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Title: Fostering Fairness and Inclusion: How Leadership Shapes Diversity Climate and Job Satisfaction in Universities

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Fostering Fairness and Inclusion: How Leadership Shapes Diversity Climate and Job Satisfaction in Universities

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Abstract

Fairness in the workplace is crucial for employee satisfaction. This study examines the relationship between inclusive leadership, organizational justice, perceived diversity climate and job satisfaction among university faculty, drawing on Fairness Heuristic Theory as guiding framework. By employing a quantitative, cross-sectional design, data were collected from 230 faculty members across six universities in Pakistan through a structured questionnaire, anchored responses on a five-point Likert scale. To test hypothesis in structural model Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was employed. The findings reveal that inclusive leadership positively linked to organizational justice, which in turn significantly predicts perceived diversity climate. Perception about diversity climate is associated with enhanced job satisfaction. Mediation analysis indicates that organizational justice and diversity climate sequentially mediates the relationship between inclusive leadership and job satisfaction. The study extends Fairness Heuristic Theory to the higher education context, integrating diversity climate as a key attitudinal outcome of justice perceptions. Practical implications highlight the need for transparent decision-making, equitable resource allocation, and inclusive leadership practices to foster fairness, strengthen diversity climate, and enhance faculty satisfaction. Limitations include the cross-sectional design, convenience sampling, and the context-specific focus on higher education, suggesting avenues for longitudinal and cross-sectoral research.

Keywords: *Organizational justice, job satisfaction, inclusive leadership, decision-making, diversity.*

1. Introduction

Inclusive leadership has recently gained attention as a leadership style that foster openness, accessibility, and active involvement with employees (Carmeli et al., 2010). Inclusive leadership value diverse perspectives, encourage participation, and create psychological safety by ensuring all member feel heard and respected. These behaviors are directly linked to perceptions of fairness, as they promote equitable treatment, transparency in decision-making, and respectful interpersonal interactions (Roberson & Perry, 2022). In higher education institutions where faculty diversity, autonomy, and academic freedom are central such leadership can be instrumental in shaping both organizational justice and diversity climate. Yet, empirical studies linking inclusive leadership to these outcomes, particularly in educational, remain scarce.

In organizational settings, employees constantly evaluate whether their leaders and institutions can be trusted. According to Fairness Heuristic Theory (Lind, 2001), such judgments often rely on fairness-related cues, especially in situations of uncertainty, ambiguity, or power imbalance. When employees find transparency in decision-making processes, outcomes are equitable, and interpersonal treatment is respectful, they form positive assessments of the organization's trustworthiness. These perceptions of fairness not only shape their immediate attitudes toward work but also influence broader evaluations of the organization's climate, including how it values and supports diversity (Hoang et al., 2022). There is limited examination of diversity climate as an attitudinal mechanism linking leadership and employee outcomes (Li et al., 2019). Contemporary research highlights that job satisfaction is closely linked with how fairly and inclusively employees perceive their work environment (Brimhall et al., 2014). When

employee experience sense of fairness, transparency and injustice and inclusion in decision-making and interpersonal treatment, they are more likely to develop a positive attitude towards their work and coworker. In contrast, perceptions of injustice and exclusion may lead to dissatisfaction, demotivation, and performance declines (Dhanasekar & Anandh, 2025). Organizational justice encompassing distributive, procedural, and interactional dimensions has been shown to shape these perceptions. For instance, fair distribution of rewards, equitable workload allocation, transparent decision-making, and respectful interpersonal communication foster trust and commitment. Moreover, research suggests that inclusion of diversity climate can mitigate the adverse effects of unfavorable outcomes, such as low pay, favouritism, discrimination, low performance appraisal (Le et al., 2021).

This involves fair sharing of tasks, suitable pay according to job duties and position, along with additional incentives and adequate acknowledgment. When decision-making processes are perceived as fair and impartial, employees develop positive attitudes, demonstrate greater commitment, and engage in their work with higher energy (Moon, 2017). Conversely, when these processes are biased, employees are more likely to resist implementation and withhold cooperation, perceiving the procedures as discriminatory. Despite the established links between fairness, diversity, and satisfaction, empirical studies lack the role of leadership in this context. Inclusive leaders play a central role in ensuring such fairness by actively seeking input from all employees, promoting transparent communication, and making equitable decisions that reflect diverse perspective. (Jha et al., 2024). This study aims to fill this gap by examining how inclusive leadership shapes justice perceptions, which in turn influence diversity climate and, ultimately, job satisfaction among university faculty.

