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Inclusive Leadership and Innovative Work Behavior:The Mediating Role of Autonomous Motivation and Perceived Job Autonomy in Pakistan's Banking Sector

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to inspect the role of Inclusive Leadership as a predictor of Innovative Work Behavior. It also investigates the mediating role of Autonomous Motivation and Perceived Job Autonomy in Pakistan's banking sector. Based on the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), this study argues that Inclusive Leadership fosters Autonomous Motivation and Perceived Job Autonomy, which, in turn, leads to Innovative Work Behavior. The sample that was used on this research consisted of professionals in managerial and leadership positions, ensuring relevant and informed responses for the study. A total of 298 responses were used for the final data analysis. This study employed the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS 4.0 to test hypothetical relationships. The results revealed that IL has a significant positive effect on IWB. Furthermore, PJA was found to be a significant mediator of the relationship between IL and IWB. Given that both the direct effect of IL on IWB and the indirect effect through PJA are significant, the results indicate the PJA plays a partial mediating role in this relationship. Similarly, AM was found to be a significant mediator of the relationship between IL and IWB. The significance of both the direct and indirect effects suggested that AM also plays a partial mediating role in the relationship between IL and IWB. Overall, the findings of this study confirm the direct effect of IL on IWB, as well as the partial mediating role of PJA and AM in Pakistan's banking sector.

Introduction

Organizations today face a stark reality: the rapid pace of the market, technological advancements, and evolving customer expectations have transformed innovation from a strategic option into an operational necessity. The task is in particular complex because innovation is, by nature, a human process rather than an organizational aspect. IWB, defined by Scott and Bruce (1994) as 'a multi-stage process in which employees generate, champion, and implement new ideas, depends fundamentally on individuals' willingness and ability to go beyond routine tasks and introduce novel ideas.' So, understanding what drives this outlook has become one of the most critical issues in the field of organizational behavior research.

Leadership is widely recognized as a fundamental predecessor of IWB (Wu & Li, 2023; Li & Tang, 2022). Among the various leadership styles studied in this particular context, IL has attracted considerable academic interest in recent years. This concept was introduced by Nembhard and Edmondson (2006) to describe the behavior of leaders who actively solicit and value employee contributions; later on, Carmeli et al. (2010) expanded the idea and it to encompass broader qualities such as; openness, accessibility, and availability, that inclusive leaders demonstrate in their daily interactions with colleagues. Randel et al. (2018)

developed this approach by defining inclusive leadership as equity, shared decision-making, and a real appreciation for diverse contributions. These definitions conclude to share a common emphasis and importance on the role of leaders in creating conditions that allow employees to feel sufficiently safe and motivated to engage actively in their work. Conditions that are conducive to risk-taking and idea-sharing are considered to be an essential element for innovation.

Practical data confirms that there exists a positive relationship between IL and IWB (Wu & Li, 2023; Li & Tang, 2022; Qi et al., 2019). However, by just observing this relationship is insufficient and not enough to understand how it actually works. The mechanisms linking a leader's behavior to employee innovation are, without a doubt, more interesting than from a theoretical point. The more useful in practice, than direct relationship itself. This particular study focuses on two such mechanisms: autonomous motivation and perceived job autonomy. The Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan (1985) and significantly expanded in later on decades (Ryan & Deci, 2020, 2023), provide the theoretical foundation for this research. SDT draws fundamental distinction between autonomous and controlled motivation. Autonomous motivation, is rooted in the genuine value or meaning a person attaches to a task or job, is consistently associated with a wider creative, exploratory, and persistent behaviors than the motivation driven by external pressure or obligation. The essence of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) lies in the foundation that autonomous motivation is not fixed individual trait but rather it is a product of social environment: leaders who offer genuine and real choices to their employees, clearly explain and communicate the rationale behind tasks, and are attentive towards employee feedback, eventually create conditions conducive to the flourishing of autonomous motivation. Thus, inclusive leadership is closely linked to autonomy-fostering behaviors.

Perceived job autonomy refers to the extent with which employees feel and maybe believe that they have the freedom and discretion in deciding how they want to carry out their work. It may include the freedom to choose different work methods, organize tasks accordingly, and exercise judgement within the responsibilities of their jobs. This represents a distinctive mechanism from autonomous motivation. The perceived job autonomy concerns with the degree of discretion employees experience in their work, whereas autonomous motivation concerns the reasons why they engage in that work.

Past research suggested that employees who perceive greater autonomy may be more willing to explore different approaches and engage in innovative work behaviour (Zhang & Khan, 2024; Dixit & Upadhyay, 2021). Inclusive leadership may contribute to this sense of autonomy by involving employees in decision-making, listening to their views, and allowing them appropriate discretion in carrying out their roles and responsibilities. In this manner, inclusive leadership may be associated with innovative work behaviour through changes in employees' perceptions and insights of their own work environment, addition to the relationship with their motivation.

This study in particular, examines these relationships in the context of the Pakistani banking sector. This context is relevant because the sector has experienced considerable changes associated with globalization, digital transformation, and developments in the regulatory environment (Hussain et al., 2022). Banks operating in this environment needs employees who can meet regulatory and organisational requirements while responding to problems, identifying gaps and opportunities, while developing new means and methods of working. Despite the importance of these behaviours, research examining the relationships between leadership, motivation, autonomy, and innovative work behaviour in the Pakistani banking sector remains relatively limited. In particular, lesser studies have examined the mechanisms through which inclusive leadership may be associated with innovative work behaviour. This study addresses this specific gap by examining both perceived job autonomy and autonomous motivation as potential mediating mechanisms.

