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The Influence of Diversity-Focused Leadership on Employee Advocacy in Selected Indian Fortune Companies: The Mediating Roles of Symmetrical Internal Communication and Work Engagement

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Abstract

With the rise of globalization, evolving labor-market demographics, and rapid organizational changes, the need for diversity-oriented leadership (DOL) has grown to better recognize individuals from diverse backgrounds and address associated organizational challenges. This research examines how DOL influences employees' advocative behaviors in selected companies, framed through the lens of social exchange theory. Additionally, it explores the mediating roles of symmetrical internal communication (SIC) and work engagement (WE), along with the effects of covariates such as age, gender, educational qualifications, and the specific company, on the link between DOL and employee advocacy. Adopting a Post-Positivist approach, the study investigates causal relationships among the chosen constructs. A total of 413 employees from selected Fortune Indian companies were surveyed using proportionate random sampling. Data were collected via a self-developed instrument incorporating multiple scales adapted from the 'Inclusion and Belonging Assessment Scale', with responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The Hayes Process Macro (Model 4.0) in SPSS 20.0 was employed to analyze the impact of DOL on employee advocacy, accounting for the mediating influences of SIC and WE as well as covariates including age, gender, education, and company. Findings reveal that SIC and WE partially and complementarily mediate the relationship between DOL and employee advocacy, while the company significantly affects both advocacy and engagement but shows no notable influence on SIC.

Keywords: Fortune Indian firms, Diversity-oriented leadership, Symmetrical internal communication, Employee advocacy, Mediation, Work engagement, Hayes process macro-model version 4.0

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Introduction

The evolving global environment, demographic shifts, and rapid organizational transformations have increasingly posed challenges related to diversity, emphasizing the need for organizations to enhance their capacity to address these issues effectively [1, 2]. In recent years, the growing emphasis on social justice has made it essential for corporate leaders to advocate for fairness and promote a diversity of perspectives and individuals [3]. Understanding workforce diversity becomes even more critical in cross-cultural contexts [4]. Leaders' ability to manage diverse teams while implementing increasingly complex organizational strategies is crucial for sustaining a competitive advantage in today's globalized and highly competitive economic landscape [5]. Global leaders must adapt to cross-cultural trends, recognize the importance of effective leadership, and design strategies that drive long-term sustainable change [6]. Consequently, leadership is now considered central to shaping organizational culture and addressing emerging challenges, with numerous studies conducted across various



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industries and countries [7]. In this context, diversity-oriented leadership (DOL) has emerged as a vital mechanism for cultivating inclusive and dynamic organizations and is viewed as a strategic driver of employee performance [6]. Beyond merely including diverse individuals in leadership roles, DOL emphasizes creating an environment where employees feel valued, respected, and empowered to share their perspectives. Strategic Leadership Theory further highlights senior leaders' responsibilities in leveraging diversity to enhance organizational outcomes [8].

Employee advocacy has gained significant attention in recent years, particularly within business, public relations, and marketing fields [9]. Experts argue that employee advocacy serves as a key indicator of an organization's relationship with its workforce [10] and is associated with enhanced brand recognition, popularity, growth, and profitability [11]. However, there is no universally accepted definition of employee advocacy. Some researchers describe it as positive word-of-mouth, while others include defending the organization against criticism along with promoting it [12]. Fundamentally, employee advocacy refers to voluntary extra-role behaviors that support the organization's value among stakeholders [13, 14], including activities such as volunteering, promoting the company as an employer, sharing organizational information, supporting corporate initiatives, and making constructive suggestions [9, 13]. Modern organizations are increasingly investing in strategies to foster employee advocacy, recognizing its role in positioning employees as brand ambassadors [9, 15]. Advocacy also contributes to attracting top talent [16] and has been linked to measurable business benefits, including 48% larger contracts and 16% higher win rates [17], with the global employee advocacy market projected to grow rapidly between 2023 and 2030 [18].

