

FOSTERING CHALLENGE-ORIENTED ORGANIZATIONAL CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOR THROUGH INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP: A SERIAL MEDIATION MODEL OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY AND WORK ENGAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive leadership has become an important predictor of key workplace outcomes. This study explores the mechanism by which inclusive leadership fosters challenge-oriented OCB, leveraging psychological safety and work engagement as sequential mediators. Inclusive leadership creates an environment where employees feel a sense of security and are more psychologically safe, which makes them more engaged at work, resulting in higher CO-OCB. A sample of 630 employees from three companies operating in Pakistan's telecommunication industry is taken. Data was drawn based on a cross-sectional survey where the participants answered tried and tested reliable questions measuring CO-OCB influenced by inclusive leadership, psychological safety, and work engagement. In analyzing the model, regression assumptions were checked through SPSS software, while PROCESS macro was used primarily for the serial mediation model proposed in the study. Findings indicate that CO-OCB is positively influenced by inclusive leadership, with psychological safety and work engagement acting as mediators in a sequential pathway. That is, the trust and openness created by inclusive leadership lead to conditions of psychological safety and a sense of security that in turn promote higher levels of engagement and motivate employees to participate in tasks that foster CO-OCB. This study helps understand how inclusive leadership affects voluntary behaviors that face challenges. It shows the importance of feeling psychologically safe and being engaged in organizations. The practical results of this study are important to managers; they give useful ideas for creating leadership and engagement plans that help in improving organizational performance. Also, the study gives possible directions for future research and talks about its limitations.

Keywords: Challenge-oriented organizational citizenship behavior, inclusive leadership, psychological safety, work engagement, telecommunication sector.

INTRODUCTION

With rapid technological advancements, dynamic market demands, and globalized economic conditions, maintaining competitiveness is an uphill task for organizations today. This calls for not only structural adaptation but also employee behaviors that go beyond expectations.

Challenge-oriented organizational citizenship behavior is a discretionary, proactive effort to improve organizational functioning, has been identified as a crucial factor in organizational innovation and resilience (Mackenzie, Podsakoff, & Podsakoff, 2011; Podsakoff et al., 2018;

Bettencourt, 2019). While affiliative citizenship behaviors build harmony, CO-OCB assumes work challenging the status quo, suggesting solutions, driving positive change, and making it essential for organizations in uncertain times. However, such behavior needs to be encouraged through leadership styles that work proactively to create a supportive and empowering work climate (Chen et al., 2020).

Inclusive leadership shows openness, access, and valuing different opinions. It is seen as a way to change leadership for better employee results (Randel et al., 2018; Choi et al., 2015). Following this concept, an environment is created by the leaders where employees are respected and are encouraged to share ideas. This is important for behaviors like CO-OCB (Thompson, 2017). Despite its increasing significance, the processes through which inclusive leadership is linked to organizational outcomes are not yet well explained. Two constructs—psychological safety and work engagement—may have interrelated roles in explaining how inclusive leadership drives CO-OCB. The level of psychological safety would refer to a belief shared collectively among employees, believing that a safe space at the workplace enables risk-taking interpersonal issues, whereby people can make known errors and discuss ideas in safety against some form of backlash (Newman et al., 2017; Edmondson & Lei, 2014; Edmondson, 1999). Work engagement is a psychological condition defined by dedication, enthusiasm, and absorption in one's tasks, prompting employees to direct their efforts towards attaining positive organizational results (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018; Schaufeli, 2012).

Psychological safety is therefore a major behavior-shaping aspect in workplaces that are creative and engaging, as it requires employees to take risks and invest in innovative ideas. Inclusive leadership builds psychological safety through trust, mutual respect, and an open environment where individuals can voice their disagreements and new ideas (Zeng et al., 2020; Frazier, 2017). When leaders become inclusive, they make their employees feel safe in taking interpersonal risks such as challenging established procedures or suggesting new approaches, actions that ultimately feed into CO-OCB. Psychological safety has been shown to be a mediating factor in the relationship between leadership styles and employee outcomes, which indicates its importance as an enabler of proactive and discretionary workplace behaviors

(Iqbal et al., 2022; Younas et al., 2020; Newman et al., 2017).

In addition to psychological safety, work engagement offers a motivational tool that guides all the cognitive, emotional, and physical resources into constructive behaviors for employees. Inclusive leadership directs employees to have purpose, belongingness, and a sense of being recognized, all of which facilitate intrinsic motivation and excellence in employees' performance in their jobs (Babcock-Roberson, 2010; Bakker et al., 2011). Engaged employees have more energy, resilience, and commitment, which helps them to overcome obstacles and contribute to organizational improvement (Albrecht et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2017). More importantly, research indicates that work engagement not only improves task performance but also encourages extra-role behaviors, such as CO-OCB, by motivating employees to invest more effort in achieving organizational goals (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018; Kataria et al., 2013; Rurkkhum & Bartlett, 2012).

