instrument

Dear Panel Member:

This is the first question of three rounds for the supplier diversity research study. The purpose of this round is to identify the specific professional skills and knowledge required for supplier diversity practitioners.

In the space below, 39 skills and knowledge have been listed. Of the 39 skills, please select ONLY ten (10) skills and knowledge that you feel are most important for successful performance of supplier diversity practitioners. If there are skills which are NOT listed below that you feel are required for successful performance of supplier diversity practitioners, please list those skills on the line marked "other (please specify)" at the bottom of the following pages. Again, please list ONLY ten (10) skills and knowledge.

Please don't hesitate to contact me at (telephone number) or email me at (email address) if you have any questions.

Regards,

Mia Cole  
Doctoral Student  
Antioch University  
PhD Program in Leadership and Change

### **Supplier Diversity Research - Round 1 Survey**

In the space below, please select ten (10) skills and knowledge that you feel are required for successful performance of Supplier Diversity Professionals.

If there are skills and knowledge which are NOT listed below that you feel are required for successful performance of Supplier Diversity Professionals, please list those skills under the line marked "other (please specify)" at the bottom of this page.

- (1) Professional Industry Experience
- (2) Management Skills
- (3) Business Skills
- (4) Organizational Skills
- (5) Alignment of Corporate Initiatives w/Supplier Diversity
- (6) Contract Negotiation Skills
- (7) Purchasing Skills
- (8) Strategic Planning & Thinking
- (9) Results Oriented/Drive for Results
- (10) Computing/Technical Skills
- (11) Use Key Financial Performance Indicators
- (12) Speak with Impact
- (13) Write Effectively
- (14) Listen to Others
- (15) Facilitation Skills
- (16) Time Management
- (17) Report Business Performance
- (18) Networking Skills
- (19) Analytical Skills
- (20) Problem Solving Skills
- (21) Manage and Improve Processes

**This page is a continuation of the previous page. Of the 39 skills and knowledge listed on the previous page and on this page, please select ONLY ten (10) skills and knowledge that you feel are required for successful performance of supplier diversity practitioners.**

- (22) Establish and Develop Plans
- (23) Delegation Skills
- (24) Coach, Train and Develop People
- (25) Build Talent Pool
- (26) Inspire Trust, Honesty and Behave Ethically
- (27) Take Ownership and Responsibility
- (28) Build Relationships
- (29) Influence Others
- (30) Foster Collaboration
- (31) Manage and Champion Change, Transition and Innovation
- (32) Manage Conflict
- (33) Use Sound Judgment
- (34) Engage and Inspire People
- (35) Understand and Plan Group Resources
- (36) Manage Learning and Self Development
- (37) Leverage Individual and Cultural Diversity
- (38) Lead Courageously - Taking a Stand Despite Opposition
- (39) Demonstrate Passion at/for Work
- Other (please specify)

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## Appendix F

## Round 2 Cover Letter and Survey Instrument

Dear Panel Member:

Thank you for your response to the initial round 1 survey. This is the round 2 survey questionnaire and the purpose of this round is to further define consensus about the professional skills and knowledge required for supplier diversity practitioners. This round requires that you rate each of the professional skills and knowledge identified in round 1 according to a five point priority of importance scale.

Please complete and submit your responses to this round 2 survey by (date). I look forward to hearing from you with your responses to this round 2 survey questionnaire. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me at (telephone number) or email me at (email address).

Regards,

Mia Cole  
Doctoral Student  
Antioch University  
PhD Program in Leadership and Change

## ***Supplier Diversity Research Study - Round 2 Survey***

Please rate each of the following skills and knowledge according to a five point priority of importance scale. Provide your opinion about the level of priority by selecting the appropriate level of importance.

