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The Role of Leadership in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in the workplace and its impact on organizational culture: Empirical Evidence from Pakistan

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Abstract

Aim: The study aimed to investigate the role of leadership in prompting Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) in the workplace and its impact on organisational culture providing especial evidence from Pakistan.

Methodology: 350 employees from agriculture sector from Pakistan firm were recruited through convenience sampling to illustrate diversity and inclusion at the workplace. Different item scales were utilised for measuring the variables and the data was analysed using SmartPLS as Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) along with average variance extraction, component loadings, and composite dependability were amongst the other measurements collected to check the reliability and relationships.

Findings: According to the findings, leadership is the driving force behind diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives and helps to change the culture of a company, and it enhances the company's effectiveness and also increases creativity and innovation.

Conclusion and Implications: The importance of leadership cannot be understated when implementing DEI measures art, the workplace as leaders can promote diversity and inclusion to increase organisational performance and culture. Leaders must reduce the incidence of biasness and develop a psychological pleasant workplace providing opportunities for the employees from wide range of backgrounds to express their opinions.

Keywords: *Leadership, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, DEI, Organisational Culture*

Abbreviations: *Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI), Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)*

Introduction

Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) are extremely important in the rapidly shifting business environment. Companies have made efforts to meet diversity quotas in order to significantly expand the number of members of underrepresented groups in the workplace (Sun et al. 2024). Diversity by its alone has been proven enough to remove biasness and unfairness in the workplace. Especially in the recent years of the change of the workplace, the equity has emerged as the most significant concern (Avery et.al., 2023). Kuknor et al. (2022) also found that when there are equal opportunities for the workers and inclusive leadership in the workplaces, this results in a higher market share and reputation. Therefore, it becomes very important that inclusive leadership is followed to drive this change towards equity. The policies and practices of DEI in workplaces refer to the workplace practices that recognize and allow a variation of a gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age, sexual orientation, disability, and classification. The promotion of Diversity in the workplace is likely to enhance employee attraction, retention, creativity and productivity. McKinsey & Company in their report for the year 2020 adopted three different workplace inclusion indices which include belonging, openness and inclusiveness. These indicators are crucial for a construction of efficient and effective, and more importantly, a healthy working relationship. As per Kiradoo (2022), it is due to the nature of the diversified workforce, which can bring new ideas and new approaches to solve numerous complex problems because the workforce has different perspectives and background. A workplace that highly values diversity means that it will highly value fairness and equity and therefore creating an environment that makes everyone feel that they are welcome. On the other hand, it is well known that the process of creating and maintaining a diversity in the workplace is not easy at all. Because the process of developing an organizational culture accepting diversity, equality and inclusion is challenging, many organizations face significant issues in this area and even if they manage to create such culture, they can struggle to sustain it. Research done by Olusanya (2023) reveals that for one to install the culture of diversity, equity and inclusion, leaders are mandated to stand for it and provide the necessary support. Also, Stanley et al., (2019) also pointed out that a large number of firms fail to initiate the process of change in their policy in relation to diversity and inclusion on their own. When it comes to adopting strategic diversity strategies, organizations almost never achieve success. These initiatives, according to Ashe and Nazroo (2017), have the objective of adopting goals, beliefs, and missions

that are representative of the social and cultural demography of the entire world. Therefore, the role of leadership comes into play in promoting DEI within the organizations where social, political and cultural dimensions significantly contribute to widespread of discrimination and social exclusion. Effective leadership can drive the implementation of DEI initiatives ensuring that efforts go beyond superficial quotas in order to address deeper issues of inequality that persist within corporate environment.

In the rising amount of research on the Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion (DEI) in the workplace, the importance of leadership in supporting DEI and its impact on organizational culture has not been fully recognized. Recent studies for example have shed light on DEI in the workplace and provided strategies for sustaining a diverse workforce Kiradoo, (2022), and Feitosa et al. (2022) as it provided a framework for understanding cross-cultural performance from DEI perspective. Therefore, these studies have lacked discussion on the importance of leadership in prompting DEI. Additionally, the ways in which leaders can actively promote DEI in organizational have not been argued. Despite the fact that leadership is critical for overcoming social and cultural challenges, the literature has lacked empirical evidence from Pakistan as for example, a study by Irim, Salman, and Rauf, (2024) examined the association between organizational performance, diversity and Human Resources Practices (HRM) practices in Pakistan. Therefore, the current study focuses on how leadership affects DEI as well as workplace culture in Pakistani businesses, along with empirical evidence. Moreover, the study addresses a key existing body of research by concentrating on leadership's underappreciated role in prompting DEI in Pakistani organizations. Understanding this connection is critical for developing DEI strategies that are culturally appropriate for Pakistan. The findings from the study can help managers in improving engagement, innovation and organizational performance. It seeks to help progress DEI in Pakistan's quickly changing corporate landscape.

