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

By

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Abstract

This study examines the role of leadership in promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) within organisations and its impact on organisational culture, using empirical evidence from companies in Pakistan. A quantitative research design was employed, collecting data through a survey questionnaire distributed to employees across various industries. The findings reveal that while diversity alone does not significantly influence organisational culture, inclusion and equity are strongly associated with positive cultural outcomes. The study also highlights the crucial role of leadership in effectively implementing DEI initiatives, which are essential for fostering a supportive and inclusive work environment. Limitations of the study include the use of self-reported data and the focus on a specific geographical context, which may limit the generalisability of the results. Future research should consider longitudinal studies and a broader scope to better understand the long-term and global impact of DEI practices on organisational culture.

Introduction

Organisational culture is one of the essential aspects of any organisation, especially on issues to do with DEI, which is normally influenced by the leaders. Hence, types of diversity in the Pakistani context with nuanced socio-cultural factors at workplaces mean that leadership intervention for DEI can bring about massive change in its organisational culture. Referring to the data from Pakistan Bureau of Statistics-2022 indicated that only 22% of the women are working in the formal sector reveal the existence of a gender divide (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2021). Further, according to the World Bank survey conducted in 2023, only 15% of organisations in Pakistan have defined and implemented DEI policies. Many of these statistics clearly show that it is high time for leadership to act on DEI issues with the goal of creating a better workplace environment (World Bank, 2023). It is noted that leadership in DEI is not just about having policies that promote Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the workplaces. The organisations' leadership in Pakistan that are not dormant regarding DEI initiatives can duplicate across organisations by encouraging diverse stakeholders' representation together with the recognition of equality opportunities (Wolbring and Nguyen, 2023). Such cultural transformation improves employee satisfaction and involvement besides energising innovation as well as organisational productivity. But the findings from Pakistan indicate that there is a rising level of consciousness of DEI, though it has not permeated the culture of organisations (Edmans, Flammer and Glossner, 2023). This research will seek to identify the ways in which leadership within the Pakistan context affects DEI initiatives and the effect it has on organisational culture; this will allow an understanding of the overall trajectory and challenges encountered in this endeavour.

Literature review

Leadership and organisational culture

Leadership and culture are two intertwined concepts, whereby leadership plays the roles in defining and maintaining culture in organisations. Tavares, (2024) has highlighted that various approaches of leadership including transformational leadership, transactional leadership and democratic leadership affect, and are affected by, the organisational culture.

According to Singh et al., (2023) organisations' culture is shaped and institutionalised by the actions, decisions and words of the leaders. Managers are considered to be the culture-builders of the organisational culture since they provide definitions of set goals, standards, and expectations of the employees at the workplace. This view goes with Zen et al., (2023) who state that affective organisational culture is especially cultivated by transformational leaders who encourage organisational members to embrace the vision, values and mission of the organisation. In a comparative study, Rojak et al., (2024) provided further support to this view by comparing the level of leadership and organisational culture across different industry type. This study established

that there was a positive correlation between transformational leadership and adaptive and innovative cultures that were found to have flexibility, risk-taking and change orientation. It would therefore be expected that organisations led by leaders possessing transformational characteristics, embrace organisation culture that encourages creativity and flexibility.

EDI at workplace

EDI is defined as the representation of inclusiveness, corporate and organisational practice that involves the rights of persons of definite age, colour, sexual preference, race, faith and gender besides other forms of marginalization and discrimination (Ince, 2023). EDI is not about mere diversity but how this diversity is embraced and appreciated at the workplace and within organisational and individual sphere. Singh et al., (2023) further explains that diversity refers to understanding, respecting and accepting people's variation in attributes for instance age, class, race, ethnicity, gender, and disability.

