

Original Article<https://doi.org/10.54692/amr.2026.31223>**Workplace Diversity and Inclusive Organizational Culture in Pakistan: A Conceptual Framework for Intercultural Management Practice****Maria Khalid¹, Marium Hasan², Nasir Riaz³**¹ University of Management and Technology Lahore, Pakistan² Fazaia College of Education for Women Lahore, Pakistan³ Graduate School of Management at East Asia Management University (EAMU), Phnom Penh, CambodiaCorresponding Author: Maria Khalid Email: Gemcan.gc@gmail.com© 2026 by the Author(s). Published by AMR, under the CC-BY license

Abstract

Having a team with different backgrounds, like age, gender, culture, and skills, has become a key factor in how successful a company is, especially in developing countries. Pakistan has many types of people, including different ethnicities (Punjabi, Sindhi, and Pashto), men and women; many languages (Urdu, Punjabi, Pashto, and Sindhi); and different traditions. Despite having this wide variety of people, companies (HR departments and managers) struggle to make everyone feel included and still find it hard to manage this variety of people effectively. Although researchers are talking more about inclusive practices (such as in education or the workplace), they have not made specific, usable plans to actually make it happen in local schools or workplaces in Pakistan. This research used existing theories, literature, and ideas to build a new model or argument, rather than gathering new data through experiments or surveys. It specifically uses two psychological theories: one is social identity theory and the other is optimal distinctiveness theory. The studies suggest new ideas and theories showing a connection between two things: Leaders who support diversity, hire without bias, train employees, and have clear rules for better final results such as a more diverse workforce, better inclusion, and a better company culture. This research adds new useful information to the existing academic research on a topic by creating a set of rules or a guide or model built specifically on real-world local or specific circumstances rather than just theories of developing countries (like Pakistan and India). It also provides real advice and useful tips for businesses that want to create a working environment where everyone feels safe, valued, and included.

Keywords: Workplace Diversity, Diversity Management, Pakistan, Inclusion, Organizational Performance

1. Introduction

The current modern business world, where countries are connected and companies work across borders, having a team of employees with different backgrounds (like different ages, genders, cultures, and skills) is a key element that is necessary for a company's ability to perform well, make profits, be creative, and beat competitors (Rajesh, 2025). Pakistan has many different ethnic groups (Punjabi and Sindhi), languages, different religious groups, and different regional traditions (Murtaza & Imroze, 2025). That's why the situation is very unique and complicated in keeping everyone united and balanced. The International Labour Organization (2024) explains that hiring people from different backgrounds, such as gender, culture, and age, creates a mixed team. That's why problems are solved in new creative ways, different customers are understood better, and everyone is supported equally, especially in overcoming biases regarding gender or disability in Pakistan. It is important to have good strategies for handling a team of people with different backgrounds. It's not just about making more money or being faster, but it also helps people get along, feel safe and respected, and ensures everyone has the same fair opportunities. This research looks closely at the current state of workplace diversity. It explores the theories and problems related to having a mixed workplace. It suggests practical solutions for managing teams that are proven to work, using real-life examples and data from Pakistani companies.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Landscape of Workplace Diversity in Pakistan

2.1.1 Demographic and Cultural Diversity

Pakistan's workforce reflects the country's wider social and cultural diversity, including differences in age, gender, language, ethnicity, religion, education, and skills. Pakistan is a multiethnic and multilingual society, with major ethnic groups including Punjabis, Pashtuns, Sindhis, Saraikis, Bloch, and other communities, while the country also includes religious minorities such as Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, and others (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics [PBS], 2023; Britannica, 2026; Murtaza & Imroze, 2025). Similarly, Pakistan has a rich linguistic heritage, with Urdu, Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashto, Balochi, Saraikis, and other regional languages contributing to the country's cultural identity and social diversity (PBS, 2023). In

organizational settings, such diversity can help firms benefit from different perspectives, wider market understanding, improved creativity, and better problem-solving (Cox & Blake, 1991; Rajesh, 2025). However, despite the presence of diversity in Pakistani society and workplaces, many organizations are unable to fully gain its benefits because traditional social attitudes, gender stereotypes, ethnic biases, disability-related exclusion, and resistance to change continue to affect inclusive workplace practices (Hanif et al., 2022; Accountability Lab, 2023; International Labour Organization, 2024). Therefore, diversity alone is not enough; Pakistani organizations also need inclusive policies, fair hiring practices, leadership support, and bias-reduction mechanisms to convert workforce diversity into creativity, performance, and competitive advantage (Cox & Blake, 1991; Hanif et al., 2022; Rajesh, 2025).