Internal communication has been empirically demonstrated as a key factor in shaping organizational culture [19]. It represents a central concept within communication and public relations research [20] and is vital for organizational success [21]. Typically, internal communication refers to formal messaging within an organization, often transmitted from management to employees through various channels [22]. Leadership communication and the use of motivating language, alongside organizational-level symmetrical internal communication (SIC), contribute to cultivating a positive emotional culture [23]. SIC is an ethical approach that emphasizes openness, reciprocity, negotiation, and tolerance for disagreement between organizations and employees, empowering staff to participate in decision-making and co-create mutually acceptable solutions [20, 22, 24].

Work engagement (WE), though long studied, has been subject to ongoing debate regarding its definition [25]. Numerous studies have examined WE [26-31], yet consensus on its precise conceptualization remains elusive. Scholars often consider engagement as a multidimensional construct [32] or a unidimensional measure [33]. Initially, Kahn [34] defined WE as the harnessing of employees' selves to perform work roles. Later, Maslach and Leiter [33] framed engagement as the opposite of burnout, measured via the Maslach Burnout Inventory [35]. Other definitions emphasize focus and absorption in work tasks [36]. Contemporary understanding views WE as a positive motivational state characterized by vigor, dedication, and concentration [37]. High engagement has been linked to enhanced innovation, task performance, organizational citizenship behavior, and customer satisfaction, making it a strategic priority for modern public and private organizations [38]. By setting clear goals and delegating responsibility, leaders can bolster employees' confidence and decision-making autonomy, thereby increasing engagement [39].

This study aims to systematically examine the relationships among diversity-oriented leadership, symmetrical internal communication, work engagement, and employee advocacy. Additionally, it seeks to test a mediation model explaining how DOL influences employee advocacy through SIC and WE. Insights from this research are expected to provide managers and leaders with actionable strategies to address factors affecting employee performance and morale, thereby enhancing overall organizational commitment and success.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Theoretical foundation

This study investigates how diversity-oriented leadership (DOL) influences employees' advocative behaviours through the lens of Social Exchange Theory (SET). SET is a cornerstone theory in social sciences and organizational behaviour, offering a robust framework for understanding workplace interactions [40]. Its foundational contributors include Homans [41], Blau [42], and Emerson [43]. The theory provides a benchmark for analyzing employee behaviour in organizational contexts [40] and has been applied across diverse domains such as communication and knowledge management, sustainability, human resource management, organizational citizenship behaviours, supervisory and organizational support, and workplace relationships [44-47]. SET posits that when an individual provides something of value to another, a reciprocal exchange of equivalent value is expected [48], offering a framework to understand the outcomes of inclusion [49]. Within organizations, leaders' use of motivating language and creation of a safe, meaningful, and supportive environment can serve as socioemotional resources, encouraging employees to voluntarily engage in behaviors such as organizational advocacy [48, 50, 51]. Employees' perceptions of social exchange are shaped by their treatment by supervisors [52-55]. Empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that leadership significantly impacts work-related behaviours and outcomes [56-59]. Additionally, public relations scholars have applied SET to explain how transparent, employee-centered internal communication practices

motivate advocacy behaviours [9, 12, 15], and the theory has been leveraged to examine work engagement in multiple studies [60-62].

Diversity-Oriented Leadership (DOL) and Symmetrical Internal Communication (SIC)

Internal communication can be conceptualized as a leadership and governance mechanism aimed at achieving organizational goals [63]. Employees perceive their workplace as more open and fair when leaders act inclusively, equitably, and transparently, regardless of employees' identities, roles, or experiences. Leaders who embrace diversity encourage collaboration by providing feedback, engaging employees in shared decision-making, and empowering them to contribute meaningfully [64]. Evidence from structural equation modeling during the COVID-19 pandemic shows that DOL positively influences SIC [65]. Similar positive effects have been reported among full-time employees across multiple U.S. industries [66] and in diverse industry samples in Indonesia [67]. Based on these findings and theoretical underpinnings, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Diversity-oriented leadership is significantly associated with symmetrical internal communication in selected Fortune Indian companies.