Based on data collected from 298 professionals in management and leadership roles, this study used PLS-SEM with SmartPLS 4.0 to examine a model in which perceived job autonomy and autonomous motivation partially mediate the relationship between inclusive leadership and innovative work behaviour. By considering these two mechanisms within the same model, the study provided a more detailed understanding of the relationship between inclusive leadership and innovative work behaviour, while contributing to empirical evidence from the Pakistani banking context. The findings also have practical implications for leadership practices and job design in banking organisations.

Theory and Conceptual Development

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) as a Theoretical Foundation

SDT, originally proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985) and later on was further developed by Ryan and Deci (2017, 2020), provided that the theoretical foundation for this research study. The central distinction within SDT is between autonomous and controlled motivation. Autonomous motivation (AM) occurs when an individual engages in an activity because they find it interesting, personally meaningful, or consistent, rather relates with their values. However, controlled motivation, in a sharp contrast, is driven by external demands or could be internal pressures, such as the need to avoid guilt or protect one's own sense of self-worth. From an SDT perspective, the reason because of which an individual engages in particular behaviour is important, not simply the strength of motivation itself. 'Research has associated autonomous motivation with greater engagement, creativity, and persistence' (McAnally & Hagger, 2024; Ryan & Deci, 2020).

SDT also proposes three major and very basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The point to which these needs are supported in the social environment usually can influence the quality of an individual's motivation. For instance, in the workplace, this makes the behaviour of leaders particularly relevant. Leaders who allow their employees to some extent, some choice in how they carry out their work, recognize their contributions, and encourage their participation can create conditions that support these psychological needs. However, in contrast, highly controlling, micromanaging leadership may restrict employees' sense of choice and increase reliance on external pressures (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

This perspective is particularly relevant to the present study as inclusive leadership involves relational behaviours that can give employees opportunities to participate, express their views, and practice discretion in their work. Such conditions may be reflected in employees' perceptions of job autonomy and in the extent to which they are autonomously motivated. Therefore, this study draws on SDT to determine whether these two factors help explain the relationship between inclusive leadership and innovative work behaviour.

Inclusive Leadership (IL)

The concept of IL was properly introduced by Nembhard and Edmondson (2006), who described it as 'the words and actions through which leaders invite and value the contributions of others.' Carmeli et al. (2010) further illustrated the characters of inclusive leaders as open, accessible, and available in their interactions with employees. These qualities can communicate to the employees that their views are taken seriously and that they are encouraged to contribute. Randel et al. (2018) extended the concept by emphasising two complementary aspects of employees' experience; a sense of belonging and a sense of individuality. From this perspective angle, inclusive leadership involves fair treatment, allowing participation in decision-making, and active encouragement of employees' contributions.

Although these definitions differ in emphasis what the are stressing on, they share the same idea that inclusive leadership is expressed through everyday interactions between leaders and employees. Relying, rather primarily on, formal authority, inclusive leaders create opportunities for employees to speak, participate, and contribute. Listening to employees, being available when they raise concerns, and responding positively to their ideas are therefore important aspects of inclusive leadership (Qi et al., 2019; Wu & Li, 2023). Such behaviours have been associated with outcomes including organisational commitment, work engagement, psychological safety, and innovative work behaviour (Li & Tang, 2022; Shafaei et al., 2024; Umrani et al., 2024).

For the current study, these characteristics are particularly relevant because they provide a basis for understanding how leadership behaviour, does influence employees' willingness and ability to engage in innovative and original work. When employees are encouraged and given the space to express their views and are allowed the opportunities to contribute, they may also perceive greater discretion in the way with which they approach their work. This provides a basis for probing into the perceived job autonomy and autonomous motivation as being the potential mechanisms linking inclusive leadership with innovative work behaviour.

Innovative Work Behavior (IWB)

IWB refers to employees' 'deliberate efforts to generate, promote, and implement new ideas in their work' (Scott & Bruce, 1994). These stages are related but distinct in terms of the way innovation requires not only generation of ideas but also gaining support for them and putting them into practice (Janssen, 2000). IWB involves a range of employee behaviours that are directed towards introducing and applying new ways of working.

IWB is particularly relevant and contemporary to service-intensive and knowledge-based organisations, where employee contributions can directly affect organisational outcomes (Anderson et al., 2014). Previous research has linked IWB to factors such as leadership, motivation, psychological empowerment, and job design. These findings suggest that the work environment can influence employees' willingness and ability to engage in innovative behaviour.

Inclusive Leadership (IL) and Innovative Work Behavior (IWB)

IL can encourage IWB by creating an environment in which employees feel comfortable sharing ideas and contributing to decisions. Leaders who are open and accessible can reduce employees' concerns about expressing new or different ideas (Wu & Li, 2023). When employees feel that their contributions are valued, they may also be more willing to put additional effort into their work, including efforts related to innovation (Randel et al., 2018; Umrani et al., 2024).

Empirical firsthand research across different sectors and national contexts has reported a positive relationship between inclusive leadership and innovative work behaviour (Qi et al., 2019; Li & Tang, 2022; Wu & Li, 2023; Guo et al., 2023). Evidence from Pakistan context similarly suggests that leadership can encourage employees to take the risks involved in generating, promoting, and implementing innovative ideas (Javed et al., 2019). Based on this relationship, the study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Leadership has a significant positive effect on innovative work behavior.