2.1.2 Gender and Social Inclusion

Representing men and women in workplaces in an equitable manner is a great social and organizational challenge in Pakistan. Women's participation in regular paid work is also lower than it should be as a result of deep-rooted gender norms, inequity in access to education and skills, geographic limitations, unpaid care responsibilities, discriminatory actions in the workplace and insufficient family-friendly workplace policies. Many women find these barriers a challenge to getting into, staying in and advancing their careers in the formal sector. Hanif et al. (2022) also indicate that many organizations are still present in Pakistan, having visible gender disparities and therefore not leveraging workforce diversity as it is supposed to be. This gender imbalance may have adverse implications for organizational efficiency, decision-making, innovation, creativity, productivity, and performance since companies miss out on the advantages of having diversity of vision and participation (Cox & Blake, 1991; Hanif et al., 2022). Besides, women in Pakistan are also facing challenges at the workplace in advancing their careers, including limited mentoring and networking opportunities, male-dominated work culture, rigid work hours, absence of flexible working hours, lack of maternity support, non-existence of workplace childcare arrangements, and unequal promotion opportunities (ILO, 2022; UNICEF Pakistan, 2024; UN Women Pakistan, 2024). Gender diversity also needs to be defined as a mix of both the number of women on the job and the way that organizations develop policies and practices to ensure that they are inclusive, employ fair allocation and promotion systems, make space for flexible working, offer maternity benefits, provide daycare facilities, and foster supportive working relationships with women's leaders (Hanif et al., 2022; ILO, 2022; UNICEF Pakistan, 2024).

2.1.3 Regional and Disability Diversity

Some places (usually big cities) have many jobs, while other places (like rural areas) have very few jobs, because of a lack of basic services (like good roads, internet) talented people living there, so they cannot get good jobs or opportunities. People with disabilities often have very hard lives because the world is not designed for them to move around or use services easily, because many people hold negative, unfair opinions about them. These certain reasons make it harder for specific groups of people, such as women, minorities, or people with disabilities, to get hired, resulting in fewer of them working in that job. For instance, if women make up fifty percent of population but only ten percent of engineers are women, women are underrepresented in engineering (Accountability Lab, 2023; Core, 2022).

2.1.4 Organizational Responses

Even though there are big hurdles such as traditional gender roles, cultural obstacles, or poor policy implementations, certain companies are leading the way, doing something new that hires and supports people from different backgrounds (such as women and minorities) in Pakistan. For example, GIZ Pakistan has created a work environment that helps women and minorities succeed by hiring fairly, giving employees guidance to help them grow, and allowing flexible hours (working from home to help with work-life balance). They are setting the example for other companies to follow to make the workplace fair and equal. Pakistan Cables Limited has created written official rules to ensure the company includes people from different backgrounds, specifically focusing on gender equality, and they are aiming to increase the number of women working at the company in technical, leadership and frontline roles, and they are upgrading physical facilities such as installing female-friendly washroom, safe transportation, and prayer areas to create a comfortable environment for women (Pakistan Cables, 2023).

2.2 Theoretical Foundations and Models of Diversity Management

The academic studies (books, research papers) about managing a team with different backgrounds (age, race, gender) are based on research from psychology and how companies operate. These fields explain how people act in groups and how to create a work environment.

2.2.1 Social Identity Theory and Optimal Distinctiveness Theory

Social Identity Theory (SIT) explains that people define who they are based on the groups they belong to (e.g. nationality, team, and religion). We categorize ourselves into “in-groups” and others into “out-groups”. This leads to favoring our own group and bias against outsiders,

which can create conflict and break down team unity. Optimal Distinctiveness Theory suggests that people need to feel they fit in (belonging) while also feeling special (uniqueness); because of this, diversity efforts at work must make people feel included in the group, but also allowed to express who they are as individuals (Hanif et al., 2022).

