

Promoting Life Satisfaction in IT Sector Employees Through Leaders' Inclusiveness



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In post-COVID period, Organizational leadership, as a work-centric variable, is considered crucial in promoting the well-being and satisfaction of employees. Using LMX theory as background, this study attempts to assess the impact of Inclusive Leadership on employees' life satisfaction by analyzing the mediation and direct impact of Career Satisfaction in the relationship. Data was collected from IT sector professionals based in Kolkata, India, by administering standardized questionnaires. Relevant Statistical analyses, including PLS-SEM using SmartPLS4.0, are conducted to investigate the relationship between the variables. The findings indicate that a significant relationship exists between Inclusive leadership and life satisfaction through career satisfaction.

Key words: Inclusive Leadership, Satisfaction with life, Career Satisfaction, LMX Theory

1. Introduction

With the propagation of globalization, the top echelon and strategic constituents of organizations have intensified their focus on creating a diverse and inclusive workforce, as it is considered a strategic advantage in the dynamic competitive corporate world (Garg & Sangwan, 2021). Creating a diverse workforce with a sense of belongingness toward organizations has become a key concern for decision-makers (Ashikali et al., 2021). A line of thought has anticipated leadership behavior as one of the key facilitators of promoting this inclusiveness among employees (Brimhall et al., 2017; Carmeli et al., 2010; Nair & Vohra, 2015). Inclusive leadership is manifested by openness, availability, and accessibility exhibited by the leaders while interacting with their followers (Carmeli et al., 2010). Growing research in the recent decades on diversity and inclusion literature has also emphasized the value of Inclusive Leadership as a managerial tactic, not only to enhance the perception of inclusiveness among employees but also to gain a strategic competitive advantage over competitors. Thus, being the key catalyst, it is one of the responsibilities of the leader to ensure employees' belongingness and promote subjective well-being and satisfaction among them.

The pandemic due to COVID-19 has changed workplace dynamics in a way never experienced before; Employees have started realizing the value of their well-being and life satisfaction more than ever. This sudden change has initiated unrest in the workplace dynamics resulting in high employee dissatisfaction along with low intention to stay in the organizations. Well-being and satisfaction have been major concerns for individuals and societies from the start of civilization; prominent scholars like Aristotle have mentioned well-being as the decisive aim of human existence (Erdogan et al., 2012). Researchers have frequently used Satisfaction with life (SWL) as one of the key indicators of subjective well-being and happiness (Diener et al., 1985). Satisfaction with life can be understood as the extent of "a person's cognitive and affective evaluations of his or her life" (Diener et al., 2002). Among all other factors, leaders' behavior is considered to be a vital force in promoting employees' satisfaction with life. Although several studies in the past have already focused on establishing the role of different leadership styles such, as Servant leadership (Chughtai, 2018; Latif & Marimon, 2019), Transformational Leadership (Bernarto et al., 2020) Ethical Leadership (Zhang & Tu, 2018), Paternalistic Leadership (Gull et al., 2021) and others in promoting satisfaction with life among employees, not many studies have empirically tested the impact of Inclusive Leadership on Satisfaction with Life among IT employees. However, (Liu et al., 2022) have proposed a theoretical framework consisting of the relationship between disability-inclusive leadership style and life satisfaction; the conceptual model is yet to be empirically tested. Thus, a significant gap exists in research literature regarding the impact of Inclusive leadership on Satisfaction with life among employees.

Furthermore, the study will also examine the role of the career satisfaction (CS) of employees as mediating variable in the Inclusive Leadership (IL) and Satisfaction with Life (SWL) relationship. Satisfaction with one's career as a whole is considered to be positively related to life satisfaction as when employees consider themselves to be skilled, professionally developed, and productive, they feel more responsible towards their duty (Latif & Marimon, 2019). As a result of this autonomy and development, the satisfaction with life will also be positively impacted. Existing research has suggested the role of leadership in developing employees professionally and help them achieve career success (Mughtar et al., 2022), In addition to previous literature, this study will integrate another dimension by investigating the impact of Inclusive leadership on career satisfaction. Therefore, via this study the researchers have tried to contribute to existing literature by investigating the relationship between Inclusive leadership and Satisfaction with life through mediating and direct impact of career satisfaction on the relationship.