Diversity-Oriented Leadership (DOL) and Work Engagement (WE)

Leadership and employee engagement are closely linked in the literature. While studies on transformational leadership and engagement are abundant [68, 69], research specifically examining DOL and work engagement is limited. DOL enhances employee resources through transparency, approachability, and accessibility, fostering greater employee involvement and commitment [70]. Engagement is influenced by leadership style, job characteristics, work environment, and individual traits [71]. By promoting respect, recognition, and enthusiasm, diversity-oriented leaders cultivate a positive environment, thereby enhancing work engagement [72, 73]. Empirical studies in Vietnam's manufacturing sector found a positive relationship between diversity-focused HR practices and employee engagement [74], and similar associations have been reported elsewhere [70, 75]. Drawing on these insights and SET, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H2: Diversity-oriented leadership is significantly related to employees' work engagement in selected Fortune Indian companies.

Diversity-Oriented Leadership (DOL) and Employee Advocacy (EA)

Contemporary organizations increasingly value adaptive, responsive, and flexible cultures [76], prompting scholars to focus on emergent diversity-focused leadership styles rather than strictly formal leadership roles [77, 78]. Research indicates that leadership significantly influences employee advocacy [12, 14, 15, 79, 80]. While numerous studies have examined relationships between various leadership styles (transactional, transformational, empowering, participative, shared) and advocacy [81, 82], there is limited evidence regarding the effects of DOL specifically. As DOL becomes increasingly essential for managing diverse work environments [83], it is considered a key driver of employee advocacy [47]. Research among racial minority employees in the U.S. suggests that DOL indirectly enhances advocacy behaviours, and surveys in the U.S. and India show that leaders' motivating language positively correlates with employee advocacy [79, 84]. Based on these studies and SET, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Diversity-oriented leadership is significantly associated with employee advocacy in selected Fortune Indian companies.

Symmetrical Internal Communication (SIC) and Employee Advocacy (EA)

Employee advocacy is widely recognized as a broader behavioral outcome of effective internal communication [10]. Research consistently shows a positive link between SIC and EA [12, 80]. For many organizations, cultivating engaged frontline employees is critical because higher engagement levels lead to more satisfied, productive employees who can act as brand ambassadors [85]. According to Kang and Sung [20], symmetrical internal communication plays a crucial role in establishing conditions that encourage employee advocacy. While promoting advocacy requires collaboration across multiple organizational functions, balanced internal communication specifically fosters openness, transparency, positivity, and a culture that both acknowledges employees' contributions and legitimizes their concerns, which can enhance EA [79]. Findings from a U.S. online survey of full-time employees also highlighted that empowerment and open dialogue from supervisors positively influence EA [86]. Aligning with prior research and theoretical perspectives, a significant relationship between SIC and EA is anticipated, leading to the following hypothesis:

H4: Symmetrical internal communication has a significant relationship with employee advocacy in selected Fortune Indian companies.

Work Engagement (WE) and Employee Advocacy (EA)

The relationship between work engagement and employee advocacy is evident through shared factors such as contribution, recognition, transparency, and satisfaction [87]. Effective employee advocacy programs rely on a highly engaged workforce,

as advocacy is driven by employees who genuinely embrace the organization's narrative [85]. Engaged employees voluntarily exert extra effort to benefit the organization and view their role as more than just receiving paychecks or promotions, forming an emotional connection with the organization [39, 88]. Engagement promotes positive communication behaviors akin to advocacy, as both involve actively supporting organizational goals and values. By fostering engagement, organizations can build a collaborative, supportive culture that enhances productivity, innovation, and overall organizational success [20]. Engaged employees tend to promote the organization and act as external advocates [89]. Previous studies have observed positive links between engagement and advocacy [90, 91], leading to the following hypothesis:

H5: Work engagement is significantly related to employee advocacy in selected Fortune Indian companies.