Despite the individualistic effects on CO-OCB, psychological safety and work engagement has not received extensive attention as serial mediators. Psychological safety works at a cognitive level; this develops a feeling of security within an environment. Contrary to psychological safety, the emotional and motivational condition of work engagement translates the notion of perceived safety into actual behaviour. This interaction falls in place with Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory about positive emotions, which as explicated indicates that positive psychological conditions, in this case safety and engagement, build up individuals' cognitive and behavioral capacities, and therefore helps them come up with creative solutions and adaptive arrangements (Fredrickson, 2001). Inclusive leadership therefore starts by creating the psychological safety and then enhances work engagement, which contributes to CO-OCB. This sequential framework provides a far more expansive perspective on how inclusive leadership affects discretionary employee behaviors.

Yet little academic attention has been paid to this relationship, especially within particular organizational contexts of developing economies. Mostly, the inclusive leadership literature and its associated constructs have been studied in Western contexts, representing individualistic cultural features with a low power distance; both of which naturally promote inclusive practices

(Choi et al., 2015; Randel et al., 2018; Thompson, 2017; Xiaotao, 2018). In comparison, the characteristics of these relationships could vary appreciably in collectivist cultures, like Pakistan, which has high power distance. Here, employees would seek more promises of safety and recognition before participating in risk-taking activities like CO-OCB (Ahmad et al., 2023; Mehmood et al., 2024; Nawaz et al., 2020; Opoku et al., 2022). The telecom sector in Pakistan offers a very good environment for examining these interlinkages, as its staff need to be more innovative and adaptable in order to respond to fast technological developments and strong market competition.

This research attempts to fill the theoretical and contextual gaps in the existing literature by answering how CO-OCB is influenced by inclusive leadership, and how psychological safety and work engagement mediates the relationship? It makes a contribution toward the general debate on leadership and employee behavior by providing a cultural perspective on inclusive leadership to strengthen organizational performance based on these dynamics in the telecommunication sector of Pakistan.

This research contributes significantly to theory, practice, and methodology. It advances the theoretical understanding of how inclusive leadership influences CO-OCB by uncovering the underlying mechanisms and highlighting the critical roles of psychological safety and work engagement. By integrating these constructs into a cohesive framework, the study addresses the limitations of prior fragmented research that examined these variables in isolation (Ensari & Riggio, 2020; Zeng et al., 2020). Furthermore, it extends the generalizability of existing theoretical frameworks, such as social exchange theory and the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, to non-Western contexts. This generalization not only enhances the explanatory power of these theories but also extends their applicability across different global contexts (Fredrickson, 2001; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

From the pragmatic standpoint, the implications of the results are important for both managers and policy-makers. In addition, knowing that psychological safety and work engagement are two of the key mechanisms can give a clear outline to designing leadership development programs and workplace interventions. Training in these areas would include active listening, valuing diversity, and open communication as

tools toward greater inclusiveness of leadership (Carmeli et al., 2010). Facilitative supportive organizational policies and practices may encourage psychological safety and work engagement to result in CO-OCB at the organizational level and enhance organizational resilience and competitiveness.

A comprehensive analytical framework was employed in this study using PROCESS macro, specifically to study serial mediation. Such a method would allow for in-depth analysis regarding the direct and indirect impacts involved with the concept of inclusive leadership, allowing for complex insights into the hypothesized relationships (Hayes & Rockwood, 2020). The stringent statistical method deployed ensured that results acquired are reliable and valid, and hence, laid a robust foundation for further research into leadership and employee behavior.

This research contributes significantly in the literature and probes how psychological safety and work engagement as sequential mediators facilitates the relationship of inclusive leadership and CO-OCB. Focusing on the telecom sector in Pakistan, this research adds to a more holistic understanding of the construct while providing implementable recommendations to enhance organizational performance. The outcomes are expected to enrich both scholarly and managerial debates and lead to valuable insights in the development of innovation and flexibility in contemporary organizations.

2. Literature Review

Modern organizations have to increasingly cope with a more complex and competitive environment wherein success is determined by both operational efficiency and discretionary effort. The various ways discretionary behavior occurs in the workplace, CO-OCB remains paramount for effective organizational operation in dynamic and turbulent contexts (Podsakoff et al., 2018; Bettencourt, 2019). CO-OCB shows that employees are genuinely proactive in activities that continually disrupt the status quo, and pioneer innovation solutions that create constructive change in organizations. It is not officially rewarded but is portrayed as critical to the adaptability and resilience of the organizations (LePine et al., 2002; Morrison, 2011). However, it acts like a double-edged sword with it acting against workplace harmony or in combativeness from colleagues and bosses. This therefore means that knowing the

antecedents and mechanisms that support CO-OCB in a facilitating and enabling way is critical for theory and practice alike.

The most promising response to the facilitation of CO-OCB has been inclusive leadership. The term inclusive leadership can be referred to as the behaviors that open up spaces, make the workplace accessible, and explicitly value diverse viewpoints to develop an environment that is conducive to innovation and proactive engagement (Choi et al., 2015; Randel et al., 2018). The inclusive leader creates opportunities for adding value beyond formal roles by encouraging participation and removing the barriers that hierarchy imposes. Nevertheless, there is a pressing need for mechanisms that positively impact CO-OCB with the help of inclusive leadership. For instance, in this case, the two concepts are intimately linked because psychological safety and work engagement may be mediators in how inclusive leadership affects CO-OCB.