Jabeen, Hussain and Iqbal, (2023) establish the value of developing a favourable EDI climate in organisations stressing that such endeavours are conducive to positive results to all the parties concerned. Tavares, (2024) stated that when organisations are committed to implementing EDI, it does not only benefit minorities and other marginalised groups but also the employee workforce leading to better organisation performance. Ali et al.,(2023) noted that EDI enhanced organisational performance because it increase employee satisfaction, motivation, and turnover, all of which their survey also established were correlated with a strong policy. Also, Javed, (2024) indicated that EDI in the workplace is much more than diversity hiring where employers seek employees from diverse groups. Thus, actual EDI entails the adoption and implementation of equality policies as well as supporting equal practices in institutions. Based on Edmans, Flammer and Glossner, (2023) the extent to which EDI initiatives are mainstream into the organisational, institutional and structural practices then the effectiveness of such measures is not only enhanced but they become real and not a form of tokenism. Khan and Javaid, (2023) therefore depicts that there is the need for the formulation of organisational policies which can capture the ever-changing workforce demands and requirements with the aim of creating a favourable work culture.

Though diversity of employee populations may be instituted through recruitment policies, lack of effective policies that would embrace diversity can negatively impact the benefits that come with diversity at the workplace (Jabeen, Hussain and Iqbal, 2023). On the other hand, organisations that focus on enhancing the mainstreaming of EDI policies are likely to reap more benefits such as high employee productivity, enhanced satisfaction and overall better organisational performances (Edmans, Flammer and Glossner, 2023). This raises not only problems associated with searching for inclusion of personnel or other employees, regardless of their race or gender, but also the

problems associated with the acceptance of such personnel into an organisation and the respect for their rights and opportunities by other members of the organisation.

The Role of Leadership in Promoting DEI

It cannot be overemphasised that Leadership is central to DEI, and several pieces of research have attempted to explicate how leadership behaviour influences an organisation's progress in cultivating an inclusive organisational culture. The study by Javed, (2024) looked at the effect of transformational leadership on diversity efforts. The authors identified that where the leader subset can be categorised as transformational, that is, inspirational, motivational and questioning of the norm, then the organisation is likely to exhibit a strong DEI. It means that transformational leaders define a new and better model of organisational relations, demand organisational members' support for equal treatment, and personally demonstrate substantial appreciation to diversity (Saleem, Tahir and Batool, 2021). Thus, promoting DEI initiatives helps such leaders not only improve employees' engagement but also increase organisational effectiveness, as many people believe that their opinion is valued by the organisation's management.

On the other hand, another study conducted by Edmans, Flammer and Glossner, (2023) compared the leadership possibilities and the way it may influence diverse employees 'experience through the concept of cultural diversity in work group. The research therefore concluded that leadership strategies that involve use of relational leadership that aims at creating positive rapport with employees are effective in the promotion of inclusiveness. These leaders involve themselves with employees from different backgrounds, pay attention to the problems they may be facing and try to see that they are given a voice in the organisation (Ahmad, Ozturk and Tatli, 2024). The study also showed that depth of relational leadership and genuine concern of managers for DEI is a key for overcoming the barriers towards diverse inclusiveness and building inclusive environment for employees (Saleem, Tahir and Batool, 2021).

Raza and Awang, (2021) although both transformational and the relational leadership styles can lead to promotion of DEI, they work in different ways. Transformational leadership fosters DEI as it has a vision that the employees embrace and follow while relational leadership accomplishes similar objectives due to appealing to relationships between people (Ahmad, Ozturk and Tatli, 2024). Both models, however, stress the role of leadership in not only the DEI policies enactment but also in integrating these principles in organisational culture.

Conceptual framework and hypothesis

For this research study, three independent variables have been identified namely; Diversity, Inclusion and Equity and the dependent variable is Organisational Culture. In turn, the framework emphasises that diversity management, which implies recognition of the differences among the workforce and valuing those differences, inclusion, which means ensuring that every employee

feels he is welcome and encouraged to participate, and equity, that mean fair treatment of all the workforce and providing equal opportunities for them, are the key factors that underlie the positive organizational culture (Edmans, Flammer and Glossner, 2023). The study assumes that each of the DEI components positively affects organizational culture, and that where these components are embraced, an organization will experience enhanced organisational culture that is more supportive, cohesive and dynamic.

