

Examining Individual Behaviors towards Inclusive and Diverse Leadership in Universities: A Study on Attitudes and Perceptions

Abstract

This study examines how behaviors of influential and affected participants contribute to an inclusive workplace climate and how leadership diversity impacts university performance. Using a cross-sectional survey, data were collected from employees at various Pakistani universities via a self-administered online questionnaire comprising Likert-scale items on leadership diversity, engagement, and workplace behavior. The sample included 100 respondents, most aged 18–25 (36%) and predominantly male (56%). Results reveal a strong need for institutions to strengthen leadership skills, adopt inclusive leadership styles, improve communication, and actively promote diversity. Findings show apparent gaps in leadership effectiveness and representation, underscoring the importance of increasing diversity in leadership positions. The study recommends that higher education institutions prioritize inclusive leadership development, enhance communication practices, and implement meaningful diversity and inclusion initiatives.

Keywords: Leadership, Diversity, Inclusion, Employee, Satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, diversity and inclusion have become central concerns for organizations operating in an increasingly globalized world. A diverse workforce enhances innovation, creativity, and problem-solving by bringing together individuals with distinct backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives. Within this global corporate environment, “inclusion” has emerged as a critical component for sustaining competitive advantage, promoting employee well-being, and enabling organizational success. Inclusion is described as a positive diversity management strategy that emphasizes valuing individual differences rather than treating diversity as a challenge to be corrected (Roberson, 2006; Shore et al., 2009; Zanoni & Janssens, 2007). It satisfies employees’ simultaneous needs for individuality and belonging, enabling them to express themselves authentically while still feeling accepted (Shore et al., 2011). Organizations that apply inclusive principles move beyond merely tolerating diversity toward cultivating equitable spaces where all workers are viewed as “insiders” (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Hope Pelled et al., 1999). However, diversity alone is insufficient. To truly harness its potential, organizations must intentionally foster inclusive work environments that respect each employee. Leadership plays a central role in driving this cultural transformation. Research reveals that diverse leadership teams contribute significantly to improved innovation, decision-making, and organizational profitability. For instance, McKinsey & Company reports that organizations with gender-diverse leadership are 21% more likely to achieve above-average profitability. In universities, diverse leadership not only strengthens

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organizational performance but also signals institutional commitment to equity and inclusion. However, sustainable inclusion requires systems for employee voice. Regular employee surveys, focus groups, town halls, and diversity training enable institutions to understand concerns and co-create inclusive work climates. Universities that consistently act on employee feedback tend to achieve higher engagement, retention, and overall performance. In a rapidly globalizing world, diversity and inclusion have become essential for institutional survival and innovation. Universities, as knowledge-driven organizations, must recognize the strategic importance of inclusion for enhancing their overall effectiveness (Brannen & Thomas, 2010; Chrobot-Mason et al., 2013; Mor Barak, 2011; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). Leadership plays a pivotal role in implementing inclusive policies and shaping inclusive organizational cultures. Shore et al. (2011) identify inclusive leadership as a key contextual factor influencing employees' experiences of inclusion. Global debates—led by organizations such as Catalyst, Deloitte, and Korn Ferry—emphasize the influence of leadership behaviours on workplace inclusivity (Ferdman et al., 2020). Inclusive leaders support participation, representation, psychological safety, and equitable treatment for all team members.

This study aims to examine:

- how leadership diversity shapes employee experiences,
- how employees perceive working under leaders from diverse backgrounds, and
- Which institutional strategies are most effective for building inclusive leadership pipelines in higher education?

Inclusive leadership is associated with psychological safety (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006), creativity (Carmeli et al., 2010), error learning (Ye et al., 2019), and work engagement (Choi et al., 2015). Nevertheless, conceptual clarity around inclusive leadership remains limited (Boekhorst, 2015; Shore & Chung, 2021). Diversity in leadership also predicts better decision-making, higher innovation, and improved retention, key drivers of organizational success. However, leadership diversity alone is not enough. Sustainable inclusion requires continuous feedback systems, open dialogue, and actionable responses to employee concerns. Through surveys, focus groups, resource groups, and training, organizations can foster equitable, respectful, and high-performing workplaces.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To investigate the relationship between diverse leadership and employee satisfaction, retention, and engagement.
2. To explore employees' comfort and openness toward working under leaders from diverse backgrounds.
3. To identify effective strategies for attracting, retaining, and promoting diverse talent in university leadership structures.