This study aims to pinpoint four objectives. Firstly, to examine the role of inclusive leadership in shaping employees' perception of organizational justice, with a focus on how leaders create inclusive environments contribute to employees' sense of fairness and equity within the organization. Secondly, to explore the role of workplace diversity and inclusion climate in shaping employees' perceptions of organizational justice focusing on how inclusive environments contribute to employees' sense of fairness and equity within the organization. Thirdly, to explore how different dimensions of organizational justice (distributive, procedural, and interactional) influence employee motivation, job satisfaction, and organizational productivity including the types of justice employees expect and how fair reward systems affect their morale. Lastly, to identify organizational practices and standards that foster a just, inclusive, and motivating work environment with the aim of proposing actionable strategies to enhance working conditions, employee well-being, and overall institutional effectiveness, based on employees' lived experiences and feedback.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition of Variables

2.1.1 Inclusive Leadership

Inclusive leadership is characterized by leaders who demonstrated openness, accessibility and availability in their interactions with subordinates. It is form of relational leadership that emphasizes attentiveness to employees' needs and fosters a sense of leader availability (Carmeli et al., 2010).

2.1.2 Organizational Justice

Organizational justice describes how employee perceive fairness in their workplace (Greenberg, 1990) and is typically categorized into three dimensions. Distributive justice concerns employees' perception regarding the fairness of how outcome and rewards are allocated, including both tangible rewards or pay and intangible benefits or recognition (Nozick, 1973). Procedural justice, introduced by Thibaut and Walker (1978), highlights whether the procedures used to determine outcomes are fair.. It suggests that employee involvement in decision-making enhances fairness perceptions. Interactional justice, proposed by (Bies, 1986), pertains to how employees are treated on an interpersonal level during procedural implementation. This includes interpersonal justice (respect and dignity) and

informational justice (transparent and timely communication) (Colquitt, 2001). Collectively, these justice dimensions contribute to organizational outcomes such as trust, commitment, and resilience (Skarlicki & Folger, 1997).

2.1.3 Diversity Climate

Diversity, commonly defined as the extent to which individuals from various culturally significant group affiliations are represented within an organization (Cox, 1994), has become a focal point of strategic organizational management. It is increasingly recognized as a valuable asset that enhances the breadth of perspectives and experiences, contributing to innovation, improved decision-making, and long-term competitive advantage (Richard et al., 2004).

2.1.4 Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction defined by (Locke, 1969), is the perceived alignment between what individual desire from job and what the job offers. It is an emotional response reflecting how employees feel about various internal and external aspects of their work. Satisfied employees are more likely to contribute to innovation through continuous quality improvement and show greater involvement in institutional decision-making processes (Judge et al., 2020).

2.2 Hypothesis Development

2.2.1 Inclusion Leadership to Organizational Justice

Inclusive leadership is pivotal in shaping employees' perception of fairness within organizations, by openness, accessibility, and availability in leader–follower interactions. Inclusive leaders contribute to distributive justice by ensuring that rewards and resources are equally allocated, considering individual contributions and needs. They promote procedural justice by engaging employees in decision-making and ensuring transparency in how those decisions are reached (Qi et al., 2023). Moreover, inclusive leadership enhances interactional justice by treating employees with dignity, respect, and empathy while providing honest and timely communication. Inclusive leaders enhances interactional justice by treating employee with dignity (Li et al., 2024). According to Fairness Heuristic Theory suggests that employees use perceptions of fairness as a shortcut (heuristic) to decide whether they can trust authorities and accept their decisions especially in situations involving uncertainty, ambiguity, or power asymmetry in leader–subordinate relationships.

H₁: Inclusive leadership has positive and significant impact on organizational justice.