The Mediating Role of Perceived Job Autonomy (PJA)

Perceived job autonomy refers to the extent to which employees believe they have freedom to plan and carry out their work and make decisions within their job responsibilities (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). This emphasis is on employees' perceptions rather than simply on whether autonomy is formally included in their job descriptions. Even where employees are given formal decision-making authority, supervisory or controlling behaviour can limit their actual sense of control over their work (Lee et al., 2021).

IL may strengthen employees' perceived job autonomy by involving them in decision-making, seeking their views and opinions, respecting their judgement and decisions, all the while allowing them discretion in how they perform their work. Shakil et al. (2023) found that employees working under inclusive leaders reported greater perceptions of autonomy, while Jaleel and Sarmad (2024) reported a ‘positive relationship between supportive leadership and autonomous functioning’. From an SDT perspective, such leadership behaviours can support employees' need for autonomy by giving them greater choice and involvement in their work (Deci & Ryan, 2000; McAnally & Hagger, 2024). Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2(a): Inclusive leadership has a significant positive effect on the perceived job autonomy.

Further on the linkage between PJA and IWB is well established. Employees who feel that they have significant autonomy in their work are more likely to experiment, explore new approaches, and take the initiatives necessary for innovation (Zhang & Khan, 2024; Dixit & Upadhyay, 2021). This is because autonomy reduces the perceived cost of deviating from routine: when employees feel that they are responsible for their work, experimenting with new methods is viewed as an extension of that particular responsibility not a transgression of expectations. Research in knowledge-intensive sectors have consistently shown that the greater perceived autonomy is associated with higher levels of innovative behavior. Some studies indicate that this relationship is strong when employees also receive significant support and feedback from their managers (Suhandiah et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2021). Job autonomy significantly influences innovative behavior, as the freedom it provides allows employees to experiment with and explore new ideas more extensively (Škerlavaj et al., 2014). Therefore:

H2(b): Perceived job autonomy has a significant positive effect on innovative behavior.

Together, hypotheses H2(a) and H2(b) imply that perceived job autonomy acts as a mediating mechanism through which inclusive leadership influences innovative work behavior. The reasoning is sequential and successive: inclusive leaders create an environment in which employees feel their judgment is respected and their decision-making capacity is considered, thereby strengthening their sense of job autonomy and motivating them to engage more actively in innovative behaviors. Therefore:

H2: Perceived job autonomy plays a mediating role in the relationship between inclusive leadership and innovative work behavior.

The Mediating Role of Autonomous Motivation

Within SDT, autonomous motivation refers to engage in work for reasons that the individual personally values, for instance, the interest in the task, its' personal significance, or its alignment with one's values (Ryan & Deci, 2020). It differs from controlled motivation in that the individual identifies with the activity rather than acting because of external pressure or internal demands. In organisational settings, autonomous motivation has been associated with positive work behaviours, including creativity, knowledge sharing, and innovative behaviour (McAnally & Hagger, 2024; Papachristopoulos & Arvanitis, 2024).

IL may support autonomous motivation by creating opportunities for employees to participate, express their views, and contribute to decisions. By paying attention to employees and valuing their contributions, inclusive leaders can support employees' need for autonomy, which is central to the motivational process described by SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Evidence from the Pakistani IT sector supports this relationship. Korkmaz et al. (2022) found that autonomous motivation mediated the relationship between inclusive leadership and innovative work behaviour. Also, research in the Indian IT sector reported a mediating role for autonomous motivation in the relationship between inclusive leadership and employee creativity (IRJMS, 2024).

These findings suggest that autonomous motivation may be one mechanism through which inclusive leadership is associated with innovative work behaviour. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3(a): Inclusive leadership has a significant positive effect on autonomous motivation.

The relationship between autonomous motivation and innovative work behaviour is consistent with the principles of SDT. When employees are autonomously motivated, they engage in their work because they find it interesting, meaningful, and/or consistent with their values and identity. This differs from behaviour driven just by external expectations or pressure. Autonomous motivation has been associated with greater exploration, creativity, and persistence, all of which are relevant to the generation and enactment of new ideas (Grenier et al., 2024; Papachristopoulos & Arvanitis, 2024). Employees who find their work 'personally meaningful' may therefore be more willing to explore new approaches and persist when efforts to introduce change encounter difficulties.

Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

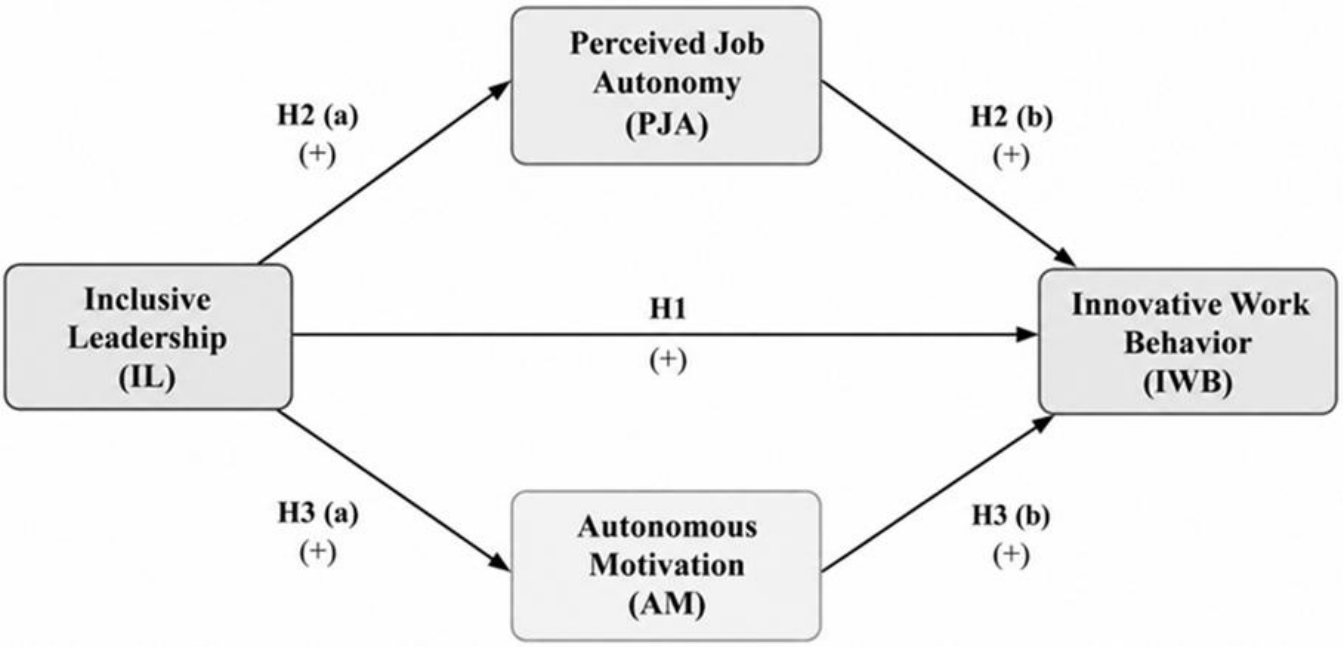
H3(b): Autonomous motivation has a significant positive effect on innovative work behavior.

The argument for comprehensive mediation supports the idea that inclusive leadership fosters self-motivation by satisfying employees' psychological need for autonomy within a relational context, through recognition, inclusion, and genuine responsiveness, which, in turn, drives innovative work behavior. This mechanism operates in parallel with, and independently of, the job autonomy mechanism described earlier.

H3: Autonomous motivation plays a mediating role in the relationship between inclusive leadership and innovative work behavior.

The proposed full model, which integrates H1, H2(a)/(b), and H3(a)/(b), is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. ***Conceptual Framework***



Methodology

Research Design and Setting

The study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional research study design. The data was collected from professionals working in the Pakistani banking sector, providing the empirical context for this research. The unit of analysis is the individual employee. A cross-sectional design was determined to be appropriate because the study examines the relationships among inclusive leadership, perceived job autonomy, autonomous motivation, and innovative work behaviour at a particular point in time, rather than examining how these variables change over time (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

The Pakistani banking sector was selected as the research context because of its relevance to the study of innovative work behaviour. Changes in technology, competition, and regulatory requirements with the passage of time have increased the need for banks to adapt their products, services, and work practices. These changes make employee innovation an important area of study and research in the sector. At the same time, research examining the factors that influence innovative work behaviour among employees in Pakistani banks remains relatively limited. The sector therefore provides a relevant context for examining the relationships proposed in this study.

Sampling and Data Collection

Data collected via a structured online questionnaire distributed using Google Forms. With a chain-referral sampling technique used, with initial contacts in the banking sector asked to share the questionnaire with eligible colleagues within their professional networks. This particular approach was used because access to professionals in the banking sector can be difficult to obtain through probability sampling. A similar approach has been used in organisational research in comparable contexts (Bhatti et al., 2021).

The target population sample consisted of professionals in management and leadership roles who are working in commercial banks in Pakistan. This group was selected because these employees were able to report on their experiences of leadership, their own autonomous motivation and perceived job task and autonomy, along with their innovative work behaviour. A total of 390 questionnaires were distributed. After incomplete or inconsistent responses were excluded, 298 responses were retained for the final analysis, representing a response rate of approximately 76.4%.

The definitive sample size was considered adequate for the PLS-SEM analysis based on the recommended sample-size considerations for models of comparable complexity (Hair et al., 2022).

Measurement Instruments

The variables were measured using scales from the organizational behavior literature, adapted for the banking sector context, as and where necessary. Each item was rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 being 'strongly disagree' to 5 being 'strongly agree'.

IL was measured using the scale developed by Pless and Maak (2004), which 'encompasses the relational and ethical dimensions of inclusive leadership', that included recognizing employee contributions, openness to diverse perspectives and lastly, fostering a work environment that is conducive to innovation. This particular scale was widely used in leadership research and is considered well-suited to understanding the multi-dimensional nature of inclusive leadership.

IWB was measured by adopting the six-item scale developed by Scott and Bruce (1994). This scale encompasses the three fundamental stages of innovative behavior: idea generation, idea promotion, and idea implementation. It remains the most cited and validated instrument for measuring innovative work behavior in the organizational behavior literature (Janssen, 2000; Anderson et al., 2014).