### **Professional skills and knowledge required for Supplier Diversity Practitioners**

	<b>Essential</b>	<b>Very Important</b>	<b>Moderately Important</b>	<b>Somewhat Important</b>	<b>Of Little Importance</b>
<b>1. Establishing and Developing Plans</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>2. Building Relationships</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>3. Influencing Others</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>4. Aligning Corporate Initiatives w/Supplier Diversity Initiatives</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>5. Strategic Planning and Thinking</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>6. Business Skills</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>7. Networking Skills</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>8. Fostering Collaboration</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>9. Managing and Championing Change, Transition and Innovation</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>10. Managing Conflict</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>11. Engaging and Inspiring People</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>12. Organizational Skills</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>13. Speaking with Impact</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>14. Writing Effectively</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>15. Listening to Others</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>16. Facilitation Skills</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>17. Leveraging Individual and Cultural Diversity</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>18. Leading Courageously Taking a Stand Despite Opposition</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>19. Demonstrating Passion at/for Work</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>20. Inspiring Trust, Honesty and Behave Ethically</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>21. Professional Industry Experience</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>22. Management Skills</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>23. Results Oriented/Drive for Results</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>24. Analytical Skills</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>25. Problem Solving Skills</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>26. Coaching, Training and Developing People</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>27. Purchasing Skills</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>28. Using Key Financial Performance Indicators</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>29. Computing/Technical Skills</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>30. Managing and Improving Processes</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>31. Delegation Skills</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>32. Taking Ownership and Responsibility</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>33. Using Sound Judgment</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>34. Reporting Business Performance</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>35. Building Talent Pool</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>36. Understanding and Planning Group Resources</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>37. Managing Learning and Self Development</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>38. Marketing Skills</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>39. Linking Supplier Diversity to Profitability</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



## Appendix G

## Round 3 Cover Letter and Survey Instrument

Dear Panel Members:

Thank you for responding to rounds 1 and 2 of the Supplier Diversity research study. This is the third and final round of the study. The purpose of this round is to determine consensus about the professional skills and knowledge required for Supplier Diversity practitioners.

Unfortunately, SurveyMonkey will NOT accommodate individual customized scoring for this final round. Therefore, I have designed the round 3 questionnaire for your responses on the survey instrument listed below.

In this final round 3, your individual mean scores in round 2 are listed on the survey instrument below, as well as a mean score for the overall responses of all the survey participants in round 2. To reach consensus in this final round, you will have an opportunity to change your rating score by reconsidering the responses you made in round 2, in light of the group's response, and change your rating score if you wish.

If you wish to make any comments about your rating score or the majority consensus mean scores for any of the skills and knowledge listed below, please insert your comments at the bottom of the survey instrument in the appropriate space provided.

Please complete and submit this round 3 survey by (date). I look forward to hearing from you with your responses to this round 3 questionnaire. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me at (telephone number) or email me at (email address).

Regards,

Mia Cole  
Doctoral Student  
Antioch University  
PhD Program in Leadership and Change

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 Supplier Diversity Research Study – Round 3
 

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Instructions: Please reconsider your response to each of the skills and knowledge you rated in round 2. To change your rating score, please record your new score according to the priority of importance scale listed below in Column 3. If you desire to keep any of your original rating scores from round 2, please leave Column 3 marked “New Rating Score” black and continue your rating assessment for each of the skills and knowledge listed in the chart below. Please rate each of the 39 skills and knowledge on the survey instrument below.

Priority of Importance Rating Scale (to use in Column 3)

- 5 – Essential
- 4 – Very Important
- 3 – Moderately Important
- 2 – Somewhat Important
- 1 – Of Little Importance

#	Skills and Knowledge	(1) Participant’s Round 2 Rating Score	(2) Mean Score Round 2 (Majority Consensus)	(3) Participant’s New Rating Score for Round 3
1	Establishing and Developing Plans			
2	Building Relationships			
3	Influencing Others			
4	Aligning Corporate Initiatives w/ SD Initiatives			
5	Strategic Planning and Thinking			
6	Business Skills			
7	Networking Skills			
8	Fostering Collaboration			
9	Managing and Championing Change/Transition			
10	Managing Conflict			
11	Engaging and Inspiring People			
12	Organizational Skills			
13	Speaking with Impact			
14	Writing Effectively			
15	Listening to Others			
16	Facilitation Skills			
17	Leveraging Individual & Cultural Diversity			
18	Leading Courageously – Taking a Stand			
19	Demonstrating Passion at/for Work			
20	Inspiring Trust, Honesty & Behaving Ethically			
21	Professional Industry Experience			



## Appendix H

## IRB Application

Antioch University  
PhD in Leadership & Change  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD  
Application for Ethics Review

IRB Chair comments:  
Instructions

- All research (by faculty and/or students) involving human participants must be reviewed and approved prior to initiating the project.
- This version of the form is intended for you to complete in Antioch Online. Once it is completed, including the attachment of any necessary documents, please press the Submit button. Submissions will 1) send you an email copy of the application for your own records, 2) email the application to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Carolyn Kenny E-mail: ckenny@phd.Antioch.edu