2.2.2 Diversity Management Models

Companies make specific rules and plan to handle diversity, and the goal is to use the different backgrounds, skills, and viewpoints of a mixed staff to make the business more successful. The company makes a special effort to hire and promote people from groups that have historically been left out, rather than just waiting for them to apply. Effective, modern companies do not treat diversity, keeping employees, and training as separate tasks; they combine these three areas into one master plan to make the workplace better for everyone and more successful (Core, 2022; Hanif et al., 2022). These models believe that for a company to do well, leaders must be fully dedicated, respectful of diversity, and always checking and improving how they work.

3. Case Studies and Best Practices from Pakistani Organizations

3.1 GIZ Pakistan

GIZ Pakistan has made it a permanent rule to treat all employees equally, regardless of background, gender, or ability. They do this by hiring fairly, mentoring staff for growth, and offering flexible hours to support a healthy work-life balance. The company gives money to employees to help pay for daycare and offers safe spaces for children such as nursing rooms, and the company has strict rules that no form of bullying, unwanted sexual advances or threats are allowed. If harassment happens, immediately punish anyone who harasses others. Having regular meetings to talk about diversity helps create a workplace where everyone feels safe, respected, and valued (GIZ Pakistan, 2023).

3.2 Pakistan Cables Limited

Pakistan Cables has officially written down and adopted specific rules, creating a workplace with different types of people where everyone feels welcomed, especially ensuring women have equal chances to work and grow. The company ensures women have safe ways to get to work and private restrooms; they also have a plan to hire more women. Workshops help employees to realize their hidden prejudices, which make them fairer bosses who treat everyone equally (Pakistan Cables, 2023).

3.3 Higher Education Sector

Universities in Pakistan are becoming more common in higher education to enhance fairness and improve the overall learning and working environment. Universities are working to make sure everyone, both students and staff, feels welcomed and respected. They are doing so by actively facing and solving problems related to money differences and understanding different cultures (Hanif et al., 2022; Suit Journal, 2023).

4. Research Gap

Even though more researchers in Pakistan are studying how to manage a diverse workforce, most studies only look at how this affects company profit or performance. They are overlooking the issue of how and why these diversity rules actually make employees feel included and valued (Hanif et al., 2022; Hanif et al., 2023). Furthermore, old studies looked at diversity programs (like hiring targets) as separate, one-off events. These studies did not relate to the care shown by the leaders, the acceptance of the policy (company rules), or the acceptance of the culture (office atmosphere). The research did not merge all these together into a single and complete strategy (Jabeen, 2022; Accountability Lab, 2023). Research conducted in Western or developed countries has shown that good leadership and diversity in the team (gender, age, etc.) increase company performance. We do not have enough tailored, practical, or locally tested plans that fit the specific environment of a certain place. These plans need to be made especially for developing nations, such as Pakistan, which have unique cultural, social, and economic issues (Turi et al., 2022). Therefore, this research fixes this by creating a structured plan for handling staff differences specifically within Pakistani workplaces. This study is creating a new plan to help Pakistani companies better manage employees from different backgrounds.

5. Methodology

The current research is conceptual in nature and build its argument based on the analysis and incorporation of material published in research articles and national or international reports, as well as material that is publicly available. The purpose of this approach is to re-organize the present knowledge and convert it in a practical model to resolve workplace diversity in Pakistani organizations.

The review was done in three stages. This was followed by an analysis of literature and research about workplace diversity, inclusion and management in Pakistan and other developing countries with special focus on the more recent literature. Articles and reports from credible sources such as the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2023), World Bank (2024), UNICEF Pakistan (2024), and UN Women Pakistan (2024), were given greater weight. Second, it was looked at through two theories that may explain the development of subgroups in the workplace, as well as the need to belong to a group and to be unique at the same time – the social identity theory and the optimal distinctiveness theory. Third, some illustrative cases like GIZ Pakistan (2023) and Pakistan Cables (2023) from the Pakistani organizations were explored to test the findings from the literature with respect to the actual practice.

These patterns emerged from this blended reading, connecting inclusive leadership, fair hiring, employee training and clear rules to a more diverse workforce, robust inclusion and improved company culture. These patterns were clustered into the conceptual structures, expressed in Section 6 and then in testable propositions in Section 7. The framework has been developed from existing literature and illustrative cases and does not rely on new field data, so it is important that the reader view it as a base for future empirical testing, but not as a definitive and final model.