AM was determined using items adapted from the Ryan and Connell Self-Regulation Questionnaire (1989), which is based on Self-Determination Theory. This questionnaire assesses the extent to which individuals engage in work-related behaviors for autonomous reasons, as opposed to controlled reasons. The scale distinguishes between intrinsic motivation, identified regulation, introjected regulation, and external regulation. The autonomous motivation subscale includes the two most self-determined forms: intrinsic motivation and identified regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

PJA was measured using the Breaugh (1985) scale, which assesses employees' perceived discretionary power along three dimensions: autonomy in work method (freedom regarding how work is performed), autonomy in work organization (freedom regarding when work is performed), and autonomy in evaluation criteria (freedom regarding performance evaluation standards). Breaugh's (1985) scale is recognized as one of the most comprehensive and psychometrically reliable measures of work autonomy available in the literature; it offers broader coverage of the concept than the single-item autonomy measure included in the Job Diagnostic Survey (Hackman & Oldham, 1976)

Table 1. Measurement Scales

Variable	No. of Items	Measurement Scales
Inclusive Leadership	06	Pless & Mark, 2004
Innovative Work Behavior	06	Scott & Bruce, 1994
Autonomous Motivation	08	Ryan et al., 1989
Perceived Job Autonomy	08	Breaugh, J. A., 1985
Total	28	

Analytical Approach

This study employed PLS-SEM utilizing SmartPLS 4.0 (Ringle et al., 2022) to test the hypothesized relationships between the variables. PLS-SEM was used because the study examines a relatively complex model that included two mediating variables and focused on the relationships among the proposed constructs. It is also suitable for models estimated with moderate sample sizes and does not need multivariate normality to the same extent as covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM) (Hair et al., 2019, 2022).

The prospective and potential for CMB was assessed using the full collinearity VIF approach proposed by Kock (2015). This approach assessed both vertical and lateral collinearity among the constructs and has been proposed as an alternative to Harman's single-factor test. Following Kock's (2015) criterion, VIF values below 3.3 indicate that common method bias is unlikely

to be a serious concern. The full collinearity assessment showed that all construct VIF values were below this threshold, suggesting that CMB was unlikely to pose a substantial threat to the study's findings.

The analysis proceeded in two stages. First, the measurement model was assessed for indicator reliability, internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Indicator reliability was examined through factor loadings, while internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability. Convergent validity was assessed using average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity was examined using the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio (Henseler et al., 2015).

The structural model was then assessed using path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2), effect sizes (f^2), and the significance of the hypothesised relationships. Bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples was used to assess the significance of the direct and indirect effects, following the recommended procedures for mediation analysis in PLS-SEM (Hair et al., 2022; Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

Results

Profiles of Respondents

Through the data collection phase, the questionnaires were sent out to professionals in management and leadership positions within the banking sector via an online link. Where a total of 390 questionnaires were sent, out of which 298 responses were retained for the final analysis. This represented a response rate of 76.4%. The respondents were those professionals, who are working in management and leadership roles, making them relevant to the context examined in this study.

The demographic profile showed that the sample was predominantly male, with 258 men (86.6%) and 40 women (13.4%). In terms of age, 239 respondents (80.2%) were over 40 years old, while 35 (11.7%) were between 36 and 40 years and 24 (8.1%) were between 25 and 35 years. The age distribution therefore indicates that most respondents were relatively experienced professionals.

The respondents represented various levels of organisational seniority. Overall, 74.5% held senior management positions including executive and vice-presidential positions (EVP, SEVP, SVP, and VP), which accounted for 37.0% of the sample; followed by general managers and deputy general managers (GM and DGM) at 21.5%, and heads of departments or services at 16.1%. The remaining respondents held positions such as deputy director (4.0%), project or middle manager (3.4%), and team leader (2.7%).

The respondents were generally experienced in the banking sector, with approximately 94% of them reporting more than eight years of banking experience. Overall, the demographic profile indicates that the sample largely composed of senior and experienced banking professionals, providing responses from individuals with substantial experience in the organisational context examined in the study.

Table 2. ***Respondents' Demographics (n=298)***

Categories		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	258	86.6
	Female	40	13.4
Age	25-30	10	3.4
	31-35	14	4.7
	35-40	35	11.7
	Above 40	239	80.2
Total		298	100

Assessment of Measurement Models

Composite Reliability

The measurement of assessment model is designed to determine the relationship between the latent variables and the measures that they represent. It comprised of reliability, validity, and consistency of the scales that were utilized for data collection. The structural equation modeling using SmartPLS, this was used to test the latent variables' reliability, validity, and consistency. In this case, Cronbach Alpha, factor loadings, composite reliability, and the AVE values were assessed. The model used in this study reflects, it means that all measuring items of a latent variable originate from the same variable (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011). Hence, all items are interchangeable while omitting any item from the construct does not affect its meaning. This provided the construct that was suitable for reliability. The items less than 0.5 loadings were omitted for better results (Hair et al., 2011). As such, item 5 of AM was deleted due to loading 0.391. To calculate a reflective construct's convergent validity, outer loadings and AVE must be assessed. Resulting in the threshold value of 0.7 and above for outer loadings was retained in the study.

Nevertheless, the loadings less than 0.7 were still carefully assessed before removing them in order for it not to affect the composite reliability of the construct. The Cronbach Alpha value of all latent variables was more than 0.7, threshold was satisfied. Likewise, the AVE values of all constructs were also acceptable values, as they reached the threshold value of more than 0.5. The result of the measurement model was considered acceptable and confirmed the threshold criteria of reliability, consistency, and validity of the instrument used in the study. These results led to a further process of analysis. Table 3 depicts the results of the assessment model.