2. Theoretical Framework

The present study is based on the proposition that Inclusive Leadership promotes the Satisfaction with life among employees in the presence of Career satisfaction. The relation between IL and SWL can be viewed from the lens of Leaders Members Exchange (LMX) Theory (Dansereau et al., 1975). According to LMX theory, the quality of leader-follower relationship will have various impact on employees' outcome at workplace (Bauer & Erdogan, 2015). The theory revolves around premise that leaders behavior facilitates the development of strong interpersonal relationship between leaders and followers, and significantly helps in employees to achieve their true potential (Latif & Marimon, 2019). The relational exchanges between the leader and subordinate shapes the professional behavior and attitude of employees. As leaders, who provide professional feedback, shows availability, and offer high quality relationships are likely to satisfy followers need for belongingness and autonomy. Via satisfying these work-centric needs, this inclusive behavior of leader is certainly having a positive impact on subordinates' well-being, finally leading to a high life satisfaction among employees.

Furthermore, LMX can also be used to explain the relationship between Inclusive leadership, as the leaders with high professional relationship with their followers are having high probability of developing employees' career path satisfying the career needs of employees. Existing literature on life satisfaction calls for further research in organizational settings since most of the recent studies have mainly focused on non-working samples, including college students (Loewe et al., 2014). As satisfaction with life is a key criterion of subjective well-being (Diener et al., 1985), and contemporary research literature has manifested a relationship between inclusive leadership and employee well-being (Choi et al., 2017), Therefore, using the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory, this study aims to investigate whether Inclusive Leadership (IL) has an impact on the employees' satisfaction with life (SWL) by analyzing the mediation and direct effect of employees' career satisfaction on employees' satisfaction with life (SWL). To investigate the proposed model, author has hypothesized that:

H₁: IL is significantly positively associated with SWL

H₂: IL is significantly positively associated with CS,

H₃: CS is significantly positively associated with SWL,

H₄: CS mediates the association between IL and SWL

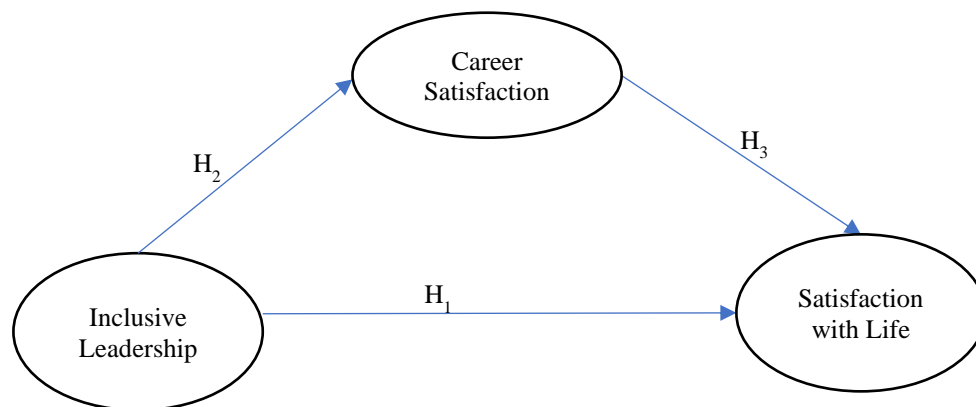


Figure 1 Theoretical Framework (authors' own composition)

3. Methods

3.1 Sample

The exploratory approach emphasized in this study is to investigate the relationship between IL, SWL, and CS. These variables are correlated to each other, whereas CS mediates the relationship between IL and SWL. In this regard, the cross-sectional approach and quantitative methodology have been applied.