Significance of Study:

Understanding the impacts of diversity in leadership is critical for modern educational institutions. Universities that promote diversity benefit from enhanced creativity, improved productivity, and more substantial competitiveness. A diverse leadership team ensures

representation of multiple perspectives and supports equitable decision-making processes. Diversity also strengthens employee engagement, job satisfaction, and retention, all of which contribute to organizational performance. However, achieving meaningful diversity and inclusion requires ongoing institutional commitment and evidence-based strategies. This research provides insights into the challenges universities face and highlights practical ways to build inclusive and sustainable leadership structures.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a **cross-sectional survey research design** to examine employees' perceptions of leadership diversity, inclusive behaviours, and workplace climate within universities in Pakistan. A cross-sectional design was considered appropriate because it allows the collection of data at a single point in time, enabling the researcher to capture existing patterns, attitudes, and associations among variables without manipulating the study environment.

Sampling Technique

A convenience sampling technique was adopted to recruit participants from different academic and administrative departments. This non-probability sampling method was chosen for its practicality and accessibility, especially in university settings, where reaching diverse employee groups required flexibility. Although convenience sampling limits generalizability, it allows efficient data collection within resource and time constraints.

Sample Size

A total of **250** university employees were initially approached through an online Google Forms link distributed via institutional email and professional networks. Of these, 100 participants completed the survey, yielding a 40% response rate. The final sample size of 100 was sufficient for conducting correlational and regression analyses, meeting minimum statistical requirements for exploratory studies.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through a **self-administered online questionnaire** explicitly designed for this study. The instrument comprised close-ended items measured on a Likert scale to assess the following key constructs:

- **Leadership Diversity** perceptions of representation and inclusivity within leadership structures
- **Employee Engagement:** levels of involvement, enthusiasm, and commitment to work
- **Inclusive Behaviours:** employees' experiences with fairness, respect, and recognition
- **Workplace Climate** overall sense of belongingness, openness, and psychological safety

The online format enabled participants to complete the survey anonymously and at their convenience, promoting honest and unbiased responses.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics (mean, frequency, standard deviation) were used to summarize participants' demographic characteristics and overall response patterns. Inferential analyses, including correlation, multiple regression, and factor analyses, were performed to examine relationships among variables, test hypotheses, and explore underlying constructs in leadership diversity and inclusion. These analyses helped determine the extent to which leadership diversity predicts engagement, retention, and workplace climate outcomes.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical research standards. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, voluntary nature, and the right to withdraw without penalty.

Informed consent was obtained electronically before participation. Confidentiality was ensured by not collecting any personal identifiers, and data were stored securely with restricted access. Additionally, the study design minimized any potential psychological or professional risks to participants.

Theoretical Framework:

Inclusive leadership centres on leaders' responsibility to meet employees' needs for both individuality and belonging, particularly in diverse workplaces. Nembhard and Edmondson (2006) first defined inclusive leadership as "*words and deeds by a leader that indicate an invitation and appreciation for others' contributions*" (p. 927). This was later expanded by Carmeli et al. (2010), who emphasized leaders' *visibility, accessibility, and availability* in their interactions with followers. Building on this foundation, Randel et al. (2018) conceptualised inclusive leadership as supporting employees as valued group members through ensuring fairness and equity, encouraging shared decision-making, and promoting diverse contributions.