Literature Review

Leaders are responsible for developing and implementing diversity, equity and inclusion policies, teaching these concepts in their terms and modelling inclusive behavior at workplace. As per the Harvard Business Review Article in 2020, leaders' words, performance and actions can hugely influence an individual's perception of inclusion by up to 70%. This holds significance

since employees who are involved in the process are more inclined to speak up, go above and beyond and collaborate, all of which significantly help the business to succeed. Moreover, Pemberton and Kisamore (2022) conducted interviews with thirty-two knowledgeable leaders in the field of workplace diversity and inclusion. According to the results of the survey, 93.33 percent of respondents believed that the buy-in, dedication, attitude, and support of leaders were key factors to consider when evaluating the diversity program of a business and striving to improve its environment. It was as established by Fife et al. (2021) that for DEI to be effective, a leader has the responsibility of cultivating an inclusive workplace culture. Inability to address diversity in the right way can greatly hamper efforts at the integration of DEI in workplaces. Furthermore, Jin et al., (2017) talked about the concept of inclusive leadership which embraces everybody's talents and accommodation.

Furthermore, Green (2018) pointed that Diversity, Equity and Inclusion has to be adopted by the organization as a strategic imperative not a compliance imperative. Therefore, to make DEI a core company value and to ensure that the workplace is inclusive, it is important that leaders must constantly explain and commit to DEI. Leaders must aggressively promote and act on diverse points of view to develop an inclusive throughout the organization. As per Forbes (2024), the business and moral imperatives of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) need to be emphasized to all levels by leadership teams. It is possible for board members to support inclusion as a policy and as a component of our corporate culture if they have clear expectations and are accountable for their actions. The most significant aspect is that a diversity and inclusion leader's background and experience prepare them to succeed in organizations that value diversity, and are committed to inclusion (Stanley et al. 2019). Similarly, Iqbal (2020) conferred that individuals in positions of leadership must be committed to excellence, willing to help others navigate uncertainty and change, and patient in their approach.

According to Ashe and Nazroo (2017), leaders in diversity and inclusion must have the necessary education, work experience, and training to interact with and train a diverse range of employees at workplace. Diverse teams can solve difficulties imaginatively and perform better if they have the right culture. Hunt, Layton, and Prince's (2015) research found that organizations that are inclusive and accept and support different persons have higher employee engagement and productivity rates. When it comes to recruiting and retention, a company's culture influences

whether or not diverse employees feel connected and loyal to the organization. To develop an inclusive culture for a diverse workforce, there must be a careful grasp of social identities and how they are experienced in the workplace. According to Wong (2019), it is critical to understand how disparities in identities and experiences influence how leaders engage with one's surroundings and each other. Race, gender, sexuality, class, and ability, as well as its intersections, all have an impact on people's interactions, experiences, and journeys through organizational policies, practices, and procedures. According to El-Amin (2022), the most significant sort of diversity difficulties arises from organizational cultures that lack a diversity and inclusion mindset. Acculturation procedures, which are used to transition members of a group from one culture to a heterogeneous group, may be shared by both cross-national and international diversity management, despite the fact that their objectives differ. El-Amin (2022) identifies four key ways to acculturation including separation, deculturation, assimilation, integration, and pluralism. As per Cormoş (2022) these acculturation strategies in DEI leadership is that they provide insights into how individuals from diverse backgrounds may interact with and adapt to the workplace culture. Employees can demonstrate their commitment to diversity and inclusion by participating in affinity groups, training, discussions, and showing respect for coworkers and customers (Adejumo, 2021; Iqbal, 2024). Concerns about resolving disparities are widespread among workers who work with diverse populations or groups. As a result, there are different ways to interact with the "Big 8" characteristics, which include age, ability, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status (class), and religion (Adejumo, 2020). According to Gomez and Bernet (2019), initiatives to promote diversity and inclusion should be incorporated into training and development programs. For instance, Ely, and Thomas, (2020) stated that, diversity has the potential to increase both customer service and financial positions of the organization. Leaders may be able to better evaluate the benefits of diversity when the business's outcomes, productivity, and revenue sources improve.