For the present study, the data was collected through a survey conducted in Kolkata, the state capital of West Bengal, India. The sample for this study consisted of professionals working in firms belonging to the IT sector. These organizations have a functional organizational structure with standard HR practices. The structured questionnaire was prepared, and the snowball sampling technique was adopted for collecting data. The questionnaire was administered through a web-based survey via Google Forms. Additionally, participants were made aware that their participation in the survey was voluntary and that their responses would only be utilized for research purposes. Data were collected from a total of 210 respondents in the sample, with respect to the present study.

There are manifold reasons why the IT industry is particularly intriguing for this study. Firstly, being a highly employee-centric industry, it is highly advisable for IT firms to maintain their well-being and take measures to ensure high satisfaction of employees for better work dynamics. Secondly, most IT firms have a group-based organic structure; thus, the contribution of the team leader is more immense than in other sectors; and as most of the organizations employ a large number of employees from highly diverse demographic background, thus it became responsibility of the leader to generate a sense of belongingness among employees through their inclusive behaviour. Thirdly, since the churn rate of the IT sector is higher than other industries, most organizations are facing a challenge in retaining their employees, and therefore, promoting a sense of satisfaction with life among IT professionals may help organizations to formulate their retention strategies in a better and more effective way.

Lastly, as most of the IT employees possess high academic qualifications, they thrive to take their career on next stage justifying the high switching rate of employees across industry. Thus, to deal with this issue, it is essential for organizations to cater the career needs of employees, so that they develop a sense of career satisfaction, resulting in a higher satisfaction with life.

3.2 Measures

The survey included three scales that measured IL, CS, & SWL, along with information being sought concerning the demographic details of the employees included in the sample of the present study. The following standardized tools were used in the study:

Inclusive Leadership Scale

The variable IL has been measured by a 9-item scale, adapting the items from the conceptual work of (Carmeli et al., 2010). The 9 items are divided into three dimensions: openness, availability, and accessibility, respectively. The participants rated their extent of agreement based on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from (1= "Not at all" to 5= "Great Extent").

The SWL scale

The SWL was measured by using an adapted 5-item questionnaire, as constructed by (Diener et al., 1985). The participants rated their level of agreement or disagreement based on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from (1= "Completely Disagree" to 5 "Completely Agree").

Career Satisfaction scale

Career Satisfaction has been assessed based on five items scale adapted from (Greenhaus et al., 1990). The participants rated their level of agreement or disagreement based on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from (1= "Strongly Disagree" to 5 "Strongly Agree"). The summary of the variables is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1: List of Variables

Sl. No.	Variable Name	No. of items	Source
1	IL	9	Carmeli et al.,2010
2	SWL	5	Deiner et al., 1985
3	CS	5	Greenhaus et al., 1990

4. Analysis and Discussion

Primarily the demographic data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, afterwards quantitative data were analyzed using the partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) approach. PLS-SEM is an emergent information analysis method used in business and social science research to manage sample size and non-normal facts (Hair et al., 2014). To analyze the data and test the hypothesis, SmartPLS 4.0 software was used, adhering to recent recommendations and guidelines provided for the PLS-SEM for analyzing the data and summarizing results subsequently (Hair et al., 2011; Ringle et al., 2020)

4.1 General Information Schedule

Data were collected with respect to certain demographic variables like gender, age, and work experience of the respondents (displayed in Table 2).