The behavioral leadership theory provides an important theoretical anchor for understanding inclusive leadership. Behavioural theorists argue that leadership effectiveness is shaped not by inherent traits but by observable behaviours (Sergio, 2008). This perspective maintains that leaders are *made rather than born* and that anyone can learn effective leadership behaviours (Indeed Editorial Team, 2021). Classic studies at Ohio State University (1940s) and the University of Michigan (1950s) identified key leadership behaviours that differentiate effective leaders, shifting focus away from traits to actions. Several foundational concepts further enrich the understanding of inclusive leadership. Randel et al.'s (2018) work builds on Shore et al. (2011) and Brewer's Optimal Distinctiveness Theory, proposing that inclusion requires balancing employees' need for belonging with their need for uniqueness. Workplace diversity frameworks such as the discrimination-and-fairness perspective highlight the importance of equitable treatment, equal opportunities, and unbiased practices, all of which are embedded in inclusive leadership. Similarly, the integration-and-learning perspective views diversity as a resource that enhances learning, adaptation, and innovation (Ely & Thomas, 2001). These ideas are reflected in Kuknor and Bhattacharya's characterization of inclusive leadership behaviours, especially the development of learning-oriented

environments for diverse groups. Within this study, people-oriented leadership aligns closely with inclusive leadership. People-oriented leaders prioritise relationship-building, communication, and interpersonal sensitivity, enabling them to address employees' needs at all levels. By fostering trust, support, and motivation, people-oriented leaders create conditions in which employees feel respected, valued, and empowered to contribute (Indeed Editorial Team, 2021). This approach complements the principles of inclusive leadership, particularly in academic institutions where diversity, collaboration, and shared engagement play central roles.

Theoretical Framework of Inclusion:

The purpose of leadership, including inclusive leadership, is to bring about change and mould the future. Beyond this, inclusive leadership emphasises the joint creation of a vision, a comprehensive understanding of oneself and one's surroundings, the creation and maintenance of connections, and the ongoing improvement of one's character (Leadership, 2018).

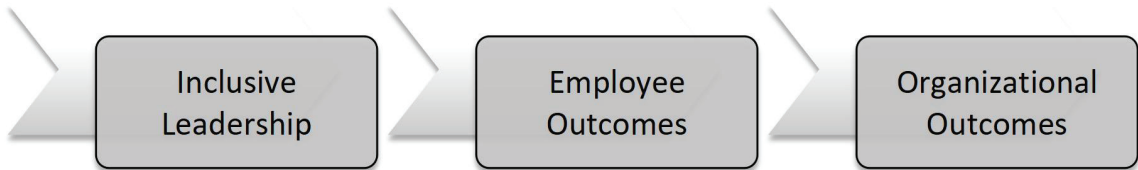


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Inclusive Leadership

According to psychologist Edwin Hollander, inclusive leadership is about building connections that benefit both parties. It takes "doing things with people, rather than to people" to reach this next level of leadership. He goes on to say that this approach breaks with the long-standing practice of emphasising the leader's attributes rather than attending to followers' needs and perceptions. According to him, inclusive leadership is far more focused on including followers than on using them as tools for manipulating people in positions of authority. For inclusive leadership to be successfully implemented, respect, acknowledgment, responsiveness, and accountability are essential (Joseph et al., 2020). Another Author and consultant, Frederic Laloux, discusses a non-hierarchical system in which self-management structures and procedures are established. He defines a leader as someone who helps others develop their leadership skills and sense of autonomy. To empower someone, that person must be clever or honourable enough to cede some of his power. Laloux thinks it is feasible to establish a company in which there is no distinction between those in positions of power and those in positions of weakness. Additionally, he argues that a "sense and respond" strategy should be used instead of the "predict and control system" because the world has grown more complicated (Joseph et al., 2020).

Figure 2: Inclusive Leadership Theoretical Framework

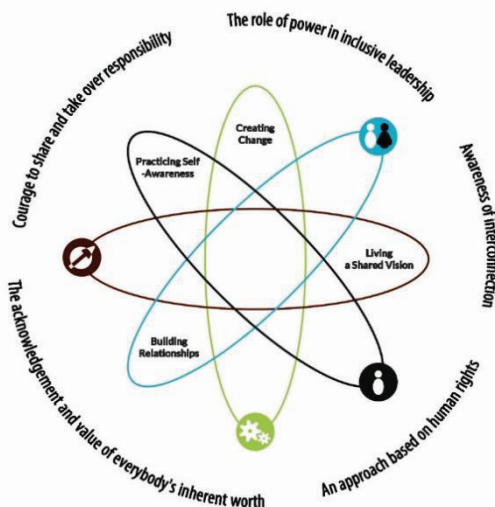


Figure 3: Inclusion Framework (Jagers, 2019)