According to El-Amin, (2022), the Theory of Generative Interactions (TGI) is about generating and supporting an inclusive climate within organizations and to question and create opportunities for productive working interactions to occur between diverse groups. In the context of leadership's involvement in DEI in Pakistani workplaces, the theory offers the framework on how to introduce DEI ideas into the organizational processes. The study by Ahmad et al. (2020)

was successful in showing that perceived corporate social reasonability has a positive influence on the OCB amongst employees through trust-based mediational mechanisms. This is in line with the hypothesis of DEI initiatives when effectively implemented into corporate culture, the employee's engagement and organizational performance enhance. It was argued by Bernstein et al. (2020) that for organizations to support full inclusion at workplace, they must eradicate exclusion mechanisms such as self- exclusion, communication apprehension, stereotyping and stigmatization. Many organizations agree with TGI's perception of diversity because this firm is convinced that if different members of an organization are encouraged to look for long-term, meaningful, balanced and collaborative relationships with other members, equal status partnerships can be developed where diversity is not only welcomed but actively used for the benefit of all organizations. In Pakistan, where social, and cultural inequality traits persists, implementing TGI can assist leaders in creating more egalitarian workplaces by ensuring that various points of view are heard, respected and integrated into the decision-making process. The approach supports social justice and mortal standard, but also drive organizational effectiveness by exploiting the full potential of a diverse workforce, resulting in a more inclusive and equitable organizational culture.

Methodology and Framework

The study employed quantitative approach to evaluate the role of leadership in Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion (DEI) in the workplace and its impact on organizational culture. Surveyor questionnaire was distributed to 350 employees from the agriculture sector of Pakistan through convenience sampling method. The sample's confidence level was 95%, with a 5% error rate. The study included 350 individuals, ensuring a representative sample size as the questionnaire had a sample size of 350 agreed for the participation. As per the NATIONAL REPORT ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN PAKISTAN (2023), agriculture remains the most popular place of work for women. In comparison, only 27% of men work in manufacturing, while 67% of women work in agriculture, 16% in services, and 14% in manufacturing. Agriculture sector was chosen as it illustrated diversity and inclusion at the workplace. Moreover, 4-item scale previously used in research was adjusted for this study to adequately measure each construct. Avolio et al. (1999), Chen (2014), and Islam (2012) provided the groundwork for measuring transformative leadership. The scale examined the components of transformative leadership as idealistic impact, inspirational motivation and visionary leadership. Lennox et al (2022) established the DEI scale to represent

DEI procedures used in agriculture contexts. Employees were asked to answer about the DEI using the scale's four items. To ensure that that DEI measurement in this business is correct, the items were adjusted to better reflect Pakistani and culture and society. Van der berg and Wilderom (2004) devised a 4-item measure for evaluating an organization's culture. The measure looked at how organization's values, attitudes and practices support or obstruct transformational leadership, as well as diversity and inclusion. The items were adjusted in relation to the study's objectives. For this study, a successful exploratory confirmatory technique known as SmartPLS was used to evaluate data using SMRT PLS. This approach enables both exploratory and confirmatory research, as well as sophisticated operations. Validation of the measurement model was achieved using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), that confirmed each of the theoretical aspects were included. The average variance extraction, component loadings, and composite dependability were amongst the other measurements collected. A multicollinearity test was used to confirm the predictor variables' independence. The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was estimated for the variables that were assumed to be independent.

Results

Measurement model using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

Table 1: Measurement model using CFA

Constructs	Indicators	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Leadership	LD1	0.877	0.859	0.831	0.781
	LD2	0.906			
	LD3	0.868			
Diversity and Inclusion	DEI1	0.761	0.824	0.860	0.653
	DEI2	0.791			
	DEI3	0.84			
	DEI4	0.838			
Organisational Culture	EI1	0.821	0.897	0.900	0.764
	EI2	0.859			
	EI3	0.912			

The study by Brown (2015) found that component structure can be assessed in terms of discriminant convergence and reliability using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). Construct dependability can be evaluated using two methods: Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability. Table 1 presents the degree of internal consistency reliability. Kline (2023) states that for something to be considered dependable, both Cronbach's alpha and composite dependability need to be more than 0.7. The Cronbach's Alpha value for Leadership, Diversity and Inclusion, and Organizational Culture are found to be 0.859, 0.824, and 0.897 respectively as it revealed that the values are reliable. Composite Reliability for Leadership, Diversity and Inclusion, and Organizational Culture are found to be 0.831, 0.860, and 0.900; demonstrating that these values indicating that the instruments are found to be reliable. Factor loadings were used to validate the indications. Latan, Noonan, and Matthews (2017) suggested factor loadings higher than 0.6 to ensure validity. As Table 1 demonstrates, all of the indicators have factor loadings larger than 0.6, so none of them need to be excluded or validated. Additionally, Cheung et al. (2024) used the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) with a 0.5 threshold to determine relatedness in their investigation and report on convergent validity. The AVE values in Table 1 show convergent validity since they are much larger than 0.5.