**NOTE: IRB Approval for projects is valid for one year only. Investigators must request a continuation if the activity lasts for more than one year. IF APPROVAL FOR THE PROJECT LAPSES, CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH IS A VIOLATION OF UNIVERSITY POLICY AS WELL AS FEDERAL REGULATIONS.**

**1. Name and mailing address of Principal Investigator(s):**

Euphemia Adonza Cole  
7800 SW Parkway, Unit 410  
Austin, TX 78735

**For Faculty - Other Principal Investigator: N/A**

**2. Departmental Status:** Student

**3. Phone Number:** (a) Cell (512) 406-1747, (b) Home (512) 351-9993

**4. Name of Core Faculty Advisor:**

Dr. Laurien Alexandre

Vice Chancellor of University Academic Affairs

Director and Professor, Ph.D Program in Leadership and Change

Antioch University

323-666-8181

**5. Name & Contact Information of other Program Faculty Involved in this Project:**

**a. Antioch Faculty and/or Primary Evaluator for Learning Achievement or Research Project:**

Dr. Melvin Gravely

The Institute for Entrepreneurial Thinking

513-469-6772

E-mail address of non-PhD faculty person: N/A

**Note to students: Please have your primary evaluator send an email to Dr. Carolyn Kenny indicating his/her approval of your research proposal.**

**b. If this ethics application is for your dissertation, the name of your Dissertation Chair appears below.**

Dr. Jon Wergin

Professor, PhD Program in Leadership and Change

Antioch University

804-269-3826

**6. Learning Achievement Dissertation**

Title of Project: "A Critical Assessment of Professional Skills and Knowledge in Supplier Diversity: A Delphi Study"

**7. Source of Funding for the project (if applicable): N/A**

**8. Expected starting date for project: 12/19/2007**

**9. Anticipated completion date for data collection: 07/30/2008**

**10. Describe the proposed participants- age, number, sex, race, or other special characteristics. (Up to 250 words):**

The participants for this research study will be individuals who work in major US corporations whose job responsibility is to ensure that minority suppliers are part of the corporate supply chain. The number of participants will be approximately 14 for the actual dissertation research. The sample size of the participants is suggested by the literature for a Delphi research study. The age, sex and race of the participants vary; and they will be adult professionals whose job responsibility is in the practice of supplier diversity. The participants will be those persons who work in the corporate sector who are supplier diversity professionals. No special characteristics other than being an expert in the field of supplier diversity.

**11. Describe how the participants are to be selected and recruited. (Up to 400 words):**

The participants will be recruited by identifying those corporations that have been awarded the “Corporation of the Year” award through the National Minority Supplier Development Council. The NMSDC is the premier professional trade association that represents minority suppliers and corporations. The individuals selected work for those corporations and carry out the work functions of supplier diversity.

**12. Describe the proposed procedures, e.g., interviewing survey questionnaires, experiments, etc. in the project. Any proposed experimental activities that are included in evaluation, research, development, demonstration, instruction, study, treatments, debriefing, questionnaires, and similar projects must be described. Continue your description on following page if necessary. USE SIMPLE LANGUAGE AND AVOID JARGON. Please do not insert a copy of your methodology section from your proposal. State briefly and concisely the procedures for the project. (500 words):**

For this research, a Delphi methods process/procedure will be utilized. Approximately 14 participants will be selected as expert panelist. The survey panelists will be sent a three-round survey questionnaire to respond too. In round 1, the participants will be asked to identify 39 skills and knowledge required for successful performance of supplier diversity professionals. After I receive the responses from round 1, this information will be analyzed and distributed to the participants for round 2. Round 2 will be a Likert scale to rate each of the responses identified in round 1. After round 2 responses have been received, a third round will be sent to the participants to rank the responses to reach consensus. The survey process will end after round 3, and the information will be

incorporated into Chapter 4 of my dissertation.

**13. Project Purpose(s) and Benefits: (400 words):**

The purpose of the research study is to identify the professional skills and knowledge for successful performance of supplier diversity practitioners. Supplier diversity is a relative new field of study and currently there are no requirements that determine the required skills for these practitioners. The professional competencies have not yet been delineated. Additionally, there is no accurate method of assessing an individual's qualifications or the skills that these professionals should have in the field and practice of supplier diversity. It is for this reason that this research is being conducted. This research will be an important building block for supplier diversity practitioners to become professionals. The findings will be used by individuals and corporations in assessing the training, development and performance needs for supplier diversity professionals.