6. Proposed Conceptual Framework

A proposed plan, model, or structure designed to show the relationship between ideas will explain key things inside a company that affect (how it work, such as leadership, policies, and culture) and the result of having a mix of different people (e.g. gender, age) on company performance, such as productivity, innovation, or employee morale, specifically organizations within Pakistan. When top managers and bosses are genuinely, actively dedicated, not just talking about it, they are the main force that creates and defines a work environment where everyone feels safe and respected, valued and all people can succeed, regardless of their background. A company uses special, fair hiring methods to make sure they hire a wide variety of people (including specific groups like drivers). At the same time, they teach their current staff about diversity to help them recognize and stop hidden automatic prejudice; they might not know they have. When, furthermore, companies offer helpful rules like allowing staff to work from home, choose their own hours, and treat everyone fairly, it makes employees happier and motivated to do a good job. When a company takes several actions together (such as hiring diverse people, training staff, and creating fair policies), they manage a variety of backgrounds

and perspectives (such as making more money and being more creative) effectively. This plan (or set of rules) is very useful to use in Pakistan because local traditions religion and social habits have a big impact on how different types of people work together. The theory defines properly managing a diverse workforce as the bridge that connects company rules to the final results (higher innovation, better performance).

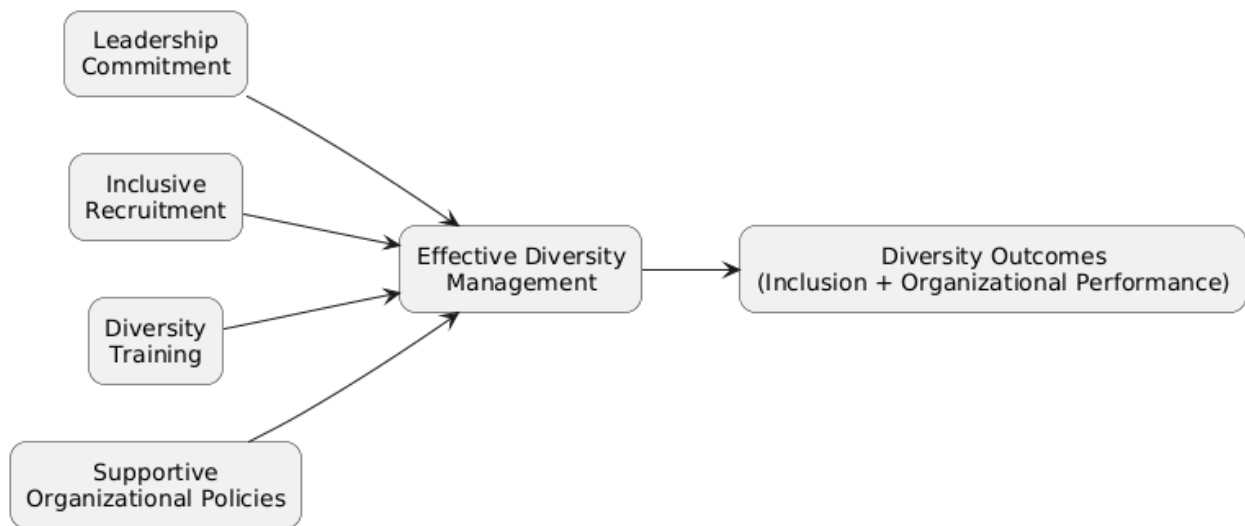


Fig 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework

7. Proposed Propositions

- **H1:** When bosses and seniors managers truly care about and support having a diverse workplace, their efforts make diversity programs work much better.
- **H2:** When companies make their hiring process fair and welcoming to everyone, they hire a wider variety of people (different genders, ages and backgrounds).
- **H3:** Training in diversity makes the office a better, more respectful place to work, while reducing unfair treatment and arguments.
- **H4:** When companies take care of all their people through fair rules, those people work harder and feel more loyal.
- **H5:** When a company does a good job of hiring people from different backgrounds, it results in better business and better workplace experiences, where everyone feels they belong.