	Low Belongingness	High Belongingness
Low Value in Uniqueness	<p>Exclusion</p> <p>Individual is not treated as an organizational insider with unique value in the work group but there are other employees or groups who are insiders.</p>	<p>Assimilation</p> <p>Individual is treated as an insider in the work group when they conform to organizational/dominant culture norms and downplay uniqueness.</p>
High Value in Uniqueness	<p>Differentiation</p> <p>Individual is not treated as an organizational insider in the work group but their unique characteristics are seen as valuable and required for group/ organization success.</p>	<p>Inclusion</p> <p>Individual is treated as an insider and also allowed/encouraged to retain uniqueness within the work group.</p>

Levels of Inclusive and Diverse Leadership:

According to research, inclusive leaders who are accessible and transparent provide their staff members with chances to advance their knowledge, skills, and cognitive function. These have also been shown to affect both personal and professional resources that support sentiments of job engagement (Kopperud et al., 2014). In more recent studies, it has been argued that leadership is crucial for fostering employee work engagement because it tends to generate a positive atmosphere that supports engagement (Choi et al., 2015). Leaders perform functions as drivers of motivation and pleasure for workers. In other words, as it fosters connections at all organizational levels so that tasks are carried out to the advantage of both parties, IL may be ideally suited to creating EE (Sugiyama, Cavanagh, Esch, Bilmoria, & Brown, 2016).

According to the Social Exchange Theory (SET), when one person does something for another that is of value to them, they are expected to provide something similarly valuable for return (Blau, 1964). As a result, the relationship between the leader and the follower is said to develop into a reciprocal one (Strom et al., 2014). In essence, SET is a process that involves "transactions" or simply "exchange" and is two-sided, mutually reliant, and mutually rewarding (Blau, 1964). According to an IL style viewpoint, relationships are viewed as a two-way leader-follower interaction reliant on respect, acknowledgment, responsiveness, and accountability (Hollander, 2012).

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The discussion elaborates on the objectives using the findings. The quantitative results of the study are presented through a discussion of the survey participants' demographic information. The important tables and graphs for pictorial presentation of results are also attached below.

Table 1: Demographic Information of participants

Variables	Categories	Statistics	
		<i>f</i>	%
Age		100	100
	18-25	36	36
	26-35	26	26
	36-45	16	16
	46-55	22	22
Gender	Male	56	56
	Female	44	44
Position	Entry-level employee	60	60
	Middle-level employee	28	28
	Senior-level employee	6	6
	Executive/coordinator role	6	6
Province	Punjab	20	20
	KPK	28	28
	Sindh	10	10
	Balochistan	10	10
	GB	4	4
Tenure in Organization	Less than 1 year	80	80
	1-3 years	8	8
	4-6 years	6	6
	7-10 years	6	6
Higher Education Institute	University	70	70
	College	30	30

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the analytic sample (N = 100). The age distribution is skewed toward early-career cohorts: 36% were aged 18–25, and a further 26%

were 26–35 years old, together accounting for almost two-thirds of respondents. Mid-career (36–45) and mature staff (46–55) comprised 16% and 22%, respectively.

Females represented 44% of the sample and males 56%, yielding a gender split adequate for comparative analyses. Positionally, the majority were entry-level employees (60%), with middle-level staff contributing 28%; senior-level faculty/administrators and executive/co-ordinator roles each constituted only 6%.

Geographically, participants were recruited from five administrative regions of Pakistan. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) supplied the largest share (28%), followed by Punjab (20%). Sindh and Balochistan each contributed 10%, while Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) accounted for 4%. Organisational tenure was heavily concentrated in the first employment year: 80% reported less than 12 months of service, 8% between 1 and 3 years, and 12% had four or more years of service. Finally, 70% of respondents were employed at public-sector universities and 30% at affiliated degree colleges, reflecting the dual-sector structure of Pakistani higher education. From the objective one, i.e., investigate the relationship between diverse leadership and employee satisfaction, retention, and engagement, we can see the level of employee satisfaction with current leadership.