2.2.2 Organizational Justice to Diversity Climate

Organizational justice plays significant role in shaping employee's perception on fairness and inclusive work environment. By the lens of Fairness Heuristic Theory, when employees perceive that outcomes (distributive justice), procedures (procedural justice), and interpersonal interactions (interactional justice) are fair, they are more likely to view the organization as valuing diversity and fostering an inclusive climate. A strong diversity climate is characterized by shared perception of organization supports fair treatment, respect for individual difference, and equal opportunity regardless of background (McKay et al., 2007). Perception of justice serves as a critical input, when fairness is embedded in decision-making processes and interpersonal treatment, employees infer that the organization is committed to inclusion, equity, and the representation of diverse voices (Hoang et al., 2022; Le et al., 2021).

H₂: Organizational justice has positive and significant impact on perceived diversity climate.

2.2.3 Diversity Climate to Job Satisfaction

A positive diversity climate as employee's shared perceptions that their organization values and diversity, inclusion and equitable treatment which adds to job satisfaction. Such climate contributes to higher job satisfaction by fostering a sense of belonging, reducing experiences of bias, promote trust in peers, supporting conflict resolution (Mickson et al., 2021). Moreover,

by Organizational Support Theory (Baran et al., 2012), organization with strong diversity climate tends to encourage open communication, collaboration and respect, all of which are strongly linked to positive affective responses, including job satisfaction.

H₃: Perceived Diversity climate has positive and significant impact on Job Satisfaction.

2.2.4 Mediating Role of Organizational Justice and Diversity Climate

Grounded in Fairness Heuristic Theory (Lind, 2001), this model suggests that inclusive leadership offers salient cues of fairness through transparent, respectful and participative behaviors. These cues shape perceptions of organizational justice, which employees use as a heuristic to judge whether the organizational environment supports and values diversity (Brimhall et al., 2014). A strong diversity climate, in turn, fosters positive employee attitudes, leading to enhanced job satisfaction (Moon, 2017).

Inclusive leaders emphasize attentiveness to individual needs, respect for diverse perspective and active solicitation of employee input. When such leadership uphold distributive, procedural and interactional justice, employees feel more satisfied with their jobs and loyal to the company, reducing their likelihood of turnover. Organizational justice reflects employees' perceptions of fairness in treatment and decision-making, and perceived injustice may result in withdrawal or reduced performance. When employees perceive unfair treatment, they may react with low productivity or end up leaving the job (Dhanasekar & Anandh, 2025). Employees demonstrate a high level of voluntary cooperation when they perceive decision-making processes as fair, due to their commitment and trust (Al Doghan et al., 2019). By embedding fairness into daily interactions, inclusive leaders not only strengthen organizational justice perceptions but also cultivate a diversity climate that drives positive attitudes and sustained job satisfaction.

H₄: Organizational Justice and Perceived Diversity mediates the relationship between Inclusive Leadership and Job Satisfaction.

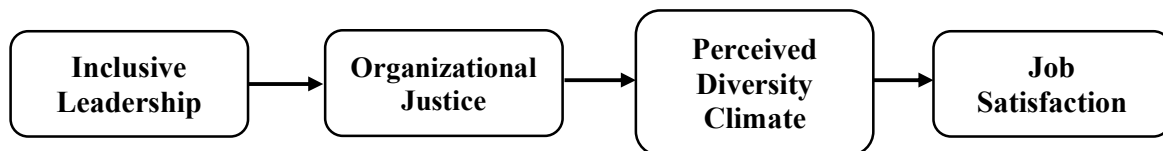


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

3. Research Methodology

This study uses a quantitative, cross-sectional survey of university teachers from six universities in Islamabad, Pakistan. Data were gathered through a self-administered questionnaire, using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The instrument comprises 9 items of Inclusive Leadership adapted from (Carmeli et al., 2010), 15 items of Organizational Justice (distributive, procedural, interactional) (Colquitt, 2001), 4 items of Diversity Climate, and 3 items of Job Satisfaction developed by (Lawler et al., 1979), along with demographics (e.g., age, gender, rank, tenure, university). Scores are computed as item means for each construct. The target population is faculty; sampling is convenience, sample size is 230 as minimum desired sample of 182 respondents (Krejcie & dan Morgan, 1970), gathered through departmental mailing lists and on-site distribution. Participation is voluntary and anonymous, with informed consent obtained; incomplete responses are screened and removed per a predefined missing-data rule. Analytically, we report descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations), reliability, validity and Structural Equational Modelling (SEM) for structural model analysis.