Table 3. AoM model

Construct	Items	Loadings	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Inclusive Leadership (IL)	IL1	0.870	0.94	0.95	0.76
	IL2	0.887			
	IL3	0.825			
	IL4	0.902			
	IL5	0.869			
	IL6	0.860			
Innovative Work Behavior (IWB)	IWB1	0.828	0.91	0.93	0.67
	IWB2	0.876			
	IWB3	0.837			
	IWB4	0.737			
	IWB5	0.871			
	IWB6	0.822			
Autonomous Motivation (AM)	AM1	0.771	0.88	0.91	0.56
	AM2	0.831			
	AM3	0.599			
	AM4	0.767			
	AM5	0.391			
	AM6	0.830			
	AM7	0.856			
	AM8	0.828			
Perceived Job Autonomy (PJA)	PJA1	0.848	0.96	0.97	0.78
	PJA2	0.884			
	PJA3	0.890			
	PJA4	0.900			
	PJA5	0.880			
	PJA6	0.885			
	PJA7	0.903			
	PJA8	0.853			

Discriminant Validity (DV)

Contrasting to convergent validity, DV is used to measure the extent to which the constructs in the model are not linked. The DV was measured through the Fornell-Larcker criteria and cross-loadings. The results show that all constructs could be gauged at different nature of variables and also showed a satisfactory result. The results of DV through the Fornell-Larcker criteria are provided in the following table. Diagonal values in the table denote the square root of AVE.

Table 4. Fornell-Larcker Criteria

	AM	IL	IWB	PJA
AM	**0.75**			
IL	0.59	**0.87**		
IWB	0.72	0.39	**0.79**	
PJA	0.61	0.68	0.61	**0.86**

Assessment of the Structural Model (AoSM)

Post AMM resulted as satisfactory, the researcher moved on to evaluate the structural model. Structural model estimation is usually used to analyze and interpret data. AoSM is used to examined the coefficient of determination or R-square, Collinearity through VIF along with hypothesis testing through P value.

Collinearity Diagnosis (CD) and Evaluating R-square (R^2)

Inspecting the VIF is used for the measure to assess collinearity. If the VIF value equals 1, it indicates that no collinearity between variables, however a VIF greater than 1 but less than 5 indicates that variables are moderately correlated.

The results eliminated multi-collinearity issues in the data, proving that the final analysis's next step. Additionally, the coefficient of determination, also known as R-square, is a statistical measure used to explain the proportion of variance in the dependent variable, as reflected by the independent variable. Scholars have suggested *'a threshold value of R^2 of 0.67 as strong, 0.33 as moderate, and 0.19 as weak'* (Falk & Miller, 1992). The table below indicates the results of VIF and R^2.

Table 5. Results of VIF and R^2

	VIF	R^2	Relation
IL	1.64		
AM	1.70	0.27	Weak
IWB	2.16	0.52	Moderate
PJA	2.40	0.59	Moderate

The results indicate varying levels of association between the independent variables and the dependent variables. The dependent variable AM demonstrates a weak relationship with its associated predictors, with an R^2 value of 0.27. In contrast, IWB exhibits a moderate relationship, reflected by an R^2 value of 0.52. Similarly, PJA shows a moderate association with the independent

variables, with an R^2 value of 0.59. Likewise, the VIF values, ranging between 1.64 to 2.40, point to the notion that multicollinearity is not a concern for the model, as all values remain well below the recommended threshold.

Hypothesis Testing through P-value

The hypotheses were tested using SEM with SmartPLS software (version 4.0) as part of the final data analysis. The significance of the structural relationships was evaluated by examining the path coefficients and their corresponding p-values. A p-value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant and served as the criterion for accepting the hypotheses.

The results revealed that IL has a significant positive effect on IWB, with a p-value of 0.000. Furthermore, it was found that PJA significantly mediates the relationship between IL and IWB, with a p-value of 0.003. Given that both the direct effect of IL on IWB and the indirect effect through PWA were significant, the results indicate that PWA partially mediates this relationship.

Similarly, it was found that AM plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between IL and IWB, with a p-value of 0.000. The significance of the direct and indirect effects suggests that AM also partially mediates the relationship between IL and IWB.

Overall, these results support hypotheses 1 (H1), 2 (H2), and 3 (H3), confirming the direct effect of inclusive leadership on innovative work behavior, as well as its role as a partial mediator of perceived job autonomy and self-motivation. A more comprehensive explanation of the results of the hypothesis tests are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Relation	P-Value	Decision
H1	IL→IWB	0.000	Accepted
H2	IL→PJA→IWB	0.003	Accepted
H3	IL→AM→ IWB	0.000	Accepted

Discussion

Discussion of Findings

This study examined the relationship between inclusive leadership and innovative work behaviour among professionals in the Pakistani banking sector, with perceived job autonomy and autonomous motivation examined as potential mediating mechanisms. The findings supported all three proposed hypotheses. IL was positively associated with innovative work behaviour, while perceived job autonomy and autonomous motivation each partially mediated this relationship. These findings provide further evidence that leadership behaviour and employee-level motivational and job-related factors are relevant to understanding innovative work behaviour in the Pakistani banking context.

The results support H1, showing a positive and significant relationship between inclusive leadership and innovative work behaviour. This finding is consistent with previous research that has identified inclusive leadership as an important factor in encouraging employees to engage in innovative activities (Qi et al., 2019; Wu & Li, 2023; Li & Tang, 2022). Inclusive leaders are generally characterised by openness, accessibility, and responsiveness to employees' views. Such behaviours can make employees more comfortable expressing ideas and contributing to discussions, which may encourage them to engage in activities related to innovation.

The finding is also consistent with research conducted in Pakistan. Sharma et al. (2024) reported a relationship between IL and IWB in the Pakistani context, supporting the relevance of leadership behaviour to employee innovation. The present study has added to this evidence by examining inclusive leadership specifically within the banking sector.