The psychological safety makes employees in an organization feel that it is risk-free to raise a concern in the organization through interpersonal behavior that involves sharing problems and offering new solutions in the firm (Edmondson, 1999; Newman et al., 2017). An inclusive leader creates psychological safety by showing openness, fairness, and support for diverse views in creating a trusting environment that allows discretionary behaviors in employees (Zeng et al., 2020). Work engagement refers to a state of work-related well-being, positive and fulfilling, characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli, 2012; Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). Hence, inclusive leadership leads to work engagement. Inclusive leadership creates meaning, belongingness, and intrinsic motivation for the employee, who consequently puts energy and resources into fruitful organizational outcomes (Bakker et al., 2011).

2.1. Inclusive Leadership and Its Role in Modern Organizations

Inclusive leadership has increasingly been acknowledged as a significant force behind the organization's success in complex and diversified settings. Compared to traditional forms of leadership, inclusive leadership focuses more on the leader's integration capacity of diverse points of view, collaboration, and developing an atmosphere of inclusiveness at work (Randel et al., 2018). Such leadership behaviors are imperative in the modern global workplace

where teams are diverse and varied, often problematic for teams, as there is a high potential for either more innovation or more conflict when diversity is not managed effectively (Choi et al., 2015). Inclusive leaders overcome these barriers, making all team members feel valued and respected, leading to stronger team bonding and performance (Carmeli et al., 2010).

It is well-underlined that inclusive leadership provides widespread organizational benefits, including better team performance, overall organizational innovation, and increased employee creativity (Zeng et al., 2020; Choi et al., 2015). However, the potential for CO-OCB, the behavior that contributes directly to constructive organizational change, is direly in need of exploration. Inclusive leadership provides a platform for CO-OCB since it fosters an environment in the workplace where the employees are safe to be themselves, challenging prevailing norms to produce novel solutions (Chen et al., 2020).

2.2. Hypotheses Development

2.2.1. Direct Relationship Between Inclusive Leadership and CO-OCB

Creating an empowering environment where employees feel valued, respected, and inspired to surpass their designated roles, inclusive leadership influences CO-OCB. Such leaders adopt open and accessible strategies to ensure equal treatment for all and create trust among team members who then try to positively contest conventional norms. Research suggests that inclusive leadership motivates employees to take proactive steps toward organizational change, outperforming other leadership styles in this regard (Randel et al., 2018; Choi et al., 2015). Under such leadership, CO-OCB activities are perceived as less risky and align with an innovation-driven culture, where adapting to and embracing change are seen as positive and necessary (Zeng et al., 2020).

Hence, empirical evidence is thus drawn that inclusive leadership affects discretionary behaviors. For instance, research studies found that employees operating under inclusive leaders have a higher chance of proposing more innovative solutions with more status quo-disruptive behavior primarily because of support and acknowledgment (Chen et al., 2020; Carmeli et al., 2010). Thus, based on these findings, the following hypothesis is developed:

Hypothesis 1: *Inclusive leadership has a positive relationship with challenge-oriented organizational citizenship behavior.*

2.2.2. Psychological Safety as a Mediator

Psychological safety is very critical to the performance of any team. Research by Edmondson (1999) early reported that it is an essential ingredient to establish a psychological sense of a haven where teams can learn and innovate. This research further confirmed that it encourages risky behavior, such as sharing ideas or proposing improvement (Newman et al., 2017; Vakira et al., 2023). Showing accessibility, fairness, and support for what employees do is a way of leading that makes everyone feel safe (Carmeli et al., 2010). It lets the employees know that their ideas matter, which removes the fear of bad outcomes and encourages them to join in CO-OCB.

It has been found in recent studies that psychological safety affects different kinds of leadership styles and the behaviors of employees. For instance, Javed et al. (2019) conclude that psychological safety plays a pivotal role in linking inclusive leadership and innovation among teams by offering a space to share creative ideas among employees. Similarly, Vakira et al. (2023) found that feeling safe in a team increases interest in CO-OCB by reducing the personal risks that come with wanting to change things. These results are strong enough to suggest that psychological safety might play a role in how inclusive leadership affects CO-OCB.

Hypothesis 2: *Psychological safety mediates the relationship between inclusive leadership and challenge-oriented organizational citizenship behavior.*

2.2.3. Work Engagement as a Mediator

Work engagement is a positive psychology concept. It is the state of well-being at work, where individuals feel energized, committed, and fully involved in their work (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). High engagement employees are intrinsically motivated to do better at what they do and, in most cases, contribute beyond the limits of their tasks to aid the success of the organization (Albrecht et al., 2015). Inclusive leadership inspires employees in their work through meaning and belonging, using their mental, emotional, and physical energy (Ly et al., 2024).

A lot of research has been undertaken regarding the aspect of inclusive leadership and work engagement of employees. For instance, Choi et al. (2015) note that an open and fair work environment created through an inclusive leader leads to the intrinsic motivation of people and increases employee engagement. Moreover, research has also shown that work engagement helps organizations perform better, for instance, by improving task and contextual performance (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018). Studies have found that motivated workers are more likely to put their energy and passion into tasks that challenge normal ways of doing things and help organizations grow (Albrecht et al., 2015). These results support the idea that work engagement is very important.