Table 2: Demographic Details

Variable	Indicator	Frequency	(%)
Gender	Female	89	42.38
	Male	121	57.62
	Total	210	100
Experience	Less than four years	79	37.62
	4-8 years	52	24.76
	8-12 years	48	22.86
	12-16 years	22	10.48
	17 years and above	9	4.28
	Total	210	100
Age	Less than 25 years	49	23.33
	26-30 years	67	31.91
	31-35 years	41	19.521
	36-40 years	35	16.67
	40 and above years	18	8.58
	Total	210	100

4.2 Measurement Model

In PLS-SEM analysis, the assessment of the measurement model is the initial step that ensures that only constructs with acceptable reliability and validity are utilized in the structural path model. Initially, 19 items were considered for the research. During the measurement model examination, no item was removed, as every item has a loading value above the suggested

factor loading value of 0.60. To illustrate the reliability of the four measures, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted were calculated.

4.3 Discriminant and Convergent Validity

Initially, Cronbach’s alpha of all constructs ranges from 0.803 to 0.915, exceeding the acceptable value of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2011, 2019); after that, composite reliability ranges from 0.864 to 0.930, which meets the acceptable level of 0.60 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). As a result, the model's latent constructs all have composite reliability (See table 3 & Fig. 1). The indicator of convergent validity, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), ranges from 0.561 to 0.597 and is higher than the acceptable level of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2011, 2019), confirming that the convergent validity exists for the present constructs (see Table 3). The discriminant validity of the constructs is evaluated using the Cross loading approach, suggested by (Hair et al., 2011), since all of the items’ loading with the parent construct is higher than the cross-loading with other constructs (displayed in table 4), establishing the discriminant validity of all items (Hair et al., 2011).

Table 3: Indicators of reliability and convergent validity

	Cronbach alpha	Composite reliability	AVE
CS	0.803	0.864	0.561
IL	0.915	0.930	0.597
SWL	0.829	0.880	0.595

Table 4: Discriminate Validity (cross loading of items)

	CS	IL	SWL
CS1	0.684	0.455	0.579
CS2	0.733	0.542	0.603
CS3	0.748	0.547	0.56
CS4	0.773	0.523	0.601
CS5	0.800	0.519	0.641
IL1	0.497	0.719	0.455
IL2	0.579	0.760	0.544
IL3	0.514	0.745	0.51
IL4	0.545	0.806	0.548
IL5	0.45	0.750	0.435
IL6	0.554	0.785	0.538
IL7	0.581	0.795	0.54
IL8	0.543	0.781	0.541
IL9	0.529	0.808	0.561
SWL1	0.516	0.468	0.707
SWL2	0.666	0.584	0.798
SWL3	0.645	0.57	0.765
SWL4	0.614	0.518	0.761
SWL5	0.617	0.446	0.821

4.4 Structural Model Analysis

Following the assessment of the measurement model, the structural model analysis was performed. The primary evaluation criteria for the structural model are the R² measures (Hair et al., 2011). The coefficient of determination (R²) results revealed the variance explained in the dependent variable because of the independent variable, R² values are 0.478 & 0.665 for CS and SWL, respectively. The R² values support the model’s in-sample predictive power since they are above the required threshold level of 0.20 (Hair et al., 2011). However, the explanatory power of R² is moderate for CS since its lower than 0.50 and substantial for SWL, as it is lower than 0.75 (Hair et al., 2011, 2014).

After that, the path coefficient for the structural model was evaluated to assess the statistical significance of the relationship among constructs. The hypotheses were tested with bootstrapping procedure using 5000 bootstrap samples, no sign changes option, and 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals. Table 5 & Figure 3 shows the result of the path analysis.

H₁ predicted that IL was significantly positively related to SWL. The result ($\beta = 0.237, t = 3.403, p < 0.001$) demonstrates a significant and positive relationship between IL and SWL, supporting the first hypothesis (H₁).

H₂ predicted that IL was significantly positively related to CS. The result ($\beta = 0.692, t = 15.345, p < 0.001$) demonstrates a significant positive relationship between IL and CS; hence H₂ is supported.

H₃ predicted that CS was significantly positively related to SWL. The result ($\beta = 0.634, t = 9.264, p < 0.001$) demonstrates a significant and positive relationship between PS and GOCB; hence H₃ is supported.