4. Results

4.1 Demographic Analysis

Table 1 presents the demographic information of all 230 respondents. The respondents, representing different age groups, have varying levels of education, tenure, and positions within the organization, among both males and females.

Key Observations

- **Gender Representation:** There are significantly more male respondents (65%) than female respondents (35%).
- **Age Distribution:** Most respondents fall within the 36-45 age group, followed by the 26–35 age group.
- **Educational Qualification:** Maximum participants have a Masters & PhD Degree
- **Job Positions:** Mid-level positions have the highest representation among both genders, followed by senior-level positions.
- **Experience:** Most respondents have 6-10 years of experience.

Table 1. Demographic Information

Variables	Items	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	150	65%
	Female	80	35%
Age	18-25 years	30	13%
	26-35 years	66	28%
	36-45 years	79	34%
	46 & Above years	55	25%
Qualification	Bachelors	90	39%
	Masters & Above	140	61%
Tenure	1-5 years	64	28%
	6-10 years	92	40%
	11 %& Above	74	32%
Position	Lecturer	74	32 %
	Assistant Professor	71	31%
	Associate Professor	47	20%
	Professor	38	17%

4.2 Reliability and Validity

Convergent validity was assessed to establish the adequacy of the measurement model. Following Fornell and Larcker (1981), convergent validity is established with average variance extracted (AVE) exceeds 0.50 and is greater than the maximum shared variance (MSV). The results meet these criteria, indicating satisfactory convergent validity. To assess internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha was computed to assess the internal consistency of each construct. All scores exceeded the suggested 0.70 benchmark, confirming acceptable reliability for the study measures.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics & Reliability

Constructs	α	CR	AVE	Mean	SD
Inclusive Leadership	0.812	0.813	0.557	4.012	.829
Organizational Justice	0.848	0.848	0.647	3.982	.801
Perceived Diversity Climate	0.799	0.798	0.599	3.487	.715
Job Satisfaction	0.901	0.900	0.578	4.019	.740

Note. Average Variance Extracted (AVE); Cronbach Alpha (α); Composite Reliability (CR); Standard Deviation (SD)

4.3 Structural Model (Direct & Indirect Effects)

This study applied Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) to evaluate the complex interplay between the Inclusive Leadership and job satisfaction within the mechanism of organizational justice and perceived diversity climate. The choice of PLS-SEM reflects its suitability for capturing the multifaceted relationships inherent in this research.

Table 3. Path Coefficients

Path →	Coefficients	Result
H1. Inclusive Leadership → Organizational Justice	0.283***	Supported
H2. Organizational Justice → Perceived Diversity Climate	0.222***	Supported
H3. Perceived Diversity Climate → Job Satisfaction	0.136**	Supported
H4. Indirect Effects (IL → OJ → JS)	0.215**	Supported
(IL → PDC → JS)	0.150***	
(IL → OJ → PDC → JS)	0.167**	

Note. Inclusive Leadership (IL); Organizational Justice (OJ); Perceived Diversity Climate (PDC); Job Satisfaction (JS) * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.001$.

The structural model results indicate that inclusive leadership significantly and positive contributes in organizational justice ($\beta = 0.283$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H1. Organizational justice significantly predicts perceived diversity climate ($\beta = 0.222$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H2, while perceived diversity climate positively influences job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.136$, $p < 0.05$), supporting H3. Mediation analysis further reveals significant indirect effects of inclusive leadership on job satisfaction through organizational justice ($\beta = 0.215$, $p < 0.05$), through perceived diversity climate ($\beta = 0.150$, $p < 0.001$), and sequentially through organizational justice and perceived diversity climate ($\beta = 0.167$, $p < 0.05$), supporting H4.