Mediating Role of Symmetrical Internal Communication (SIC)

Diversity-oriented leaders value the contributions of team members from varied backgrounds [92] and can enhance organizational communication [93]. When leaders are receptive and considerate of employees' needs, staff are more likely to support the organization over time. Feeling valued motivates employees to engage in advocacy behaviors, becoming a key organizational asset [94, 95]. Previous research attributes authentic communication about organizations to employees [96], and the likelihood of employees defending their organization depends on their trust and satisfaction with it [97]. In organizations lacking ethical culture, voluntary advocacy is unlikely [98]. Organizational culture and leadership collectively shape values, behaviors, and goals, influencing the entire organization [99]. Survey data from Chilean organizations demonstrate that ethical organizational culture fosters transparent communication, which, in turn, promotes employee advocacy [98]. Several studies applying social exchange theory suggest that SIC influenced by diversity-oriented leadership can strengthen employee engagement and organizational commitment [100, 101]. Research on the multicultural workforce within the U.S. Justice Department also indicates that DOL and SIC drive organizational justice, which affects engagement and advocacy behaviors [101]. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6: Symmetrical internal communication significantly mediates the relationship between diversity-oriented leadership and employee advocacy in selected Fortune Indian companies.

Mediating Role of Work Engagement (WE)

Previous studies suggest that work engagement can function as a mediator in organizational contexts, such as between corporate social responsibility initiatives and employee outcomes [102, 103]. However, its role in linking diversity-oriented leadership to employee advocacy remains largely unexplored. Research conducted in China's high-tech sector found that inclusive leadership motivates employees to demonstrate challenge-oriented organizational citizenship behaviors (COCB), with work engagement partially accounting for this effect [104]. COCB manifests in behaviors such as advocacy, assuming responsibility, and undertaking forward-looking actions that challenge existing norms and authority [105, 106]. Another investigation, grounded in conservation of resources theory, illustrated that providing employees with necessary resources allows inclusive leaders to enhance advocacy behaviors through work engagement [104]. For organizations, fostering engaged frontline staff is critical, as employees with higher engagement are not only more committed but also naturally evolve into brand ambassadors. Based on these insights, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H7: Work engagement acts as a significant mediator between diversity-oriented leadership and employee advocacy in selected Fortune Indian companies.

Methodology

Study objectives

This research primarily aims to examine the interrelationships among diversity-oriented leadership, symmetrical internal communication, work engagement, and employee advocacy. A secondary objective is to test a mediation model where diversity-oriented leadership influences employee advocacy via both symmetrical internal communication and work engagement, while controlling for demographic variables such as age, gender, education, and company affiliation.

Research approach

The study adopts a post-positivist perspective to investigate causal links between the constructs. This approach focuses on systematically uncovering patterns and relationships within the data collected from the target population [107].

Sample and data collection

The population for this study included employees from ten Fortune Indian companies, selected from the top fifty firms on the Fortune 500 India ranking based on revenue. This ranking has been widely used in prior research as a credible source for understanding the Indian corporate landscape [108-113].

Sample size was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan [114] table. For a population of approximately 16 million, the recommended minimum sample was 384 to achieve a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error. To improve reliability, 400 participants were targeted. Participants were proportionally stratified across the selected companies through random sampling, with **Table 1** providing the breakdown. Data were collected between January and April 2023 via an online survey distributed to employees through platforms such as LinkedIn and Facebook, resulting in 413 completed responses.