Table 2: How would you rate your supervisor's leadership skills? Scale (1-4)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Good	60	60.0	60.0	60.0
	Fine	10	10.0	10.0	70.0
	Poor	30	30.0	30.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

The survey opened with an evaluation: “How satisfied are you with the leadership and management in your organisation?” Only 60% of respondents selected the two positive categories (“Very satisfied” 50%; “Satisfied” 10%), whereas 40 % declared themselves “Dissatisfied”. In higher-education contexts where transformational and participatory styles are normative, a two-fifths dissatisfaction rate is conspicuous and signals that the status quo is failing a significant minority. When the same respondents graded their supervisor’s concrete behaviours, the pattern persisted: 30% rated overall leadership skills “Poor,” and another 18% said their contributions are “Rarely” recognised. Taken together, these items establish a baseline of mediocre leadership quality against which any diversity intervention can be measured.

Table 3: What leadership style do you think your supervisor adopts?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Authoritarian	60	60.0	60.0
	Democratic	30	30.0	30.0
	Servant	10	10.0	10.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0

Table 4: How effective is your supervisor at communicating with their team?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very Effective	60	60.0	60.0	60.0
	Somewhat Effective	30	30.0	30.0	90.0
	Not Effective	10	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

In tables 3 and 4, the respondents were asked to project their satisfaction onto a counterfactual diverse leadership team. Two items capture the affective component of engagement:

“To what extent has a diverse leadership team contributed to increased employee engagement and retention?” 70% agreed (40% strongly, 30% somewhat).

“Has leadership diversity positively impacted your job performance?” 60% answered “Yes, positively”; no respondent claimed an adverse effect.

Statistically, these are single-item measures, but their face validity is high: employees are not merely endorsing a socially desirable statement; they are retrospectively (or prospectively) linking diversity to their own motivation and performance. The absence of counter-arguing responses (zero “Strongly disagree” or “Negative impact”) is particularly telling in a 100-case sample and suggests a ceiling effect in favour of diversity.

Table 5:

How effective do you think your higher education institute is at promoting diversity and inclusion in its leadership and in its policies and practices?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very Effective	20	20.0	20.0	20.0
	Somewhat Effective	60	60.0	60.0	80.0
	Not Effective	20	20.0	20.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Table 6:

How well do your supervisor support and develop their team members?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very Well	50	50.0	50.0	50.0
	Well	30	30.0	30.0	80.0
	Not Well	10	10.0	10.0	90.0
	Do not know	10	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Table 7:***Do you feel that your supervisor recognizes and values your contributions to the team?***

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	40	40.0	40.0	40.0
	Sometimes	42	42.0	42.0	82.0
	Rarely	18	18.0	18.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Table 8:***How satisfied are you with the leadership and management in your organization?***

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very Satisfied	50	50.0	50.0	50.0
	Satisfied	10	10.0	10.0	60.0
	Dissatisfied	40	40.0	40.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

From the above tables, moving from the individual to the collective, 40 % agreed that “a diverse leadership team positively impacts the productivity of the university as a whole”. In comparison, the remaining 60 % were neutral. Crucially, not a single respondent disagreed. In social-psychological terms, the valence is uniformly positive or neutral, indicating that diversity is perceived as either beneficial or cost-free. This finding corroborates the business-case narrative reported in multinational samples (Hunt et al., 2018; McKinsey, 2020) and extends it to public-sector universities in Pakistan. SET posits that employees reciprocate resources (fairness, voice, representation) with higher effort and loyalty. When 70 % of respondents already believe that a diverse leadership team would heighten engagement/retention, they are effectively signalling that demographic inclusiveness functions as a relational resource that universities can exchange for discretionary behaviour. The 40% dissatisfaction with current (largely homogeneous) leadership provides the contrast condition: the absence of diversity erodes the exchange balance, lowering satisfaction.