Independent variables	Dependent variable
• Diversity • Inclusion	• organisational culture
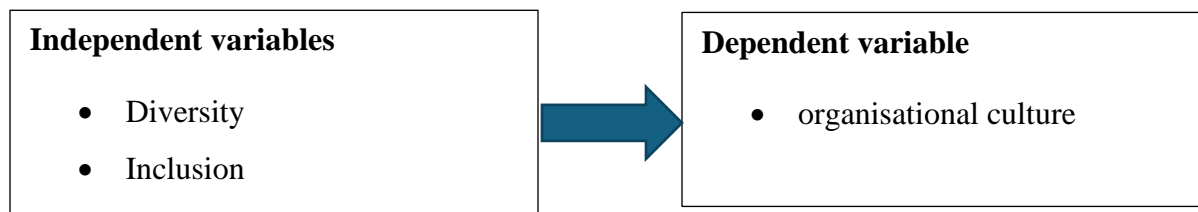
- • H1: Diversity has a strong and positive relation with organisational culture
- • H2: Inclusion has a strong and positive relation with organisational culture
- • H3: Equity has a strong and positive relation with organisational culture

Method

Research design

Using the quantitative research methodology approach, this study aims at establishing the nature and extent of leadership commitment to DEI and its organisations' culture. The reason as to why quantitative was adopted was to make it possible for the researcher to attain numerical data that can be analysed statistically to test and establish the relationship between the variables in question (Pandey and Pandey, 2021). This method has the advantage of being particularly suited for evaluating the levels of leadership practices impact on DEI results in different organisations.

Data collection and participants

In this case the data was collected through survey questionnaires returned by the respondents who include employees of different organisations of Pakistan. In the survey, respondents were asked questions that focused on understanding their view of DEI, organisational culture and leadership in DEI. The participants were selected with the help of convenience sampling with the focus on the types of industries and the sizes of organisations in order to include various experiences of employees. Likert scale questions were applied during the survey in order to measure things like diversity, equity and inclusion as well as the organisational culture in the surveyed organisations

in order to maintain consistency with the response data and make possible the use of statistical analysis.

Data analysis

PLS-SEM with the SmartPLS software was used for data analysis where the PLS-SEM is a technique for statistical analysis that is increasingly used in numerous fields (Verma, Verma and Abhishek, 2024; Kumari et al., 2023). It was also selected because of it is suitable for models with multiple variables and is ideal for small to medium samples. Understanding and testing the measurement model was done by using SmartPLS to establish the reliability and validity and reflecting the path coefficients and the relationship between the individual constructs (Dubey and Kothari, 2022). These findings offered a view about leadership's effect on DEI and the effect on organisational culture in the Pakistani industry.