Hypothesis 3: *Work engagement mediates the relationship between inclusive leadership and challenge-oriented organizational citizenship behavior.*

2.2.4. Serial Mediation of Psychological Safety and Work Engagement

Psychological safety and work engagement combine to fully account for why inclusive leadership stimulates CO-OCB. Since psychological safety constitutes a cognitive form, it presents foundational conditions to feel secure or assured in idea expression. In addition, work engagement constitutes a motivational construct in which these cognitive securities result in proactive or constructive behaviors. As a result, two constructs will culminate into a sequential pathway to link inclusive leadership with CO-OCB.

The serial mediation concept is theoretically anchored in the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. In a nutshell, it suggests that affirmative psychological states such as work engagement and psychological safety expand one's cognitive and behavioral options that further promote the development of long-term personal and social resources (Fredrickson, 2001). Psychological safety, as related to the concept of inclusive leadership, promotes employees to take more interpersonal risks. Work engagement will improve an employee's ability to channel these risks into effective action - like CO-OCB. The theoretical framework has received support through some recent empirical studies, indicating a sequential effect of psychological safety and work engagement on

improving employee outcomes (Javed et al., 2019).

Hypothesis 4: *Psychological safety and work engagement sequentially mediate the relationship between inclusive leadership and challenge-oriented organizational citizenship behavior.*

2.3. Theoretical Underpinnings

This study is based on two critical theoretical frameworks: social exchange theory and the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. According to Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005), social exchange theory points out that positive treatment by leaders is returned through discretionary behaviors that benefit the organization by employees. At its core is inclusive leadership, wherein leaders treat employees with fairness, respect, and support, fostering an environment conducive to meaningful contributions. Complementing this, broaden-and-build theory by Fredrickson (2001) would explain how such positive psychological states, including both psychological safety and work engagement, would enable workers to engage in innovative and adaptive behaviors. This combined framework helps create a stronger foundation for identifying the mechanisms under which inclusive leadership shapes CO-OCB.

2.4. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework given below describes hypothesized relationships involving direct influence from inclusive leadership to CO-OCB via psychological safety and work engagement as serial mediators.

describes the population and sample, including how employees were chosen from three telecommunication companies in Pakistan, followed by the research design, data collection procedure, and measures for key variables. The paper also highlights the data analysis strategy followed with the SPSS software, PROCESS macro in serial mediation analysis. This section extensively details important ethical considerations, such as getting informed consent and participant confidentiality.

3.1. Population and Sample

The present study was conducted among the employees of three leading telecommunication companies in Pakistan: Jazz, Zong, and Ufone. A total of 700 questionnaires were distributed among employees belonging to different departments working in various cities across the Punjab region. The Human Resources (HR) departments of these organizations provided the sampling structure, which ensured a representative sample of personnel working at different tiers of operations. From the 700 questionnaires that were distributed, 630 returned with an approximate response rate of about 90%. For the employees' selection to ensure a fair representation process, the researchers used simple random sampling; hence, giving an equal opportunity to each employee to participate (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Attempts were also made to diversify the sample so that participants belonged to other departments, that is, marketing, operations, and customer service, as well as representing different geographic areas in Punjab.

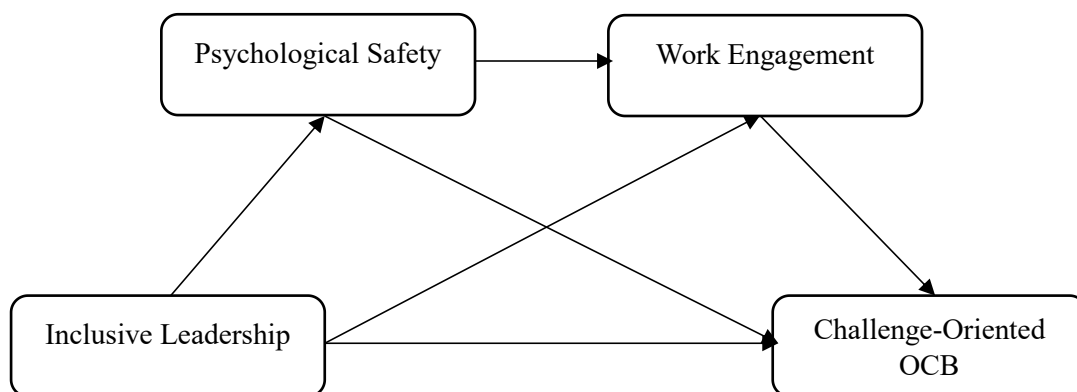


Figure 1: Empirical model of the study

3. Materials and Methods

This section explains the research design and methodology adopted in the current study. It

3.2. Research Design

The current study is a cross-sectional and quantitative study. The data collection was at

one point in time. The study focuses on challenge-oriented organizational citizenship behavior influenced by inclusive leadership, psychological safety, and work engagement. A cross-sectional design is appropriate because it captures these constructs at one point in time, thus allowing for mediating processes to be pursued (Creswell, 2014). Questionnaires were used to collect data. For questionnaire development, standardized scales that could measure key variables were adopted from the literature; their reliability and validity had been tested over a long period in published works (Hair et al., 2019). Full cooperation from the HR departments of three different companies was acquired in carrying out this research where questionnaires were administered among their employees.