A potential explanation for this particular relationship is that inclusive leadership provides employees with greater opportunities to express their views and opinions, while contributing to workplace decisions. These interactions may encourage employees to

go beyond routine ways of working and consider alternative approaches to their tasks. This may be particularly relevant in banking, where employees operate within formal organisational structures while also facing changes in technology, competition and customer expectations. However, the cross-sectional nature of the present study means that the finding should be further interpreted as an association rather than evidence of a causal effect.

The results also support H2, indicating that perceived job autonomy partially mediates the relationship between IL and IWB. This finding suggests that the relationship between inclusive leadership and employee innovation may be partly explained by employees' perceptions of how much discretion they have in carrying out their work.

The finding is consistent with Shakil et al. (2023), who reported a mediating role for job autonomy in the relationship between inclusive leadership and innovative behaviour. It is also in line with Suhandiah et al. (2023), whose research in Indonesian Islamic banks found a positive relationship between autonomy and innovation. Together, these findings suggest that employees may be more likely to engage in innovative behaviour when they have some freedom in deciding how their work is performed.

From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory, autonomy is an important psychological need. Inclusive leaders may support this need by involving employees in decisions, listening to their views, and allowing them some discretion in their work. When employees perceive greater control over how they perform their responsibilities, they may be more willing to explore different approaches and experiment with new ideas.

The mediation being partial is also important. It indicates that PJA explains part, but not all, of the relationship between IL and IWB. Inclusive leadership may therefore be associated with innovation through employees' perceptions of autonomy while also having a direct relationship with innovative work behaviour. The finding supports the view that job-related conditions are one mechanism through which leadership may be related to employee innovation, rather than the only mechanism involved.

H3 was also supported, showing that autonomous motivation partially mediates the relationship between inclusive leadership and innovative work behaviour. This finding is consistent with the principles of SDT, which emphasises the role of the social environment in shaping the quality of motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Inclusive leadership may contribute to autonomous motivation by creating an environment in which employees can express their views, participate in decisions, and feel that their contributions are valued. These conditions can support employees' sense of autonomy and encourage them to engage in their work for personally meaningful reasons rather than primarily because of external pressure. Autonomous motivation has also been associated with creativity, exploration, and persistence, behaviours that are relevant to innovative work (McAnally & Hagger, 2024; Ryan & Deci, 2020).

The finding is consistent with Korkmaz et al. (2022), who established that a mediating role for autonomous motivation between inclusive leadership and innovative work behaviour in Pakistan's information technology sector. The present study extends this line of research to the banking sector, suggesting that the motivational pathway identified in previous research may also be relevant in another organisational context.

The partial mediation for autonomous motivation indicates that motivation explains part of the relationship between inclusive leadership and innovative work behaviour, while other factors may also contribute to this relationship. This is consistent with the broader SDT perspective, in which employee behaviour is shaped by the interaction between individual motivation and the conditions provided by the work environment.

The findings suggest that inclusive leadership is related to innovative work behaviour through more than one pathway. Perceived job autonomy represents a job-related mechanism, while autonomous motivation represents a motivational mechanism. Both forms of mediation were partial, indicating that neither mechanism fully accounts for the relationship between inclusive leadership and innovative work behaviour.

The findings add to providing support for applying Self-Determination Theory to the study of inclusive leadership and employee innovation in the Pakistani banking context. This suggests that leadership behaviours that involve employees, value their contributions, and provide opportunities for participation, may be relevant not only to how employees perceive their work environment but also to why they must engage in their work, adding a sense of accountability to work behaviour. At the same time, the direct relationship between inclusive leadership and innovative work behaviour indicates that other mechanisms not examined in this study may also be involved.

Theoretical Implications

This study makes several contributions to the theory. First, it expands the scope of SDT to organizational behavior research by demonstrating that inclusive leadership functions as an autonomy-enhancing environment, consistent with the theory's predictions: an environment that simultaneously increases perceived job autonomy and autonomous motivation, each channeled independently toward innovative behavior. While previous research has applied SDT to understanding motivation in general work contexts (McAnally & Hagger, 2024), the integration into inclusive leadership remains largely unexplored, and this study helps to fill this gap.

By examining perceived job autonomy and autonomous motivation as parallel mediators, this study provides a broader view of how inclusive leadership is related to innovative work behaviour. Rather than considering only the direct relationship between leadership and innovation, the study examines two theoretically related pathways through which this relationship may operate. The partial mediation found for both variables suggests that job-related autonomy and autonomous motivation each provide part of the explanation for the relationship, while inclusive leadership also maintains a direct association with innovative work behaviour. Adding to previous research by considering these two mechanisms within the same model and in the context of the Pakistani banking sector.

Overall, the findings contribute to the growing literature on inclusive leadership, motivation, and innovative work behaviour in non-Western contexts. The results are broadly consistent with the propositions of Self-Determination Theory and with previous research on inclusive leadership conducted in other national settings. However, rather than suggesting that these relationships are unaffected by culture, the findings indicate that the proposed relationships are also relevant in the Pakistani banking context. This is particularly relevant to organisations characterized by relatively hierarchical structures, where providing employees with opportunities to participate, exercise discretion, and express their views may be important for encouraging innovative work behaviour.

Practical Implications

These findings have several practical implications for professionals in the Pakistani banking sector. For banking executives and human resources departments, they justify investing in the development of inclusive leadership across all management levels. Training programs that help managers develop active listening, tolerance for divergent ideas, and a genuine openness to employee contributions are not merely diversity initiatives, but innovative strategies with measurable behavioral benefits.