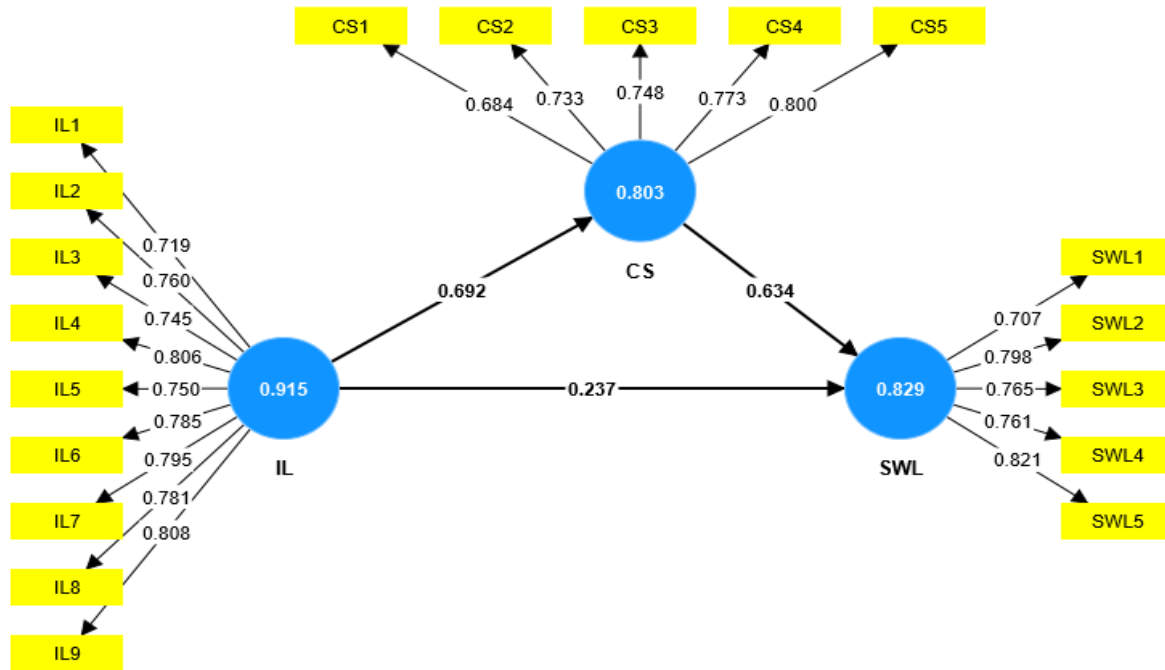


Figure 2 Measurement Model analysis

Table 5 Path coefficient table

Hypothesis	Relationship	β -value	SD	t-value	p-value	Decision
H ₁	IL -> SWL	0.237	0.069	3.403	0.000	Supported
H ₂	IL -> CS	0.692	0.045	15.345	0.000	Supported
H ₃	CS -> SWL	0.634	0.068	9.264	0.000	Supported