Table 1. Distribution of the study sample

S. no	Company	Population	Ratio distribution	Sample size	Collected data
1.	Company A	2,36,334	400*(2,36,334/16,45,244)	57	59
2.	Company B	4,88,649	400*(4,88,649/16,45,244)	119	120
3.	Company C	35,927	400*(35,927/ 16,45,244)	9	12
4.	Company D	2,59,619	400*(2,59,619/ 16,45,244)	63	64
5.	Company E	2,01,665	400*(2,01,665/16,45,244)	49	51
6.	Company F	1,68,977	400*(1,68,977/16,45,244)	41	41
7.	Company G	1,20,093	400*(1,20,093/16,45,244)	29	31
8.	Company H	85,815	400*(85,815/16,45,244)	21	18
9.	Company I	21,000	400*(21000/16,45,244)	5	7
10.	Company J	27,165	400*(27,165/16,45,244)	7	10
		16,45,244		400	413

Ethical considerations

Before conducting the study, all necessary permissions and approvals were obtained from relevant authorities and academic communities. The corresponding author received official research support from the Faculty of Commerce at Banaras Hindu University and funding from the Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi (Award letter no. F. No. 3-56/2021-22/PDF/GEN, dated 14.01.2022). Employees from the selected companies provided informed consent verbally before participating in discussions about diversity-related topics. The data collection process involved structured multiple-choice interviews lasting approximately 30 minutes and was conducted online via Google Forms shared through LinkedIn. Although an ethical review board exists at Banaras Hindu University for science disciplines, there is no equivalent committee for Commerce; thus, formal clearance was not obtained. Nevertheless, the study was low-risk, and ethical standards were carefully maintained throughout all interactions with participants.

Variables and measurement

Diversity-oriented leadership

To measure employees' perceptions of their leaders' commitment to diversity, four statements were used: (1) the leader represents all societal sectors in the workforce, (2) the supervisor manages diverse employees effectively, (3) employee perspectives from various backgrounds are treated equally, and (4) the leader seeks input from employees across demographic and expertise groups. These items were adapted from the Inclusion and Belonging Assessment Scale [115] and responses were rated on a five-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Symmetrical internal communication

Employees' perceptions of communication openness were assessed using two statements from the same scale: (1) employees feel comfortable expressing views during meetings with managers, and (2) employees are informed in advance about significant policy changes affecting their roles. Responses used a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree).

Work engagement

Work engagement was measured using selected items from the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9S) [116], which captures vigor, dedication, and absorption. Four items were included for this study: feeling energetic at work, looking forward to work in the morning, enjoying intense work, and becoming fully absorbed in tasks. Participants rated these items on a five-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Employee advocacy

Employee advocacy was measured using three items adapted from the Employee Advocacy Scale [12]: sharing positive information about the organization with others, speaking up against biased criticism, and defending the organization when criticized. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale.

Data analysis

Analyses were performed using IBM SPSS version 20, with a valid license obtained prior to use. The PROCESS macro (Hayes [117], Model 4) was applied to test mediation effects. Control variables included age, gender, educational level, and company affiliation. Indirect effects were evaluated using bias-corrected bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples and 95% confidence intervals; effects were considered significant if zero was not included in the CI.

Results and Discussion

Participant profile

The final sample consisted of 413 participants: 177 women (42.9%) and 236 men (57.1%). The largest age group was 25–34 years (47.7%), followed by 35–44 years (25.4%), 18–24 years (15.7%), 45–54 years (8.2%), and 55–64 years (2.9%). Education levels included master's degrees (51.3%), bachelor's degrees (22.3%), and professional/doctoral qualifications (18.9%). Employment duration ranged from less than one year (22%) to ten years or more (9.7%). Respondents' roles included middle management (39.7%), lower management (22.5%), senior management (16.2%), and non-management/experienced staff (15%), with the remainder from executives, entry-level, and other roles. By industry, the majority worked in technology (66.7%), followed by retail (14.3%), finance (11.9%), manufacturing (4.6%), and energy/utilities (2.4%). Organizational size varied, with 78% in firms with 10,000+ employees and 13.1% in firms with 5,000–9,999 employees. Company-wise representation ranged from Company B (29.1%) to Company I (1.7%).