**14. If participants in this proposed research may thereby be exposed to an elevated possibility of harm—physiological, psychological, or social—please provide the following information: (UP to 500 words)**

**a. Identify and describe the possible benefits and risks.**

**NOTE: for international research or vulnerable populations, please provide information about local culture that will assist the review committee in evaluating potential risks to participants, particularly when the project raises issues related to power differentials:**

The data from this Delphi survey study will be confidential and the panelist will remain anonymous to each other. The researcher and her chairman will be the only two persons who will have access to the data and the identity of the participants. The participants will not be exposed to any possibility of harm. There will be no risk to the participants and this project will not raise any issues related to power differentials.

**14b. Explain why you believe the risks are so outweighed by the benefits described in (13) as to warrant asking participants to accept these risks. Include a discussion of why the research method you propose is superior to alternative methods that may entail less risk:**

This will be the first empirical research in the field and practice of supplier diversity that will identify the professional skills required for supplier diversity practitioners. The findings will make a significant contribution to the body of knowledge in supplier diversity. The research method proposed (Delphi) is superior to alternative methods of research because it will provide an opportunity for supplier diversity professionals to think "out of the box" and be innovative

about leadership skills that will be critical to the field of supplier diversity. The Delphi method is simple and clean and provides the best "process/procedure" for capturing what they themselves (supplier diversity professionals) think are the critical professional skills required in the practice field. One of the primary features of a Delphi study is the anonymity of the participants. The responses of the participants will be kept confidential and will not be shared, as well as the identity of the participants. This method is superior to other methods because of the anonymity of the participants. There is absolutely no risk to the participants.

**14c. Explain fully how the rights and welfare of participants at risk will be protected (e.g., screening out particularly vulnerable participants, follow-up contact with participants, etc.):**

The rights and welfare of the participants will be protected because the researcher and her chairman will be the only two persons who will have access to the participant's identity and other related data. The findings from this research will be the basis for chapter 4, 5 and 6 of the dissertation on this topic. The rights and welfare of the participants will be protected.

**15. Explain how participants' privacy is addressed by your proposed research. Specify any steps taken to guard the anonymity of participants and/or confidentiality of their responses. Indicate what personal identifying information will be kept, and procedures for storage and ultimate disposal of personal information. (400 words):**

The participants will be informed that the experts selected for the panel will remain anonymous to each other. The researcher will be the only person who will have access to the data and the identity of the panelists. The data will be stored in a database that will ultimately be disposed of by downloading the information and the identify of the panelists will be downloaded on to a flash drive and ultimately disposed of after the findings are published. Anonymity of the panelists and confidentiality of the data will be included in the cover letter to each of the expert panelists. During the Delphi methods process, the information will be kept on the researchers' personal computer and no one will have access to this information.

**16. Informed consent statements, if one is used, are to be included with this application. If information other than that provided on the informed consent form is provided (e.g. a cover letter), attach a copy of such information. To submit or fax these documents, refer to the instructions in the next question.**

**If a consent form is not used, or if consent is to be presented orally, state your reason for this modification below:**

Each participant will be asked to sign an informed consent statement. Again, this information will also be included in the cover letter to the participants. Each participant will be asked to complete a Delphi Research Study Acceptance sheet



indicating the participant's acceptance to participate in this research study.

**17. If questionnaires, tests, or related research instruments are to be used, then you must submit a copy of the instrument, or a detailed description (with examples of items) of the research instruments, questionnaires, or tests that are to be used in the project.. Copies will be retained in the permanent IRB files. To submit documents**

- i. Go to end of on-line form to upload attachments; or**
- ii. Fax to tblIRBChair.name at tblIRBChair.fax**

**Please identify all attached documents.**

The following instruments will be used in this research.

(1) a request for Panel Nomination, (2) an invitation to Potential Panel Members, (3) a Participants Consent Form, (4) a Participants Data Profile Sheet, (5) a survey utilizing SurveyMonkey will be used for rounds 1 and 2 questionnaire, and (6) a survey designed and developed in Microsoft Word will be utilized for round 3.

**18. Will electrical or mechanical devices be applied to participants? No**

**If YES, describe:**

**[x] I agree to conduct this project in accordance with Antioch University's policies and requirements involving research.**

**Office Use Only**

**Application approval type: Expedited**

**IRB member assigned (dissertation or faculty research): Carolyn Kenny**

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