3.3. Procedure

The procedure for data collection started with seeking formal approval from the HR departments of Jazz, Zong, and Ufone. The HR departments allowed entry to a sample of employees of different departments and cities in the Punjab province. Instructions regarding the questionnaire and purpose of the study were mentioned on a cover letter accompanying the survey. Participants were asked to choose if they wanted to fill the questionnaire online or paper-based, with a guarantee of anonymity and self-will for participation. Copies of the questionnaire were distributed in three weeks, which ensured that employees had enough time to respond at their convenience. Participants were instructed beforehand about the confidentiality measures and they were told that at any stage they can withdraw themselves from the study for which they volunteered. Explicit consent was obtained from them. After collecting the completed questionnaires, the data were carefully checked for completeness and any missing responses were addressed accordingly. This ensured that the sample selected was diverse and unbiased, and high-quality responses were collected in this data collection process and analyzed using SPSS and PROCESS macro for serial mediation analysis.

3.4. Measures

The major variables under discussion were inclusive leadership (independent), challenge-oriented organizational citizenship behavior (dependent), psychological safety (mediator 1), and work engagement (mediator 2). These

variables were measured using standardized scales available in the literature. The measures that were used for this study are as follows:

The present study used Carmeli, Reiter-Palmon, and Ziv's (2010) scale of inclusive leadership which captures the leaders' behaviors which would lead to inclusive, openness, and collaboration at the teamwork levels. There are 8 items rated using the 5 Likert points. The points ranged between 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree). Here is an example of the item, "My leader values my input and seeks my ideas." For this scale, Cronbach's reliability coefficient was $\alpha = 0.87$. This reflects high internal consistency for the measure, according to Cronbach (1951).

Challenge-oriented OCB was measured with the scale given by MacKenzie et al. (2011). The scale assessed employees' proactive behavior above and beyond what is required at work. Scale items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale which is consistent for measuring most of the variables ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Some examples from this scale were: "I often take the initiative to suggest new ways to improve processes in my department." The scale proved to have excellent internal consistency: reliability coefficient = $\alpha = 0.88$. It indeed caught the gamut of active employees' initiatives toward organizational development and improvement well. This scale was useful when information about an employee's challenge-oriented behavior had to be needed.

For Psychological safety, this study used a 7-item scale given by Edmondson (1999), which assesses the belief that individuals will not face humiliation or penalties for taking interpersonal risks in the workplace. An example item from the scale is: "In this workplace, it is safe to take a risk." The reliability coefficient for the scale was $\alpha = 0.90$, indicating exceptional internal consistency.

Work engagement was measured by a scale developed by Schaufeli et al. (2006) named Utrecht Work Engagement Scale. In this case, a 7-point Likert scale was used to assess 9 items. The Likert scale in the case of work engagement ranges from 1 = never to 7 = always. A sample item from the scale is: "I feel bursting with energy when I get up in the morning and go to work." With a reliability coefficient of $\alpha = 0.91$, the scale demonstrates high internal consistency and reliability for measuring work engagement.

The scales applied were chosen because of their reliability and validity across cultures. Those applied include the original validation of cultural contexts such as Pakistan (Khan et al., 2015). Likert scales allowed for more subtle measures that participants' attitudes and behaviors should be measured, thus allowing the data to cover the full range of responses (Likert, 1932). Data on demographics such as age, gender, education, work experience, and the job position were also collected.

3.5. Data Analysis Strategy

Using SPSS version 25 the whole data was processed in a manner that ensured the achievement of the basic assumptions for further analysis. Preliminary statistics involved descriptive statistics, reliability, and validity, and correlation analyses. The normality, homoscedasticity, outliers, and linearity were analyzed at the start. The data for regression analysis needs to be in order, that is, appropriately fitted (Field, 2013). Following the confirmation that the data fulfilled the assumptions, hypotheses were tested by PROCESS macro of Hayes (2017) in serial mediation analysis. This methodology facilitated the examination of serial mediation in the relationship between inclusive leadership and challenge-oriented organizational citizenship behavior (CO-OCB). Specifically, MODEL 6 of the PROCESS macro was employed to test psychological safety and work engagement as serial mediators, utilizing robust estimation of

indirect effects and confidence intervals (CIs) through bootstrapping procedures (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

3.6. Ethical Considerations

This study followed standards in terms of ethics during research. Instructions were given to the participants that their participation was voluntary, and upon their will they would be free at any time during the study, without any ill effects, if they wanted to withdraw from it. All answers were kept confidential, and all participants' names were kept confidential during the process of data gathering and analysis. This study has entailed ethical considerations such as getting all the participants to obtain informed consent as well as making sure there was approval by an ethical review board. The research was conducted considering culture and all sensitive issues around people's cultural beliefs, mainly around workplace concerns, which include aspects of leadership style and employee attitude or behavior (Beauchamp & Childress, 2013).