Reliability and data normality

Reliability assesses the consistency of measurements, and validity evaluates whether instruments measure the intended construct accurately [118]. **Table 2** presents descriptive statistics for independent, dependent, and mediating variables. All items showed strong internal consistency based on Cronbach's alpha. Data normality was examined using skewness and kurtosis criteria (skewness between -2 and +2, kurtosis between -7 and +7) as suggested by Bryne [119] and Hair *et al.* [120]. The results indicated that the data were normally distributed across all constructs.

Table 2. Reliability and validity

Constructs	No. of items	Cronbach alpha	Minimum	Maximum	Skewness	Kurtosis
DOL	4	0.925	1	5	-1.4	1.969
EA	3	0.906	1	5	-1.54	2.328
SIC	2	0.909	1	5	-1.454	1.931
WE	4	0.895	1	5	-1.251	1.564

Linearity

The assumption of linearity refers to the expectation that the mean or predicted value of a dependent variable changes in a straight-line manner across the range of an independent variable [121]. Assessing linearity is crucial for accurately identifying relationships between variables and ensuring that correlation coefficients validly represent these relationships [120]. In this study, the linearity test yielded a significant result ($p < 0.05$) for the relationships among the variables.

Common method bias

Common method bias can occur when the same measurement approach is applied to all study constructs, potentially affecting both reliability and the validity of findings [122-124]. To detect this issue, Harman's single-factor test using exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was employed. A value above 50% variance explained by a single factor would indicate potential bias. In the current dataset, the single factor accounted for 44.975% of the variance, suggesting that common method bias is not a significant concern.

Hayes process macro results

To explore the influence of diversity-oriented leadership on employee advocacy, along with the mediating effects of symmetrical internal communication and work engagement, a mediation regression analysis was conducted using Hayes' Process Macro (Model 4). In **Table 3**, the model and variables are detailed: Y represents the dependent variable, X is the independent variable, and M1 and M2 are the two mediators. Covariates in the analysis included age, gender, educational qualifications, and company affiliation.

Table 3. Description of the model

Model	4
Y	EA
X	DOL

Grant and Wallace		Ann Organ Cult Leadersh Extern Engagem J, 2024, 5:159-173
M1	SIC	
M2	WE	
Covariates	Age, Gender, Educational Qualifications, Company	
Sample Size	413	

The analysis in **Table 4** summarizes how diversity-oriented leadership (DOL) influences symmetrical internal communication (SIC), accounting for demographic factors including age, gender, education, and company affiliation. The table reports overall model statistics such as R, R², F-values, and significance levels. Regression results indicate that DOL exerts a strong and statistically significant positive effect on SIC ($b = 0.8463$, $t = 28.2362$, $p < 0.001$), representing path a1. In contrast, the demographic covariates did not show any meaningful impact on SIC. Based on these outcomes, hypothesis H1, which proposes a significant association between DOL and SIC in the selected Fortune Indian companies, is confirmed. This result is consistent with prior studies that have found a significant positive link between these variables [64-67, 125, 126].

Table 4. Model summary (outcome variable: SIC)

P	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2
0.0000	0.8222	0.6760	0.3396	169.8433	5	407
Model						
	coeff	Se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	0.8441	0.2296	3.6761	0.0003	0.3927	1.2955
DOL	0.8463	0.0300	28.2362	0.0000	0.7874	0.9053
Age	0.0247	0.0311	0.7920	0.4288	-0.0366	0.0859
Gender	-0.0103	0.0590	-0.1746	0.8615	-0.1262	0.1056
EduQual	-0.0508	0.0336	-1.5115	0.1314	-0.1168	0.0153
Company	-0.0045	0.0126	-0.3596	0.7193	-0.0292	0.0202

Table 5 provides a summary of the model examining work engagement (WE) as the outcome variable, along with the associated regression coefficients. The findings indicate that diversity-oriented leadership (DOL) has a strong and significant positive effect on WE, as reflected by the coefficient ($b = 0.7612$, $t = 25.5169$, $p < 0.001$), corresponding to path a2. Among the control variables, only the company showed a significant influence on employees' work engagement ($b = -0.0476$, $t = -3.8096$, $p < 0.001$), while age, gender, and educational qualifications did not have a meaningful effect. Consequently, hypothesis H2, which proposes a significant association between DOL and employees' WE in the selected Fortune Indian companies, is supported. These results are consistent with prior research demonstrating a positive link between diversity-oriented leadership and work engagement [70, 72-75].