Ethical considerations

The survey was completely anonymous and voluntary, and respondents were given prior and clear information regarding the nature of the study, their rights of withdrawal at any given time and guarantee of anonymity as well as confidentiality (Ocaña-Fernández and Fuster-Guillén, 2021) Participants were asked to give their consent before they filled the questionnaires, and were thus fully informed. The quantitative data collected was kept secure and was only used for the purpose of analysing results for this study by the research team (Al-Ababneh, 2020). Also, the study was conducted with the low risk to participants and it was compliant with the ethical rules and principals thus its purpose respected their rights and dignity.
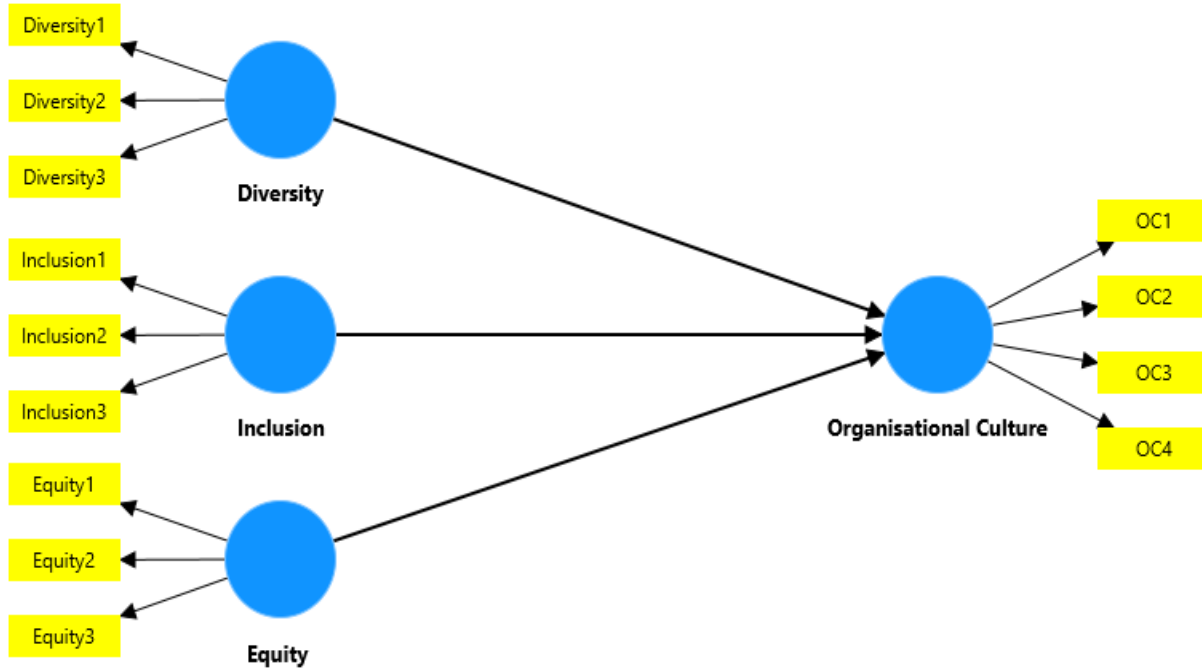
Analysis and Discussion

Factor loadings

Figure 1 Factor loadings

	Outer loadings
Diversity1 <- Diversity	0.857
Diversity2 <- Diversity	0.900
Diversity3 <- Diversity	0.858
Equity1 <- Equity	0.894
Equity2 <- Equity	0.929
Equity3 <- Equity	0.901
Inclusion1 <- Inclusion	0.828
Inclusion2 <- Inclusion	0.923

Inclusion3 <- Inclusion	0.857
OC1 <- Organisational Culture	0.814
OC2 <- Organisational Culture	0.822
OC3 <- Organisational Culture	0.824
OC4 <- Organisational Culture	0.835

The outer loadings provided for the constructs of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Organisational Culture presented a good model, all the indicators have loadings higher than the accepted level of 0. 7. As for the loadings for Diversity, it can be seen that all the items used to measure it (Diversity1: 0. 857, Diversity2: 0. 900, Diversity3: 0. 858) are quite reliable and reflect the meaning of this construct. Similarly, equity constructed is significantly affirmed by its indicators whereby the reliability of the measure is confirmed by the data, with Equity1: 0.894, Equity 2: 0.929 and Equity 3: 0.901 indicating that the items used to test equity are not only reliable but are also highly related to the equity construct. This high level of loading across the diversity and equity constructs suggest that the model specification is good in this study because the measures used to define the latent constructs here were good in reflecting the intended construct, and any analysis that will be based on these measures will be both valid and reliable.

In addition, the outer loading values are also higher and significant for inclusion construct (Inclusion1 = 0. 828, Inclusion2 = 0. 923, Inclusion3 = 0. 857), which shows that the items used were properly measuring the chosen aspect with reference to organisational environment. The nature of the organisational culture which the construct comprises of four indices (OC1= 0.814, OC2 = 0.822, OC3 = 0.824, OC4 = 0.835) present slightly lower though robust factor loadings to confirm that these items are appropriate for the assessment of the construct. The demonstration of these loadings' reliability across all the constructs strengthens confidence in the overall measurement model and, specifically, suggests that each indicated variable captures the construct in question accurately. Such a high level of reliability and validity is important to make sure that when all the constructs dealing with diversity, equity, inclusion, and organisational culture are further measured and used in the analysis, they are accurately measured ready to ensure that all conclusions that are made in the future are valid.