Table 9:***In your opinion, what are the most important qualities a good leader should possess?***

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Visionary thinking	Yes	100	100.0	100.0	100.0
	Yes	100	100.0	100.0	100.0
Effective communication skills	Yes	100	100.0	100.0	100.0
	Yes	100	100.0	100.0	100.0
Adaptability and flexibility	Yes	70	70.0	70.0	70.0
	Sometimes	30	30.0	30.0	100.0
Integrity and ethics	Yes	20	20.0	20.0	20.0
	Sometimes	80	80.0	80.0	100.0
Emotional intelligence	Yes	70	70.0	70.0	70.0
	Sometimes	30	30.0	30.0	100.0
Empathy and compassion	Yes	60	60.0	60.0	60.0
	Sometimes	40	40.0	40.0	100.0
Decisiveness	Yes	30	30.0	30.0	30.0
	Sometimes	70	70.0	70.0	100.0

In Table 9, respondents were invited to tick every attribute they considered essential; consequently, each item is reported as either “Yes” or “Sometimes” rather than as mutually exclusive choices. Universal endorsement was obtained for only two qualities: every participant (100%) ticked both “Visionary thinking” and “Effective communication skills”, making them the undisputed core competencies for university leadership in this sample. The next cluster, adaptability/flexibility and emotional intelligence, was judged indispensable by 70%, while the remaining 30% felt these traits were “sometimes” needed rather than mandatory.

Integrity and ethics showed the opposite pattern: just one-fifth (20%) regarded them as an ever-present requirement, whereas 80% considered them situation-dependent. This does not imply low importance; instead, respondents may view ethical conduct as contextual rather than as a constant to be observed in daily leader behaviour.

Empathy and compassion divided the sample: 60% “Yes” and 40% “Sometimes”; decisiveness was viewed as consistently necessary by only 30%, with 70% believing it is required only in specific circumstances. Taken together, the rank-order of perceived essentiality is:

1. Vision & communication (tied at 100%),
2. Adaptability & emotional intelligence (70%),
3. Empathy (60%),
4. Integrity (20%),
5. Decisiveness (30%).

Thus, university employees in this study prioritise cognitive-strategic and interpersonal-relational skills over dispositional ethics or quick decision-making when they picture an “ideal” academic leader.

The results of some items were asked, “Would you feel comfortable working under leaders from different cultural, gender, ethnic, or other diverse backgrounds?” Content analysis showed 100 % affirmative responses, many with amplifying comments such as “Diversity brings new ideas” and “We need fresh perspectives in higher education.” While social-desirability bias cannot be ruled out, the unanimity is still noteworthy in a society often portrayed as collectivist and hierarchy-bound. A four-point scale (“Very welcoming” to “Not at all welcoming”) revealed that no respondent selected the extreme positive anchor; 70% chose “Somewhat welcoming,” and 30% chose “Not at all welcoming.” The pattern suggests a two-tier campus climate: individuals are personally open, yet they perceive the institution as only moderately inclusive. This micro–macro gap is common in emerging-economy universities where global norms collide with local traditions (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). When asked, “Indicate your confidence in your university’s ability to recruit and retain a diverse leadership team,” 90 % declared themselves “Confident.” The item serves as a behavioural-intention proxy: employees not only accept diverse leaders but expect the university to deliver them. Such confidence is a necessary (though not sufficient) condition for successful diversity initiatives because it reduces resistance and change fatigue (Nishii, 2013).

Employees simultaneously seek belonging and uniqueness. A leadership cadre that is “somewhat diverse” (60% respondent perception) partially satisfies the uniqueness need, but the 30% “not diverse at all” subgroup still triggers in-group/out-group dynamics. Increasing representational diversity would therefore reduce identity threat and enhance comfort, especially for early-career faculty (80% of the sample have <1 year of tenure).

Responses that resonate with objective 3 of the study, which is to identify effective strategies for attracting, retaining, and promoting diverse talent in university leadership.

The first point of discussion is the results from the demand-side evidence gathered from the employees' heads. The respondents selected as many strategies as they wished. The rank-order is unambiguous:

- Providing D&I training specifically for leaders is 80 %
- Expand recruiting to attract diverse candidates is 70 %
- Creating internal leadership-development programmes for under-represented groups is 60 %
- Implementing blind-hiring practices is 30 %
- Offering mentorship/sponsorship for underrepresented employees is 10 %

The first three choices all concern human-capital investment and pipeline development, whereas structural fixes (e.g., blind hiring) and individual sponsorship lag behind. This mirrors findings in Western universities where “grow-your-own” schemes outperform one-off procedural tweaks (Lacerenza et al., 2017). The second point of discussion is the training utilisation gap.