Table 2: Discriminant Validity

Variables	Diversity, Equity and Inclusion	Leadership	Organizational Culture
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion			
Leadership	0.820		
Organizational Culture	0.466	0.309	

The discriminant validity of the study's components was tested utilising the Heterotrait-monotrait (HTM) ratio. This ratio reflects concept disparities. HTMT ratios must be less than 0.85 to demonstrate discriminant validity and prevent multicollinearity as stated by to Wong (2013). Table 3 reveals that the concept has a stronger correlation with its indicators than with other constructs, which supports the model's discriminating validity. Due to the fact that the correlation values are lower than 0.85, the discriminant validity analysis demonstrates that the variables are distinct from one another. The findings demonstrate a strong correlation (0.820) between Diversity Equality and Inclusion and Leadership implying a close relationship between the variables.

However, the correlation between DEI and Organizational Culture is moderate (0.466), indicating that while two constructs are still distinct categories.

Structural Model

Table 3: Structural Model

Variables	Coefficient	T statistics	P values
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion -> Organizational Culture	0.424	5.292	0.000
Leadership -> Diversity, Equity and Inclusion	0.694	25.998	0.000
Leadership -> Organizational Culture	-0.020	0.251	0.802

As per table 3, DEI has a considerable effect on organizational culture ($\beta = 0.424$, p -value 0.000) showing that robust DEI programs are likely to promote a more inclusive and a satisfactory workplace culture that values diverse perspectives and integrates equitable practices in every operation. Leadership has a significant impact on DEI ($\beta = 0.694$, p -value 0.000) showing the significance of leadership in creating and implementing DEI programs throughout the organization. The model's negative $\beta = 0.420$ with a p -value of 8.02 suggest that leadership and organisational culture are not inherently linked; thus, demonstrating that DEI initiatives may mitigate leadership's impact on organisational culture.

Predictive Relevance and Quality Assessment

Table 4: Predictive Relevance and Quality Assessment

Variables	R-square	R-square adjusted
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion	0.482	0.480
Organizational Culture	0.168	0.164

As per table 4, the R-square values illustrates the models' predictive as for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, the R-square value is 0.480. It shows that, model's components account for 48% of the variance in the DEI, indicating significant explanatory power. On the other hand, organizational culture has an R-square value of 0.168 and an adjusted R-square value of 0.164

indicating that the model only accounts for 16.8% of the data variance. Due to the lower R-square, organizational culture is significantly influenced by the predictors

Table 5: Multicollinearity

Constructs	Indicators	VIF
Leadership	L1	2.136
	L2	2.526
	L3	2.033
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion	DEI1	2.181
	DEI2	2.334
	DEI3	2.585
	DEI4	2.571
Organizational Culture	OC1	2.041
	OC2	2.520
	OC3	23.014
	OC4	21.882

The results presented in Table 5 demonstrate that all of the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values are lower than the threshold of 5.0 that was established by Hair et al. (2019). This demonstrates that there is no such thing as multicollinearity. As per the table 5, the VIF ranges from 2.033 from 23.014 for Leadership, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, and Organizational Culture. It is possible to conclude that constructs are not showing multicollinearity between variables because none of their components exceed the threshold level. This ensures that the coefficients are consistent and that the model remains stable.

Discussion

The study's findings add to the body of evidence indicating that leadership is essential in promoting diversity, equity and inclusion in business. The findings revealed that successful leadership drives diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts, which in turn influences their execution and the business culture. Previous literature from Pemberton and Kisamore (2022), Fife et al. (2021), and Jin et al. (2017) have all concluded that inclusive leadership is responsible for creating a workplace that accepts and supports diverse employees. The analysis emphasises the idea that DEI activities are more than just compliance duties; they are strategic imperatives for an organisation's success. Leaders may develop an inclusive workplace by actively promoting and

incorporating various opinions into decision-making. It enhances the company's effectiveness and also increases creativity and innovation (Iqbal and Aftab, 2024). Green (2018) emphasises the importance of diversity and inclusion in modern businesses, showing that DEI at workplaces leads towards ensuring that the workplace is inclusive and leaders are constantly committed towards DEI. Hunt, Layton and Prince (2015), as well as Ely and Thomas (2020), discovered that vital DEI programs boost staff engagement, productivity and customer satisfaction, thus demonstrating the practical benefits that DEI can bring to the workplace.