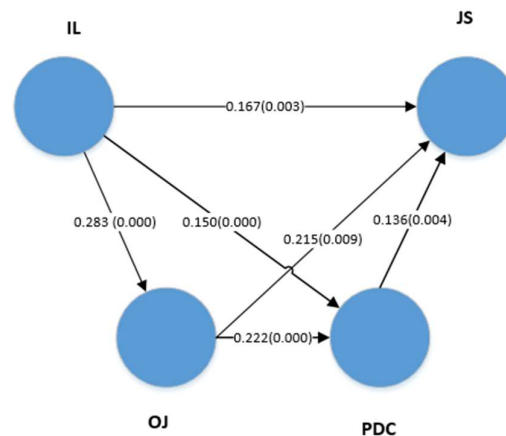


Figure 2. Structural Model

5. Discussion

The findings provide empirical support for H1, confirming that inclusive leadership has a positive and significant effect on organizational justice. This aligns with prior literature (Hanh Tran & Choi, 2019) showing that leaders who demonstrate openness, accessibility, and respect enhance employees' perceptions of fairness. Specifically, inclusive leaders reinforce distributive justice by ensuring equitable allocation of resources, procedural justice by promoting participatory decision-making, and interactional justice by communicating with dignity and transparency (Li et al., 2024). Grounded in Fairness Heuristic Theory (Lind et al., 2001), these results suggest that fairness cues from inclusive leaders' act as heuristics for

employees to assess the trustworthiness of organizational systems, particularly under conditions of uncertainty or power imbalance.

The results support H₂, indicating that organizational justice positively and significantly influences perceived diversity climate. This confirms that when employees notice fairness in outcomes, procedures, and interpersonal treatment, they are more likely to believe that the organization values diversity and fosters inclusion (Le et al., 2021). H₃ is also supported that a positive diversity climate significantly enhances job satisfaction (Hauret & Williams, 2020). Faculty who perceive their institution as equitable, inclusive, and respectful report higher levels of belonging, trust, and engagement.

The mediation analysis for H₄ further reveal that organizational justice and diversity climate sequentially mediates the relationship between inclusive leadership and job satisfaction. This suggests that fairness perceptions generated by inclusive leadership translate into stronger diversity climates, which in turn promote satisfaction. Distributive, procedural, and interactional justice are also considered key factors for employee perceptions of the organization's support for diversity and maintaining job satisfaction (Ashikali et al., 2021).

5.1 Theoretical Implications

This study extends Fairness Heuristic Theory to the higher education context, demonstrating that leadership behavior serves a primary source of fairness cues that shape justice perceptions. It contributes to organizational justice literature by showing how leader inclusivity translates into fairness judgments across distributive, procedural, and interactional dimensions. The findings contribute to the organizational justice literature by showing how leader inclusivity translate into fairness judgement across distributive, procedural, and interactional dimensions, reinforcing the idea that justice is not merely a structural or policy outcome but also a function of relational leadership practices. The results also integrate diversity climate into the justice literature, highlighting it as an important attitudinal outcome, that emerges when fairness is embedded in both decision-making and interpersonal treatment.

5.2 Practical Implications

For universities, the results underscore the importance of training and developing leaders who practice inclusivity. By being transparent, participative, and respectful, academic leaders can strengthen perceptions of fairness, which may in turn improve trust, morale, and engagement among faculty. For universities, ensuring fairness in decision-making, rewards, and interpersonal treatment is crucial to building a diversity-supportive climate. Leadership development programs should emphasize inclusive practices such as participative decision-making, transparent communication, and equitable resource distribution to enhance justice perceptions. By fostering a strong diversity climate, institutions can improve faculty satisfaction, reduce turnover intentions, and strengthen organizational commitment. Organizations should ensure fairness in rewards, workload distribution, and career advancement through transparent and unbiased criteria. Employee involvement in decision-making and standardized processes for appraisals and grievances can strengthen procedural justice. Leaders must model respectful, professional communication and be trained to uphold equitable treatment. Regular equity-focused training and open feedback channels can enhance trust, engagement, and morale. By addressing distributive, procedural, and interactional justice together, leadership can foster a fair, inclusive climate that boosts job satisfaction and commitment.

5.3 Limitations and Future Directions

Sampling Bias. The use of convenience sampling may have introduced selection bias, limiting the representation of sample. Further study should adopt probability sampling technique.

Cross Sectional Design. Data were collected at a single point in time, which prevents conclusions about causality and limits the ability to capture changes in perceptions. Further studies may employ longitudinal and time-lagged design.

Single-Sector and Context Specificity. The study focused on teaching faculty from limited number of universities. Upcoming studies can replicate the study in other sectors as well.

Model Scope. While the study explains key pathways in relationship between inclusive leadership and job satisfaction. Future research could incorporate additional mediating and moderating variables such as workload, personality traits to further enrich the understanding of these influences.

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