Currently, only 50% of respondents have attended any D&I training provided by their institution, yet 80% recommend it. The 30-percentage-point gap is a ready-made intervention target: supply is failing demand. Moreover, among the 50% who received leadership training, 80% rated it “Valuable” or “Very valuable,” reinforcing the business case for scaling up.

The third point of discussion is Internal vs. external labour markets. The popularity of “create internal leadership-development programmes” (60 %) indicates that employees trust home-grown talent pipelines more than external market searches. Pakistani universities can therefore leverage their own postgraduate pools and junior faculty rather than relying solely on market competition, which often suffers from thin applicant diversity.

The last is the Policy sequencing discussion. A prudent implementation sequence emerges: Phase 1 – Universal D&I training for existing leaders (highest endorsement, lowest cost). Phase 2 – Systematic outreach recruitment (requires HR reform but enjoys 70 % support). Phase 3 – Formal mentorship and sponsorship (currently low uptake but critical for retention). Blind hiring can be piloted in parallel, yet its modest 30 % endorsement suggests it should not be the flagship initiative.

Table 10: One-Sample Statistics T-test

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Age	100	2.24	1.164	.116
Gender	100	1.44	.499	.050
Position	100	1.58	.855	.085
What is your tenure in the organization?	100	1.38	.850	.085
People's Satisfaction with Leadership and Management	0 ^{a,b}	.	.	.
How would you rate your supervisor's leadership skills? Scale (1-4)	100	2.70	.905	.090
What leadership style do you think your supervisor adopts?	100	1.50	.674	.067
How effective is your supervisor at communicating with their team?	100	1.50	.674	.067
Do you think that a diverse and inclusive leadership team contributes to a more inclusive and supportive environment for students, faculty, and staff?	100	2.82	1.058	.106
How effective do you think your higher education institute is at promoting diversity and inclusion in its leadership and in its policies and practices?	100	2.00	.636	.064
How well does your supervisor support and develop their team members?	100	1.80	.985	.098
Do you feel that your supervisor recognizes and values your contributions to the team?	100	2.02	1.341	.134
How satisfied are you with the leadership and management in your organization?	100	1.90	.948	.095

In your opinion, what are the most important qualities a good leader should possess?	100	1.00	.000 ^c	.000
Visionary thinking	100	1.00	.000 ^c	.000
Effective communication skills	100	1.00	.000 ^c	.000
Integrity and ethics	100	1.80	.402	.040
Adaptability and flexibility	100	1.30	.461	.046
Emotional intelligence	100	1.30	.461	.046
Empathy and compassion	100	1.40	.492	.049
Decisiveness	100	1.70	.461	.046
Have you participated in any diversity and inclusion training, or programs provided by your higher education institute?	100	1.50	.503	.050
If you have received leadership training, how valuable do you think it was for your professional development?	100	2.00	.636	.064
Do you believe that leadership development programs are important for organizations to invest in?	100	2.00	.778	.078
How diverse is the leadership team in your higher education institute?	100	2.50	1.030	.103
How important do you believe diverse and inclusive leadership is for the success of a higher education institute?	100	1.00	.000 ^c	.000

a. t cannot be computed because the sum of case weights is less than or equal to 1.

b. t cannot be computed. There are no valid cases for this analysis because not all case-weights are positive.

c. t cannot be computed because the standard deviation is 0.

Table 11: ANOVA

		ANOVA				
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Do you believe that your higher education institute could do more to promote diversity and inclusion?	Between Groups	.786	1	.786	3.317	.072
	Within Groups	23.214	98	.237		
	Total	24.000	99			
Have you witnessed any instances of discrimination or bias in your higher education institute based on diversity factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion,	Between Groups	2.344	1	2.344	10.608	.002
	Within Groups	21.656	98	.221		
	Total	24.000	99			

or disability?						
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "A diverse leadership team is better able to understand and meet the needs of a diverse workforce and customer base."	Between	2.344	1	2.344	4.924	.029
	Groups					
	Within	46.656	98	.476		
	Groups					
	Total	49.000	99			
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Having a diverse leadership team is essential for creating an inclusive work culture."	Between	.786	1	.786	3.317	.072
	Groups					
	Within	23.214	98	.237		
	Groups					
	Total	24.000	99			

The present study set out to examine how employees in Pakistani higher-education institutions perceive the link between leadership diversity and their own satisfaction, retention and engagement; to gauge their openness toward leaders from diverse backgrounds; and to identify concrete strategies for attracting and retaining such leaders. Three sets of findings deserve emphasis.