4. Data Analysis and Results

4.1. Preliminary Analysis

The demographic analysis revealed important insights into the sample composition, providing a foundational understanding of the study participants. A total of 630 employees from the telecommunication sector of Pakistan participated in this study. Table 1 summarizes their demographics.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	416	66.0
	Female	214	34.0
Age	20–30 years	283	44.9
	31–40 years	230	36.5
	Above 40 years	117	18.6
Education Level	Bachelor's	189	30.0
	Master's	315	50.0
	MS/MPhil or higher	126	20.0
Job Level	Non-Managerial	428	68.0
	Managerial	202	32.0
Experience with Company	Less than 5 years	250	39.7
	5–10 years	232	36.8
	More than 10 years	148	23.5

The data were gathered from 630 employees of the telecommunication sector of Pakistan. The male participants were predominant at 66% while the female participants made up 34% of the sample. About age distribution, 44.9% of respondents were aged between 20–30 years, 36.5% between 31–40 years, and 18.6% were above 40 years. Related to education, 30% were holders of a Bachelor's degree, 50% were postgraduates holding a Master's degree, while MS/MPhil or higher qualification was possessed by 20% of the respondents. Most (68%) of the employees were in non-managerial positions, while 32% of the employees occupied managerial levels. Moreover, 39.7% of the respondents possessed experience with their organizations less than 5 years, 36.8% had 5–10

years, and 23.5% had over 10 years. This demographic breakdown ensures that the sample adequately represents the diversity of employees in the telecommunication sector, thereby enhancing the generalizability of the findings.

4.2. Descriptive Statistics, Reliability, and Correlations

All the variables included in the study have been computed in terms of mean, standard deviation, Cronbach's alpha, and the inter-variable correlation. Table 2 provides descriptive statistics regarding reliability as well as a relation amongst the concerned variables.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics, Reliability, and Correlations

Variable	M	SD	A	1	2	3	4
1. Inclusive Leadership	4.15	0.65	0.93	—			
2. Psychological Safety	4.10	0.61	0.91	0.62**	—		
3. Work Engagement	4.00	0.69	0.89	0.60**	0.63**	—	
4. Challenge-Oriented OCB	4.25	0.60	0.92	0.63**	0.61**	0.69**	—

Note: $p < .01$ for all correlations

The mean scores obtained were 4.00 (Work Engagement) to 4.25 for Challenge-Oriented Organizational Citizenship Behavior (CO-OCB), indicating a very high level of these constructs by the respondents. The standard deviations range between 0.60 and 0.69, meaning that there was moderate variability in responses. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all constructs exceed the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), showing excellent internal consistency in Inclusive Leadership ($\alpha = 0.93$), Psychological Safety ($\alpha = 0.91$), Work Engagement ($\alpha = 0.89$), and CO-OCB ($\alpha = 0.92$).

The inter-variable correlations revealed positive relationships among all constructs. Inclusive leadership was positively correlated with CO-OCB ($r = 0.63$, $p < .01$), psychological safety ($r =$

0.62 , $p < .01$), and work engagement ($r = 0.60$, $p < .01$). Psychological safety and work engagement were also positively correlated with CO-OCB ($r = 0.61$ and $r = 0.69$, respectively, $p < .01$). These findings align with theoretical expectations and provide preliminary support for the hypothesized relationships.

4.3. Convergent and Discriminant Validity

Further, the convergent validity and discriminant validity were also checked to establish the validity of the constructs. CR and AVE established convergent validity. Discriminant validity was established by evaluating the inter-construct correlations and the square root of AVE. In summary, this is presented in Table 3 below:

Table 3. Convergent and Discriminant Validity

Variable	CR	AVE	\sqrt{AVE}	1	2	3	4
1. Inclusive Leadership	0.92	0.74	0.86	—			
2. Psychological Safety	0.91	0.71	0.84	0.62	—		
3. Work Engagement	0.89	0.68	0.82	0.60	0.63	—	
4. Challenge-Oriented OCB	0.92	0.72	0.85	0.63	0.61	0.69	—

Note: CR= Composite Reliability, AVE= Average Variance Extracted

All constructs exhibited good convergent validity, with AVEs above the threshold of 0.50 as stated by Hair et al., 2010. Inclusive Leadership had an AVE of 0.74, Psychological Safety had 0.71, Work Engagement had 0.68, and CO-OCB had 0.72. Similarly, CR values were between 0.90 and 0.94, all of which exceeded the threshold of 0.70, thereby confirming the reliability of the measurement model.

The square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct exceeded its correlations with other components, indicating discriminant validity. The square root of AVE for Inclusive Leadership is 0.86, with correlations of $r = 0.62$ for Psychological Safety, $r = 0.60$ for Work Engagement, and $r = 0.63$ for CO-OCB. Consequently, as demonstrated, all constructs are distinct, providing strong evidence for the existence of discriminant validity.