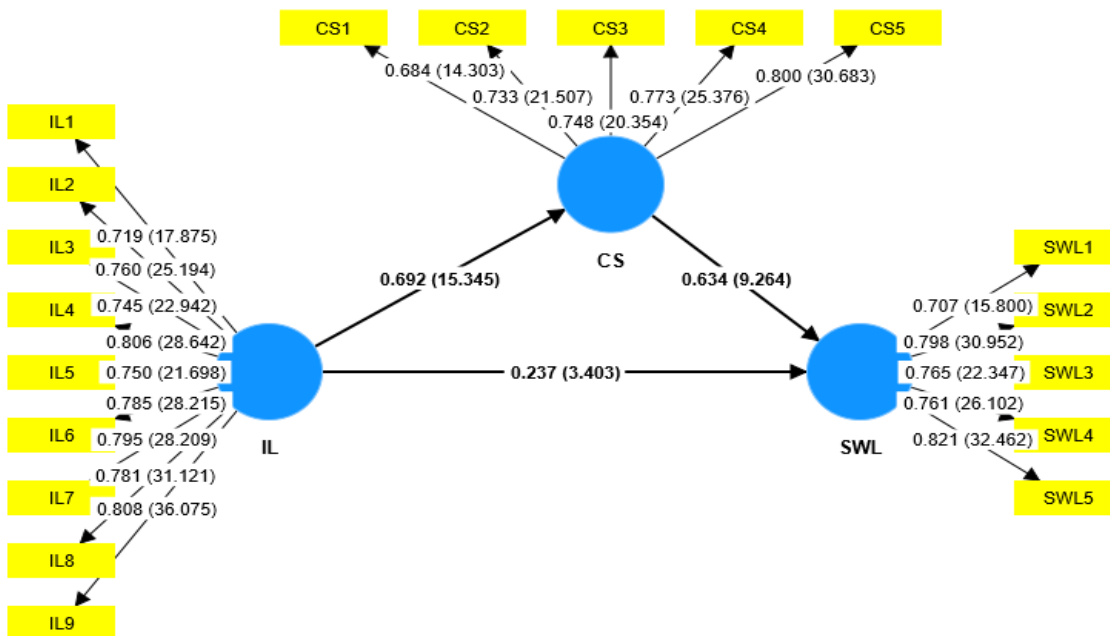


Figure 3 Bootstrapping (t-value) for the model

4.5 Model Fit

To measure the model fit in Smart PLS, standard root mean square residual (SRMR), exact fit criteria, d_ULS, d_G, Chi2 value, and NFI was used. For SRMR, value less than 0.8 (Bentler & Hu, 1998) and variations between model implied correlation and experiential correlations matrix (Hair Jr et al., 2021) can be considered a good model fit measure.

An NFI score greater than 0.90 indicates a good model fit (Bentler & Bonett, 1980). The NFI is described as a proportion of the suggested model's Chi² value to that of the null model (Lohmöller, 1989). When the factors are larger, the NFI values will increase; however, the NFI is not specifically designated as a model fit indicator (Hair Jr et al., 2021). The squared Euclidean distance (d_ ULS), and the geodesic distance (d_ G), are the two metrics that account for the disparity between the empirical covariance matrix and the covariance matrix inferred by the composite factor model. (Hair Jr et al., 2021; Henseler et al., 2014). Model fit values are displayed in table 6.

Table 6 Model fit by SmartPLS

Criteria	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.071	0.071
d_ ULS	0.96	0.96
d_ G	0.412	0.412
Chi-square	491.413	491.413
NFI	0.794	0.794

4.6 Mediation Analysis

This present study assesses the mediating role of CS on the relationship between IL and SWL. The result revealed a significant indirect effect of IL on SWL through CS ($\beta = 0.439, t = 8.044, p < 0.001$). The total effect of IL on GOCB was ($\beta = 0.675, t = 15.571, p < 0.001$) and with the inclusion of mediating variable (CS), the impact of IL on SWL was still significant ($\beta = 0.237, t = 3.404, p < 0.001$) This implies that there is a significant partial complementary mediating effect of CS exists on the relationship of IL and SWL, supporting the hypothesis H₄ (CS mediates the relationship between IL and SWL). The result of the mediation analysis is displayed in table 7:

Table 7 Result of Mediation Analysis

Total effects (IL-> SWL)			Direct effects			Indirect effect						
Coefficient	t-value	p-value	Coefficient	t-value	p-value	Hypothesis	Coefficient	SE	t-value	p-value	Percentile bootstrap	
											Lower	Upper
0.675	15.571	0.000	0.237	3.403	0.000	H ₄ : IL → CS → SWL	0.439	0.055	8.044	0.000	0.354	0.533