8. Discussion

8.1 Key Challenges in Managing Workplace Diversity in Pakistan

Leading teams with different backgrounds (genders, ethnicity) in Pakistan is difficult because of rule, company setups, and social/cultural traditions, Deeply held traditions, religious beliefs and social rules often make it hard to create a more diverse workplace or community .Strict traditional ideas about how men women should behave, along with unfair prejudices against minority groups, cause people to fight against diversity programs and make these programs less successful (Accountability Lab, 2023; Hanif et al., 2022). When there are communication problems and too many layers of bosses, it makes it hard for employees to share ideas, work together and make quick decisions. When people with different languages cannot talk easily and they are also afraid to speak up to their bosses the company fails to be creative and solve problems (Core, 2022). Another big problem is that the company does not have written rules or official procedures for promoting diversity and staff or leaders do not understand the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion. Many companies do not have organized plans or training. Because of this, employees do not understand their own hidden prejudices and leaders do not know how to make everyone feel included (Hanif et al., 2022; Accountability Lab, 2023). Also, both bosses and workers are often stopping progress because they don't want to change. This is usually because they are afraid of losing their position or they do not understand how having a diverse workplace helps the company (Core, 2022).

8.2 Lessons Learned from Diversity Management Practices

Leading companies in Pakistan such as GIZ Pakistan, Pakistan Cables Ltd and Universities have identified the best ways to make the workplace and schools in Pakistan more welcoming and effective to everyone.

The most important starting point for any organization is having bosses who are truly dedicated and who ensure that rules are actually followed. Companies that plan for diversity at the top and in their rules, rather than just hoping it happens, create better workplace where employees feel comfortable and perform better. When companies like GIZ Pakistan create firm rules and Pakistan Cables sets specific goals to hire diversity people, they prove that making diversity and equality a core, permanent part or the company's operating system (policies, culture and daily work) rather than just a temporary project (GIZ Pakistan, 2023; Pakistan Cables, 2023). Secondly fair hiring and helping all employees grow (training) are very important for keeping

a workplace diverse and broad over the long term. Mentorship programs and fair hiring processes help fix unfair systems and support people who are usually left out (GIZ Pakistan, 2023). Thirdly giving employees' flexible hours and supportive policies for families make the workplace better for everyone, especially for women who need to balance work with home life. The company's policies (like flexible hours) help workers manage both their job and personal life (family, health). This action leads to better results for the company. Employees stay at the company longer and are happier, more motivated and more committed to doing a good job.

Moreover, treating employees with respect and making them feel safe at work allows them to be honest, take risks and share ideas without fear of being punished or embarrassed. By constantly checking progress and listening to employees' feedback, a company ensures its diversity plans actually work and continue to support the company's overall goals.

8.3 Strategic Implications and Recommendations for Pakistani Organizations

The problems regarding workplace diversity in Pakistan have been identified, and it has also been clarified what actually works. Using this information, we suggest specific smart plans to make the Pakistani workplace more inclusive and fairer for everyone. Take the company's main plan worldwide for fairness and inclusion and make it fit the specific situation of a local office; they should change the plan to match local customs, traditions, and laws. It is necessary to train, mentor, and teach skills to leaders to help them improve because leaders are the most important part of making things happen in a company in making sure everyone feels welcome, valued, and treated fairly and leading the company through new ideas, improvements, or big transformations. If an organization wants to be truly and diverse, it must write down strong rules and actually follow them, so it becomes the way we do things here. Moreover, it is essential that companies continuously deliver refreshed training that helps employees learn about various cultures. This facilitates working as a team and being more comfortable around people from different cultural backgrounds. Involving government agencies and other businesses in your company's initiatives to develop a diverse and fair environment will result in better and more effective outcomes. Lastly, it's not enough for a company to talk a good game on diversity it has to have the numbers to prove it and that puts leaders in the driver's seat for driving a change in the company.

9. Conclusion

In Pakistan, it is crucial for businesses to effectively manage and lead teams that comprise members from diverse backgrounds, genders, and cultural backgrounds. In these ways the company is growing, becoming more productive and making more profit and is also ensuring equal opportunities, respect, and fair treatment for everyone, regardless of their background. Strong leadership and fair planning can transform problems into opportunities for success even when things are challenging with old habits, rigid structures, and unfair rules. Pakistan's fair and inclusive hiring or management brings joy to workers, enriched ideas, and increased profit to companies. Continued efforts to make the workplace a fair and welcoming environment for all will push Pakistan's economy forward and make it more convenient to engage with the rest of the world.

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