4.4. Assumptions Testing

Regression assumptions were checked to establish the legitimacy of hypothesis testing. Scatter plots indicated that scatter plots exhibited linear relationships between a set of predictors and outcomes indicating that the requirement for linearity was satisfied. The normality of residuals was checked by the Shapiro-Wilk test which was not significant, $p > .05$. This indicated that the residuals were normally distributed. Histograms and Q-Q plots also justified the normality

assumption. VIF values were between 1.32 and 2.14, below the critical value of 5 (Hair et al., 2010). This confirms that there is no multicollinearity. Residual plots showed that the variance of residuals was constant across all levels of predictors, which means that homoscedasticity is met. These findings support the fact that the regression analyses performed in this study are valid.

4.5. Common Method Bias Test

A Harman's single-factor test was performed to reduce the impact of the potential presence of common method bias in self-reported data. The unrotated factor accounted for merely 31.5% of the overall variation and, hence, was deemed below the 50% criterion recommended by Podsakoff et al. (2003), thereby ruling out significant CMB influence on the study's outcomes. Additionally, the marker variable approach was employed as a supplementary test, further confirming that CMB did not significantly distort the relationships between the constructs.

4.6. Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses were tested using Hayes' (2018) PROCESS macro (Model 6) in SPSS. This model tested direct, mediating, and serial mediation effects, with results presented in Table 4.

Table:4 Hypotheses Testing Using PROCESS Macro Model 6

Pathways	β	SE	LLCI	ULCI	Result
Inclusive Leadership → CO-OCB	0.38	0.05	0.29	0.47	Supported
Inclusive Leadership → PS → CO-OCB	0.16	0.04	0.08	0.24	Supported
Inclusive Leadership → PS → WE	0.22	0.05	0.13	0.32	Supported
PS → WE → CO-OCB	0.20	0.05	0.10	0.30	Supported
Inclusive Leadership → PS → WE → CO-OCB (Serial Mediation)	0.12	0.03	0.06	0.18	Supported

Note: LLCI = Lower Limit Confidence Interval; ULCI = Upper Limit Confidence Interval.

The direct impact of Inclusive Leadership on CO-OCB was positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.38$, $SE = 0.05$, $LLCI = 0.29$, $ULCI = 0.47$, $p < .001$), hence corroborating Hypothesis 1. This discovery highlights the significance of Inclusive Leadership in directly promoting CO-OCB.

The mediating effect of Psychological Safety in the association between Inclusive Leadership and CO-OCB was significant ($\beta = 0.16$, $SE = 0.04$, $LLCI = 0.08$, $ULCI = 0.24$, $p < .001$), hence validating Hypothesis 2. The mediating effect of

Work Engagement in this connection was significant ($\beta = 0.20$, $SE = 0.05$, $LLCI = 0.10$, $ULCI = 0.30$, $p < .001$), hence corroborating Hypothesis 3.

The serial mediation impact of Psychological Safety and Work Engagement was ultimately examined. The findings demonstrated a

substantial indirect effect ($\beta = 0.12$, $SE = 0.03$, $LLCI = 0.06$, $ULCI = 0.18$, $p < .001$), corroborating Hypothesis 4. This discovery emphasises the joint function of psychological safety and work engagement as sequential

mediators connecting Inclusive Leadership to CO-OCB.

The findings offer robust empirical validation for the suggested paradigm. Inclusive leadership enhances CO-OCB both directly and indirectly, with psychological safety and work engagement serving as potential mediators. Moreover, the findings validate the concept of serial mediation by demonstrating the interconnected functions of Psychological Safety and Work Engagement in facilitating CO-OCB. The outcomes of the comprehensive analysis demonstrate that the established theoretical model is robust, providing significant insights for both researchers and practitioners in the fields of organisational behaviour and leadership.

5. Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusion

The study's outcomes elucidate the relationship between inclusive leadership and challenge-oriented organisational citizenship behaviour (CO-OCB), with psychological safety and job engagement serving as serial mediators. The discovery that the incorporation of COs has an immediate positive correlation with CO-OCB further substantiates the assertion that inclusive behaviour is essential for fostering workplace conditions conducive to proactive and constructive employee behaviour, as concluded by Hirak et al. (2012) and Carmeli et al. (2010). Blau (1964) posits that social exchange theory elucidates how positive leader-employee interactions foster a sense of obligation and reciprocity, motivating individuals to beyond their official responsibilities.

The initial mediator in the sequence was psychological safety. This aligns with Edmondson's (1999) assertion that psychological safety is essential for voicing concerns and engaging in interpersonal risks. Employees are inclined to feel secure in presenting new ideas, challenging established practices, and expressing dissent constructively if they perceive their leaders as receptive. These behaviours are fundamental to CO-OCB. This discovery corresponds with the research of Newman et al. (2017) and Detert and Burris (2007), who performed the seminal study on psychological safety and its influence on fostering proactive behaviour.

The second mediator, work engagement, similarly exhibited a significant role, as demonstrated in prior research by Schaufeli et al. (2006) and Christian et al. (2011). Equitable and

inclusive leadership styles enhance employees' intrinsic motivation and vigour, resulting in increased engagement. This elevated engagement results in behaviours that beyond standard job responsibilities. This represents a unique contribution to the literature on leadership, as such mediators may collaborate rather than operate in isolation. This nuanced recognition of the sequential connection between psychological safety and professional engagement aligns with contemporary insights from Choi et al. (2015), who articulated that leadership outcomes are not isolated but interconnected.