First, the data reveal a clear “diversity dividend” in employee attitudes. Although only 10% of respondents described their current leadership team as “very diverse”, 70% agreed that a more diverse leadership cadre would boost engagement and retention, and 60% stated that it would enhance their personal job performance. Not a single participant reported an anticipated adverse effect. This unanimous positive valence aligns with Social Exchange Theory: demographic inclusiveness functions as a relational resource that employees reciprocate with higher discretionary effort (Blau, 1964). The 40% dissatisfaction with existing (largely homogeneous) leadership provides the contrast condition; absence of diversity erodes the exchange balance and lowers satisfaction. Longitudinal work is needed, but the cross-sectional pattern is consistent with multinational studies linking inclusive leadership to affective commitment (Nishii, 2013; Shore et al., 2018).

Second, employees are not merely tolerant of diverse leaders; they expect them. Every respondent (100 %) self-reported comfort working under leaders from different genders, ethnicities, or cultural backgrounds, and 90 % expressed confidence that their university can recruit and retain such a team. However, institutional welcomeness was rated only “somewhat” by 70% and “not at all” by 30%, revealing a micro–macro gap common in emerging-economy universities, where global inclusion norms collide with local traditions (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). Closing this gap through structural inclusion practices is therefore both desired and feasible.

Third, the study offers an employee-driven roadmap for change. When invited to select multiple strategies, respondents prioritised human-capital levers: 80% endorsed mandatory diversity & inclusion training for leaders, 70% recommended expanded outreach and

recruitment, and 60% urged internal leadership-development pipelines for underrepresented groups. Structural fixes such as blind hiring (30 %) or mentorship schemes (10%) received weaker support, suggesting that capacity-building and pipeline expansion should precede procedural redesign. The current 50 % participation rate in D&I training and the 80% “valuable” rating among attendees reinforce the cost-effectiveness of scaling up education before implementing more contentious selection reforms.

Several boundary conditions must be acknowledged. The convenience sample over-represents young, entry-level staff (80% with < 1 year of tenure) and institutions located in KPK and Punjab; elite or rural universities may hold different views. Social-desirability bias may have inflated the unanimity on “comfort with diverse leaders”, while the cross-sectional design precludes causal claims. Future research should link attitudinal data to objective turnover, promotion, and performance metrics, and should test intervention packages in randomised controlled trials.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to quantify how Pakistani university employees perceive the link between leadership diversity and their own satisfaction, retention, and engagement; to measure their openness to leaders from varied backgrounds; and to rank strategies for diversifying leadership pipelines. The data show a robust, positive association: 70% of staff expect higher engagement/retention under a more diverse leadership team, 60% report that such diversity would improve their personal performance, and 100% report comfort with demographically diverse leaders. Crucially, respondents have prioritised concrete actions, leadership training (80%), expanded outreach recruitment (70%), and internal development tracks for underrepresented groups (60%), providing universities with an employee-endorsed roadmap. Implementing these high-consensus initiatives first is likely to narrow the current 40% dissatisfaction gap, strengthen the psychological contract, and ultimately enhance organisational effectiveness in Pakistan’s rapidly expanding higher-education sector.

Limitations: There are several limitations, including:

Generalizability: The findings of this study may not be generalizable to all universities in Pakistan due to differences in university size, location, and culture.

Self-report bias: The data collected in this study relied heavily on self-report measures, which may be subject to response bias and social desirability bias.

Causation versus correlation: This study may establish only a correlation between diverse leadership, an inclusive environment, and university performance, but it cannot prove causation.

Sample size: The sample size for this study has been limited, which has affected the statistical power of the analysis and limited the generalizability of the findings.

Time constraint: The study’s time frame was limited, which affected the depth and breadth of the research.

Potential confounding variables: Factors beyond diversity and inclusion can affect organizational performance, such as economic conditions, market competition, and technological advancements.

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