Table 5. Model summary (outcome variable: WE)

P	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2
0.0000	0.8083	0.6534	0.3363	153.4509	5	407
Model						
	Coeff	Se	t	P	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	0.9040	0.2285	3.9557	0.0001	0.4548	1.3533
DOL	0.7612	0.0298	25.5169	0.0000	0.7025	0.8198
Age	0.0570	0.0310	1.8389	0.0667	-0.0039	0.1179
Gender	-0.0651	0.0587	-1.1091	0.2681	-0.1805	0.0503
EduQual	0.0146	0.0334	0.4369	0.6624	-0.0511	0.0803
Company	-0.0476	0.0125	-3.8096	0.0002	-0.0722	-0.0231

Table 6 presents the model summary for employee advocacy (EA) as the dependent variable. The results show that diversity-oriented leadership (DOL) has a significant positive effect on EA, with a coefficient of $b = 0.3184$, $t = 7.2678$, and $p < 0.001$, supporting hypothesis H3, which posits a meaningful relationship between DOL and EA in the selected Fortune Indian companies. This finding aligns with prior research [90, 94, 95, 98].

Symmetrical internal communication (SIC) also demonstrated a significant influence on EA ($b = 0.2405$, $t = 5.6068$, $p < 0.001$), corresponding to path b1, thereby confirming hypothesis H4. These results are consistent with previous studies [12, 79, 80, 86].

Similarly, work engagement (WE) exhibited a significant positive effect on EA ($b = 0.3732$, $t = 8.6583$, $p < 0.001$), as reflected by path b2, validating hypothesis H5 regarding the relationship between WE and EA. These findings are in line with earlier research [85, 89-91]. In contrast, none of the control variables showed a significant effect on employee advocacy.

Table 6. Model summary (outcome variable: EA)

Grant and Wallace		Ann Organ Cult Leadersh Extern Engagem J, 2024, 5:159-173				
P	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2
0.0000	0.8886	0.7897	0.2073	217.1987	7	405
Model						
	coeff	Se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	0.3462	0.1839	1.8827	0.0605	−0.0153	0.7076
DOL	0.3184	0.0438	7.2678	0.0000	0.2323	0.4045
SIC	0.2405	0.0429	5.6068	0.0000	0.1562	0.3248
WE	0.3732	0.0431	8.6583	0.0000	0.2884	0.4579
Age	−0.0032	0.0244	−0.1312	0.8957	−0.0512	0.0448
Gender	−0.0148	0.0462	−0.3197	0.7493	−0.1055	0.0760
EduQual	0.0085	0.0264	0.3235	0.7465	−0.0433	0.0604
Company	−0.0190	0.0100	−1.8991	0.0583	−0.0387	0.0007

Table 7 displays the total effect model, illustrating how diversity-oriented leadership (DOL), along with age, gender, educational qualifications, and company, affiliation influences employee advocacy (EA). The analysis indicates a strong overall relationship with EA, reflected by an R-value of 0.8338. The model estimates that approximately 69.53% of the variance in EA can be explained by these factors. Among them, only DOL and the company variable were statistically significant predictors ($p < 0.05$), while the remaining covariates did not show a meaningful effect.