5. Conclusions

The present study intended to gain better insight into the role of inclusive leadership and employee satisfaction in the Indian IT sector. The study implies that when leaders demonstrate inclusive behavior through openness and being accessible and available for their subordinates, they incorporate a feeling of satisfaction among employees. Along with that, through their openness and availability for career-related support, they also help employees in achieving new career goals, enhancing the sense of career satisfaction among employees as well. Simultaneously, when employees feel that they are advancing in their career path and develop a sense of satisfaction with career-related factors, this career satisfaction may enhance their life satisfaction. Satisfied and happy employees are a crucial asset for the organization for not just enhancing organizational productivity and creativity but also helping to create a positive and motivating work climate.

Indian IT sector, along with global IT industry has seen paradigm shift in post COVID era. Hybrid work culture, overburden of work, layoffs and resignations across industry has generated a sense of dissatisfaction and mental unrest among IT sector employees. Thus, it is responsibility of the organization to support their employees and take care their need for life satisfaction. With a huge chunk of the workforce, the Indian IT sector is one of the most employable sectors that play a crucial role in the service-oriented Indian Economy. However, being rapidly blooming and highly service-oriented, this sector requires high involvement of employees at the workplace; thus, promoting a sense of satisfaction with life among employees will provide positive results for employees and the organization. As the world is recovering from the last pandemic disruption and witnessed metamorphic changes in the corporate world, early in the form of the great resignation, and after that in form of layoffs across IT industry. From very long time the Indian IT industry is suffering from the lower retention rate of employees (Krishnamoorthy N & Ambreen Aisha, 2022), this problem has even intensified after the COVID period as employees have started looking for satisfaction in their life and in career. This search for satisfaction has led employees to switch career options in a fast pace, resulting an unrest in the organization. Somehow it also indicates that employees lack a sense of inclusivity, as they feel that they do not belong to the organization (Shore et al., 2011); resulting in an employee with lower level of satisfaction. Thus, as a leader it is responsibility of the manager to create a sense of belongingness among employees through their inclusive behavior (openness, accessibility, availability) (Carmeli et al., 2010), ensuing a way for employees to achieve a higher satisfaction with life. Along with that an effective also leader encourages their followers to perform in a highly professional manner (Latif & Marimon, 2019), being open to career related discussion and feedback promotes the professional growth of employees, resulting in higher career satisfaction, finally leading to an overall satisfied life.

Thus, with the aim to integrate another layer in the existing literature on Inclusive leadership and satisfaction with life, empirical findings of this study may establish that by showing inclusive behavior, leaders act as a major catalyst in enhancing employees' career satisfaction resulting in better satisfaction with life.

As is always the case while going through a study, limitations arose in conducting this research. With the new insight contributed by this paper, it is crucial to draw attention to the study's limitations as well. First, since the study was restricted to the Indian IT sector only, a similar result can be confirmed by testing the model in other service and manufacturing sectors. Secondly, the data were collected through a web-based survey, as there was no physical interaction with the respondents that might impact the data quality. Thirdly, due to the nature and limitations of the research, snowball sampling (a non-probability sampling) was employed to select our sample, which was not probabilistically stratified by country, organization size, or project complexity. This present study is cross-sectional; further longitudinal research may be conducted to draw more conclusive results. To avoid category asymmetries in the future, we suggest probability sampling to test control variable-related hypotheses. The present study focuses on investigating the impact of Inclusive leadership on satisfaction with life with the mediation of one variable (Career Satisfaction); hence, researchers in the future may incorporate other work-centric variables, such as self-efficacy, psychological safety, inclusive climate, perceived inclusion, to assess the relationship between these two variables. Furthermore, the present study investigated the role of a single leadership style. Thus, to generalize the impact, future researchers can consider other styles of leadership, such as knowledge leadership, self-leadership, instrumental leadership, and ethical leadership, on employees' satisfaction with life as well.

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