Quality criteria

Figure 2 Quality criteria

	R-square	R-square adjusted
Organisational Culture	0.191	0.185

The R-square value of 0.191 for Organisational Culture indicates that the model explains 19.1% of the variance in Organisational Culture, which suggests a modest explanatory power of the predictors. The adjusted R-square, slightly lower at 0.185, accounts for the number of predictors in the model, providing a more conservative estimate by adjusting for the possibility of overfitting. While these values indicate that a portion of the variability in Organisational Culture is explained by the model, a significant amount of variance remains unexplained, suggesting that other factors not included in the model may also play a critical role in shaping Organisational Culture. This level of explanatory power is typical in social sciences research, where human behavior and organisational dynamics are influenced by a wide range of complex, interrelated factors.

Construct reliability and validity

Figure 3 Construct reliability and validity

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Diversity	0.842	0.845	0.905	0.760
Equity	0.894	0.896	0.934	0.824
Inclusion	0.839	0.856	0.903	0.757
Organisational Culture	0.843	0.853	0.894	0.679

The analysis of the metrics of reliability and validity of the Constructs of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Organisational Culture show that the measurement quality is quite high. Cronbach's alpha values are expressed in the scale of 0. 839 to 0. 894 across the constructs showing that the

items are highly reliable within the constructs for the study, values above 0.7 are considered normal, that is why they are accepted. Lastly, composite reliability (rho_a and rho_c) can also provide for the reliability of the constructs having the values higher than 0. Again all the items had a Cronbach alpha value of 8, which indicated that the within constructs reliability was high. The AVE values, the indicator of the proportion of variance in the construct compared to the error variance, also possess considerable reliability and varies from 0. 679 to 0. 824. However, the Organisational Culture construct has Standard Deviation' and 'Average Variance Extracted' (AVE) of 0.679, it is above the minimum level required to represent the construct hence indicating that it has the capability of capturing most of the variance in the construct. By and large, these indices show that the measurement model accurately and reliably measures the intended constructs.
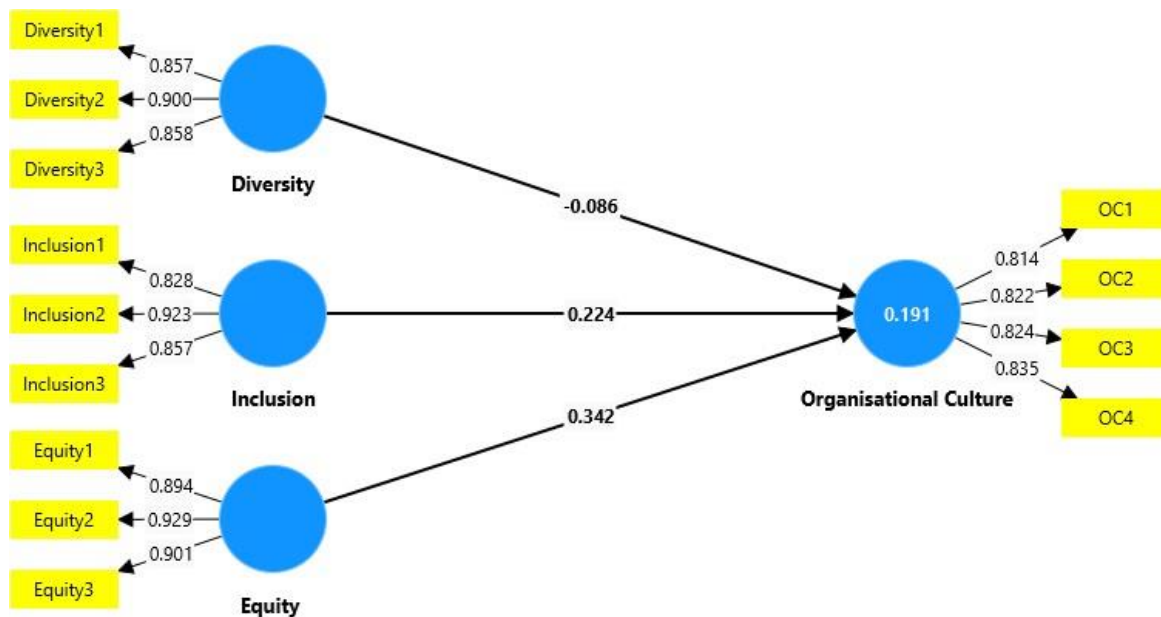
Path coefficients