The study also showed that the amplification effect happened when there was a lot of psychological safety. This was for how inclusive leadership affected CO-OCB through work engagement. This matches Kahn's (1990) ideas about engagement, which say that a safe work environment helps employees fully engage in their work. However, these results are not comparable to those of studies such as Vakira et al. (2023), where the only mediator was work engagement. The differences may be attributed to sector or cultural differences, and future research should consider specific contexts.

5.1. Research Implications

This study possesses both theoretical and practical consequences. This theoretically enhances our comprehension of the connection between leadership and employee behavior by including serial mediation into leadership studies. It offers practical insights for organizations aiming to boost inclusion, psychological safety, and engagement, hence improving overall organizational performance. The subsequent subsections provide a more detailed discussion of these consequences.

5.1.1. Theoretical Implications

The study deepens the exploration between inclusive leadership and CO-OCB, making good theoretical contributions. As opposed to earlier studies that isolated leadership, this work highlights the intricate connection between leadership behavior and employees' psychological state (Hirak et al., 2012; Randel et al., 2018). Especially, it covers sequential mediating roles of psychological safety and work engagement, providing a more full-scale and balanced theoretical framework.

More importantly, it expands the use of social exchange theory by Blau (1964) with serial mediation in that it postulates that the inclusive

leaders foster trust and reciprocity that are associated with high engagement and proactive employee behaviors. Through the investigation of the psychological safety-work engagement interplay, it contributes to the growing literature on multi-level processes of leadership, as advanced by Choi et al. (2015). This framework provides a foundation for future studies on leadership outcomes in complex organizational settings, moving beyond simplistic models.

In addition, this study challenges traditional views of leadership through the focus of inclusivity driving proactive citizenship behaviors. Although transformational and transactional leadership had been the central themes of the majority of the previous research work (Bass & Riggio, 2006), the importance of inclusive leadership within the context of the modern day, diverse and dynamic workplace becomes highlighted in this study. It also resonates with emerging research that points out the importance of inclusivity as a critical competency in the 21st-century workforce (Randel et al., 2018).

5.1.2. Practical Implications

Practically, the research yields actionable insights for organizations, particularly in the telecommunication sector, as innovation and adaptation are key. Adopting inclusive leadership practices marked by open communication, participative decision-making, and equitable treatment must be a priority for managers. Training programs aimed at enhancing inclusive leadership competencies should be initiated and included in organizational programs for leaders.

It further shows that there is a need to create psychological safety and work engagement as a means of realizing the full potential of employees. The organization should thus have mechanisms in place to encourage psychological safety through communication, recognition of employees' efforts, and correcting the power play that may limit expression. Work engagement can be fostered through job tasks aligned with the employee's skills and interests, providing avenues for growth, and acknowledgment of their success. By integrating these strategies, organizations can foster an environment where CO-OCB thrives, thereby contributing to overall performance and innovation.

5.2. Limitations and Future Research Directions

This research, although valuable, possesses several limitations. The cross-sectional approach is unsuitable for establishing causal inferences. Future research employing longitudinal methodologies could examine the interactions and subsequent evolution of inclusive leadership, psychological safety, job engagement, and CO-OCB. Moreover, the study exclusively concentrated on the telecommunications sector in Pakistan, hence constraining its generalizability. It would help make the proposed model adaptable to various businesses and cultures by extending research in that direction.

Furthermore, even though psychological safety and job engagement were evaluated as mediators, further information about the relationship between inclusive leadership and CO-OCB could be found by looking at organizational justice, emotional intelligence, or team cohesion. Future research should examine these variables as potential moderators or mediators.

Finally, self-report data were employed, which normally creates an issue of common method bias. Although control mechanisms were in place and the Harman single factor test was deducted to make sure it does not significantly affect the findings of the study, future research should use multi-source data like peer or supervisor ratings of CO-OCB to increase the validity of such research. Furthermore, research regarding how inclusive leadership functions in virtual or hybrid workplaces can be informative, especially in a post-pandemic era.

5.3. Conclusion

This paper presents persuasive empirical evidence on pathways through which the inclusive leader drives CO-OCB by having psychological safety along with work engagement as serial mediators. With the mediation of both factors, this research offers an extensive understanding of why and how these leaders develop motivational environments to work beyond job-defined roles for organizational employees. As discussed and tested in the literature, these insights suggest the paramount role that inclusivity leadership serves in facilitating organizations to become adaptable and innovative as well.

The strength of the study is that it adds a better understanding of the inclusive leadership concept, with its implications for employee behavior. It demonstrates how psychological

safety and work engagement can be leveraged to build proactive citizenship behaviors while delivering actionable recommendations for managers to create inclusive, high-performance environments. Future research will further develop the findings by building on the limitations that this study has faced and further extending its reaches into adapting the theory of leadership with advanced organizational practices, leading to a positive working atmosphere and encouraging voluntary behaviors that bring benefits to the organization.

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