However, leadership has a significant influence in the promotion of DEI while also having a positive effect on organisational culture. Based on the studies, DEI requires both the internal organisational processes and the external factors within the society. This enhance the work done by Javed and Farhan (2020) who said that leaders in Pakistani organisations may face some unique challenges because of the entrenched culture and prejudice that are not conducive to DEI efforts. Such awareness was made clear in the study to show that there is a need to fix the internal stereotyping systems within organisations since they hinder diversity and inclusion. Understanding these barriers helps leaders to minimise their impact on the company's decision-making processes and policies. The analysed outcomes support the previous research by Banaji & Greenwald (2013) and Bohnet (2016) to explain that some other factors that affect organizational processes and employees' perceptions exist and work unconsciously. Furthermore, the study was to identify the acculturation strategies for DEI leadership, and it revealed the need for DEI leadership at the workplace. When leaders embrace this process, they can facilitate expectations and belongingness of persons with different backgrounds in the workplace environment. From the study that was conducted by Amin (2022) and Cormos (2022), acculturation was pointed out as being important in the leadership of DEI organisations. People can be most effective and organisations can be most efficient if leaders can offer attention and resources for the multicultural perspectives of the employee and integrate them into the organisation.

Table 6: Table of Hypothesis

Hypothesis	Statement	Accepted/Rejected	Findings from Previous Literature
H1: Leadership positively influences DEI	Leadership has a positive impact on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion	Accepted	Pemberton and Kisamore (2022) found that inclusive leadership is

			crucial for DEI, fostering employee engagement.
H2: DEI positively impacts Organizational Culture	DEI initiatives positively influence the organizational culture	Accepted	Ely and Thomas (2020) indicated that DEI enhances innovation and strengthens organizational culture.
H3: Leadership positively impacts Organizational Culture	Leadership has a direct positive effect on organizational culture	Rejected	Jin et al. (2017) emphasized that leadership's influence on culture is often mediated by DEI efforts.
H4: DEI initiatives are strategic imperatives for organizations	DEI is critical for organizational success beyond compliance requirements	Accepted	Green (2018) argued that DEI is essential for business outcomes like increased productivity and customer satisfaction.

Conclusion and Implications

The research specifically focused on leadership of diversity, equality and inclusion at the workplace as well as organisational culture. The studies show that leadership is responsible for DEI efforts and enhances the organisation's culture. Organisations should create awareness of the importance of diversity and inclusion so that leaders can encourage this aspect to foster organisational innovation, creativity and performance. From the study, it was possible to identify the issues associated with the deployment of DEI practices in Pakistani organizations. Managing and leading are key components for an organisation, but so is the organisational culture and the culture of the society. Thus, to solve these problems, the leaders need to decrease the rate of the unconscious biases, make the working environment mentally comfortable, and let the people from various and as large as possible spectrum of the background, make the important decisions. These suggestions can prove to be critical to integrate DEI into the workplace. Moreover, the long-term benefits of DEI activities in Pakistani firms on employee satisfaction performance and organisational innovation could be investigated, and studies can shed light on the moderating effects of organisational features, including size or industry, on leadership, DEI and organisational culture. It can provide insights into the challenges of adopting DEI in a wide range of circumstances. The studies can also shed light on the implementation and opportunities in various

sectors and areas of Pakistan, as this would help uncover successful techniques and solutions in a variety of situations.

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Appendix: Questionnaire

1. Please specify your age:
 - i) 18-25
 - ii) 25-35
 - iii) 35-45
 - iv) 45-55
 - v) More than 55 years
2. Please specify your Gender:
 - i) Male
 - ii) Female
 - iii) Other
 - iv) Not feeling comfortable to specify

Based on your knowledge and experience, select any one of the options given below each of the following statements.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Leadership (Transformational leadership) (Avolio et al., 1999; Chen et al., 2014; Islam et al., 2012)					
I feel that my leader serves as a role model for me by demonstrating high ethical standards and commitment to our organization's values					
My leader inspires and motivates me by creating a compelling vision of the future and encouraging me to achieve our shared goals					
I believe my leader actively encourages and supports me in exploring and implementing new ideas and approaches to improve our work					
My leader consistently communicates a clear and motivating vision for our team, which helps guide and inspire my work					
Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion (DEI) (Lennox et al. 2022)					
The organization works to create a civil atmosphere					
I feel respected by the organization					
I think the organization recognizes diversity					
I think the organization is fair to employees					
Organizational culture (Van den Berg, and Wilderom, 2004).					
I believe that our ethical values help me differentiate right from wrong and guide my behaviour at work					
I feel that our organization has a clear and consistent value system that determines how we conduct business.					
I think that my organization provides me with the freedom to deviate from rules when necessary.					
I find it easy to reach an agreement on difficult issues within my organization.					