Figure 4 path coefficients

Figure 5 Path coefficients

	Path coefficients	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	p-values
Diversity -> Organisational Culture	-0.086	0.072	1.200	0.230
Equity -> Organisational Culture	0.342	0.070	4.904	0.000
Inclusion -> Organisational Culture	0.224	0.067	3.326	0.001

The path coefficients provide further understanding for the connection between Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Organisational Culture. When it comes to the impact of diversity on Organisational Culture the path coefficient is -0. 086 with the standard deviation of 0. 072, this giving us a t-statistics of 1. 200 and a p-value of 0.230. This means that, the relationship between Diversity and Organisational Culture is not significant, in the sense that the p-value is greater than 0. 05. This raises questions as to whether, in the framework of this model, Diversity has no effect on Organisational Culture, and this negative sign indicates that higher diversity is related to less favourable perception of organisational culture though statistically insignificant. However, there are displayed the relations between the Organisational Culture and Paths, originating from Equity and Inclusion. The results proved that the path coefficient from Equity to Organisational Culture is 0. 342; SD = 0. 070 a value which yields a t-statistic of 4. 904, and p < 0. 000. This strongly positive and statistically significant path coefficient indicates that level of Equity propels perceptions of Organisational Culture in a related manner. Likewise the value of the path coefficient for the connection between Inclusion and Organisational Culture is 0.224, while the standard deviation came to 0.067 and the p- value 0. 001. This means that there is a strong positive correlation between Inclusion and Organisational Culture which suggests that the extent of inclusion is directly related to the level of positivity to the organisational culture.

H1: Diversity has a strong and positive relation with organisational culture
The findings did not provide evidence for and or against the hypothesis 1. The result also showed that the path coefficient for Diversity to Organisational Culture was -0. 086, at p < 0. 230; it can therefore be concluded that there is no a statistically significant relationship between the two variables. Thus, in line with the findings of this work, diversity, without more, is not capable of strengthening or improving the organisational culture of JC, positively.

H2: Inclusion has a strong and positive relation with organisational culture

The results of this study also offered adequate support to the hypothesis 2. The standardised estimate of path between Inclusion and Organisational Culture was 0. 224, this value has a statistically significant difference with the p-value of 0. 001. This research finding suggest that one would get better inclusion in workplace which in turn has positive association with the improvement of organisational culture. This is because the findings underscore the significance of employees' inclusion in the organisations, since this, positively impacts the organisational culture.

H3: Equity has a strong and positive relation with organisational culture

The path coefficient from Equity to Organisational Culture was 0. 342, at a highly significant $p< .001$ level of significance. High correlation was noted for the compared variables portraying a strong and positive correlation. This shows that equity which mean bear considerable and positive influence on the organisational culture. Hence, it shows that equity is crucial to building an appreciable organisational culture, which re-echoes leadership's call to duty to ensure everyone is treated fairly in the organisation for the desired harmonious climate and optimum productivity.

Discussion

The Influence of Leadership on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Initiatives

Zen et al., (2023), posits that, leadership is central to the implementation and effectiveness of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts and its effects on culture. The results of this study reconfirm the prior literature which highlights the role of leadership in establishing and supporting DEI in organisations. Whilst Tavares, (2024) posit that only leaders with high levels of DEI commitment establish organisational structures that foster the recognition of diverse points of views, as well as the promotion of integrated inclusion practices. In addition, it was found that the concept of transformational leadership that allows motivating the employees to embrace the vision and values of the organisation is most effective for DEI (Singh et al., 2023). In this study, leadership on DEI initiatives supported the increase in the improved organisational culture when leaders are fully implementing these initiatives to have a positive influence on the organisation as well as employees' satisfaction.