The results of the mediation analysis also suggest that leadership development alone is insufficient if job design does not support it. Banks must examine how autonomy is structurally integrated into management roles and determine whether employees possess genuine discretion regarding the methods, timing, and criteria for performing their work. Inclusive leadership and autonomy-promoting job design appear to reinforce one another: a leader who inspires trust, but operates within an organizational structure that leaves little room for decision-making autonomy, may find the motivational benefits of their leadership style constrained. Therefore, aligning leadership behaviors with job design practices that significantly enhance employee autonomy is a concrete priority for institutions seeking to cultivate a culture of innovation.

Finally, given that the sample consists almost exclusively of senior executives with over eight years of experience, the results suggest that, even among seasoned banking executives, a group sometimes perceived as less inclined toward flexibility in their professional practices, inclusive leadership and a work ethic that fosters greater autonomy remain key factors in driving commitment to innovation. This is an encouraging conclusion for banks that might question the ability of leadership-focused interventions to alter managerial behaviors.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study presents several limitations. It is a cross-sectional design implies that causal inferences must be drawn with caution. Although the hypothesized relationships are supported by theoretical foundations and statistical data, the latter do not demonstrate that inclusive leadership precedes and induces changes in autonomy or innovation over time. Future research would benefit from adopting longitudinal or multi-stage study designs, which would allow for more robust conclusions regarding causality (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

Data was collected from a single source, the participants themselves, which introduces a risk of common method variance. However, the full-collinearity VIF test confirmed that this risk does not pose a significant threat to the current data (Kock, 2015). Future studies could consider collecting dyadic data, combining employees' self-assessments with evaluations from their supervisors or peers regarding innovative behavior, to obtain a more objective description of the dependent variable.

While chain sampling is pragmatically justified given the difficulty of obtaining a comprehensive sampling frame, it limits the sample's representativeness and restricts the generalizability of the results. The sample is predominantly male and composed of senior executives, reflecting the demographic reality of management within the Pakistani banking sector. However, this limits the applicability of the findings to female employees and staff in lower-level positions. Future research can employ more diverse samples, including branch staff and general employees, to verify whether the observed relationships hold true across different demographic and hierarchical groups.

Lastly, the study examines two specific mediating mechanisms: perceived job autonomy and self-motivation. However, the results regarding partial mediation indicate that other mediators are also at play. Future research could explore additional mechanisms, such as psychological safety, creative self-efficacy, or knowledge sharing, as complementary pathways through which inclusive leadership influences innovative work behaviors (Al-Hasan et al., 2023). Moderating variables such as organizational culture, performance pressure, or the need for individual development also warrant investigation, as they likely determine the conditions under which inclusive leadership is more or less effective in fostering innovation (Wan et al., 2024).

Conclusion

The study results and data examined the relationship between inclusive leadership and innovative work behaviour among managers in the Pakistani banking sector, with autonomous motivation and perceived job autonomy examined as parallel mediators. The study used PLS-SEM and data from 298 respondents, concluded that there is a significant positive relationship between inclusive leadership and innovative work behaviour. The results further indicate that autonomous motivation and perceived job autonomy partially mediate this relationship. These findings add value to the existing research on inclusive leadership and Self-Determination Theory by examining these relationships in the context of the Pakistani banking sector, where empirical research on these mechanisms remains limited.

The conclusion further suggests that the relationship between leadership and innovation is linked not only to leadership behaviour itself but also to employees' motivation and perceptions of autonomy at work. Inclusive leadership can provide employees with opportunities to participate in their work environment, express their views, and exercise some discretion in their work, while also supporting more autonomous forms of motivation. For banking organisations operating in a changing and increasingly competitive environment, these findings point to the importance of leadership practices that encourage employee participation and provide appropriate autonomy. At the same time, the findings should be interpreted within the scope of the study, particularly the research design of cross-sectional study and the Pakistani banking context.

Appendix

Instrument

Inclusive Leadership (IL)

IL1. My leader shows respect & recognition for others.

IL2. My leader shows appreciation for different voices.

IL3. My leader encourages open & frank communication.

IL4. My leader cultivates participative decision making & problem-solving processes.

IL5. My leader shows integrity & advanced moral reasoning.

IL6. My leader uses a cooperative leadership style.

Innovative Work Behavior (IWB)

IWB1. I search out new technologies, processes, techniques, and/or product ideas.

IWB2. I generate creative ideas.

IWB3. I promote and champion ideas to others.

IWB4. I investigate and secure the funds needed to implement new ideas.

IWB5. I develop adequate plans and schedules for the implementation of new ideas.

IWB6. I am innovative.

Autonomous Motivation (AM)

AM1. Because I want to understand the subject.

AM2. Because I want to learn new things.

AM3. To find out if I'm right or wrong.

AM4. Because I think it's personally important to me.

AM5. Because I wouldn't want (like) to do that.

AM6. Because I have fun doing my job.

AM7. Because what I do in my work is exciting.

AM8. Because the work I do is interesting.

Perceived Job Autonomy (PJA)

PJA1. I am allowed at work to decide many issues from my viewpoint.

PJA2. I am allowed at work to come to a decision on what approaches I apply for completing my job.

PJA3. I am allowed at work to be provided a significant amount of autonomy to make decisions.

PJA4. I am allowed at work to make decisions on what order jobs are performed accordingly.

PJA5. I am allowed at work to make decisions on how to maintain a schedule for performing jobs.

PJA6. I am allowed at work to be provided substantial opportunities for freedom as well as independence in performing tasks.

PJA7. I am allowed at work to plan the ways of performing the job.

PJA8. I am allowed at work the opportunity of applying my own judgment or initiative in performing the job.

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