Impact of diversity culture of an organisation

In light of increasing focus on diversity in the workplace, the results of the present study point to the fact that diversity does not appear to impact organisational culture positively. This is in line with other studies done in identifying that the issue of translating diverse workforces into positive cultural results is not easily achieved. As Saleem, Tahir and Batool, (2021) stated that failure to approach diversity as a process of inclusion may not bring critical returns in respect to organisational culture, but instead, cause division rather than integration. Lack of any positive correlation in this study adds to the argument that diversity, while affecting recruitment benefits,

has to be supported by specific efforts aimed at making the organisation diverse-friendly for diversity to work its magic on organisational culture (Singh et al., 2023).

Role of Inclusion and equity for organisation culture.

As opposed to the case of diversity, however, both the results on inclusion and equity showed that these two had a positive correlation with organisational culture. The above findings concur with the existing literature that encourages incorporation and equal chances for the development of good working culture. According to Tavares, (2024), it is important that integration is practiced in an organisation in which all employees feel welcome and embraced to take part in activities performed in that organisation. As Raza, and Awang, (2021) opines, equal practices on the people enhance or guarantee fairness on employees and this leads to increased commitment by the people to their work organisations. These significant positive findings further affirm the importance of Inclusive and equitable work setting that is required to foster an organisational climate of positivity and support for the employees.

Conclusion

This research shows that diversity by itself does not necessarily promote the organisation culture but practices that relate to inclusion and equity are important in creating a healthy workplace environment. The results underscore the leadership role in advancing robust DEI practice for a positive organisational culture and organisational workplace ambiance improvements. Efficient DEI advocacy shall be entrusted in leaders since they dictate organisational culture and ensure all the stakeholders feel encouraged.

Limitations

This research has several limitations which should be mentioned for the sake of clarity. Self-reported survey data can be quite biased, and the study does exercise of a particular area, i. e. Pakistani respondents which could be differed in other geographic areas or different culture. Third, the current study was a cross-sectional one, and this limits the chances of establishing causal relationships between DEI approaches and matters relating to organisational culture since it does not allow the observation of such aspects of an organisation at their various stages or developmental phases.

Future Research

Therefore, future studies should use a longitudinal research design in order to capture the effects of DEI strategies on organisational culture after a longer period. Future studies need to include variations in the type of industries and cultural settings to increase external validity and have a better picture of the extent to which DEI impacts the global society (Javed, 2024). Besides, failure

could be extended to research the various forms of leadership approaches to more understand how leadership can be leveraged to enhance the implementation of DEI in organisations.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

	IV-1 Diversity

1.	Company believe that the employees are very important especially those from different backgrounds because they deserve to be included in the decision-making process.
2.	The experience as well as before and during the employment relation is characterised by racially and ethnically sensitive environment. '
3.	At our organisation it doesnot matter if the employee is young or old, male or female, or belongs to any race as they are provided with equal opportunities to learn and grow in their careers.
	IV-2 Inclusion
4.	Everyone at the workplace enjoys dignity and is appreciated and accepted irrespective of who they are.
5.	At our organisation people are empowered to speak out, make contributions to meetings, and be part of the decision-making process.
6.	The company also goes an extra mile to get views from the minorities to be incorporated in the organisational frameworks.
	IV-3 Equity
7.	Employment in our organisation with regards to promotions and salary are determined by performance, the ability and not by orientation or ethnicity
8.	The organisation offers guide to how it is possible to make certain that all employees can occupy the same opportunity in the career path.

9.	The nature of our workplace is that there are clear and fair mechanisms for the consideration of grievances of discriminations and bias.
	IV-4 Organisational culture
10.	The organisational culture here supports the sharing of information and sharing of ideas right from the top management to the lower ranks of the company
11.	It is also true that employees of the organisation have satisfaction of their inputs being appreciated by the organisation.
12.	It also supports and fosters the values of cooperation and integration within the employees so as to accomplish organisational objectives and targets.
13.	The culture of the organisation is friendly towards flexibility in the workplace with regard to individual's personal time