Table 7. Total effect model (outcome variable: EA)

P	R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2
0.0000	0.8338	0.6953	0.2988	185.7486	5	407
Model						
	coeff	Se	T	P	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	0.8865	0.2154	4.1154	0.0000	0.4631	1.3100
DOL	0.8060	0.0281	28.6630	0.0000	0.7507	0.8612
Age	0.0240	0.0292	0.8213	0.4120	−0.0334	0.0814
Gender	−0.0415	0.0553	−0.7506	0.4533	−0.1503	0.0672
EduQual	0.0018	0.0315	0.0562	0.9552	−0.0602	0.0637
Company	−0.0379	0.0118	−3.2139	0.0014	−0.0611	−0.0147

The analysis revealed that age, gender, and educational qualifications did not exert a significant influence on the dependent variables and were therefore removed from the final model. **Table 8** presents the total, direct, and indirect effects of diversity-oriented leadership on employee advocacy, accompanied by a summary of the mediation analysis.

Table 8. Total, direct, and indirect effects of X on Y

Total effect of X on Y					
Effect	Se	T	P	LLCI	ULCI
0.8098	0.0279	29.0473	0.0000	0.7550	0.8646
Direct effect of X on Y					
Effect	Se	T	P	LLCI	ULCI
0.3191	0.0436	7.3178	0.0000	0.2334	0.4048
Indirect effect (s) of X on Y					
	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI	
Total	0.4907	0.0452	0.4035	0.5815	
MeanSIC	0.2026	0.0526	0.0974	0.3037	
MeanWE	0.2881	0.0503	0.1878	0.3851	

Summary of the mediation analysis

The study examined whether symmetrical internal communication (SIC) and work engagement (WE) mediate the relationship between diversity-oriented leadership (DOL) and employee advocacy (EA). The findings indicate a significant indirect effect of DOL on EA through SIC ($b = 0.2026$, $t = 3.8517$), supporting hypothesis H6. This outcome aligns with prior research [98, 100, 127], confirming that SIC significantly mediates the DOL–EA relationship in the selected Fortune Indian companies. Similarly, the analysis revealed a significant indirect effect of DOL on EA via WE ($b = 0.2881$, $t = 5.7276$), supporting hypothesis H7. These results are consistent with previous studies [104–106], demonstrating that work engagement serves as a mediator in the relationship between DOL and EA.

In addition, the direct effect of DOL on EA remained significant even when both mediators were included in the model ($b = 0.3191$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that SIC and WE partially mediate the relationship. The mediation is complementary, as both the direct and indirect effects share the same direction.

Regarding covariates, company affiliation significantly influenced both EA and WE but did not have a notable effect on SIC. A detailed summary of the mediation analysis is provided in **Table 9**.

Table 9. Mediation analysis summary

Total effect	Direct effect	Confidence interval				t-statistics	Conclusion
(DOL → EA (0.000))	(DOL → EA (0.000))	Relationship	Indirect effect	Lower bound	Upper bound		
0.8098 (0.000)	0.3191 (0.000)	H6: DOL → SIC → EA	0.2026	0.0974	0.3037	3.8517	Partial Mediation
		H7: DOL → WE → EA	0.2881	0.1878	0.3851	5.7276	Partial Mediation

Results and Discussion

Tables 10 and 11 present an overview of the descriptive statistics for the study's sample and the finalized outcomes of the conceptual model, respectively.

Table 10. Descriptive statistics

Demographic factors	Percentage
Gender	
Male	57.1
Female	42.9
Age	
18-24	15.7
25-34	47.7
35-44	25.4
45-54	8.2
55-64	2.9
Education	
Bachelors' degree	22.3
Masters' degree or equivalent	51.3
Professional or doctorate degree	18.9
Job Tenure	
Less than a year	22
1-3 years	31
4-6 years	23.2
7-9 years	14
10 years or more	9.7
Position in the Organisation	
Executive/ Board members	2.7
Senior management	16.2
Middle management	39.7
Lower- level management	22.5
Entry- level employee	2.2
Experienced/ non-management	15
Other grades	1.7
Nature of the Company	
Technology	66.7
Retail	14.3
Finance	11.9
Industrial/ Manufacturing	4.6
Energy/ Utilities	2.4
Number of Employees	
5000-9999	13.1
10000 or more	78
Sample Size from Selected Companies	
Company A	14.3

Company B	29.1
Company C	2.9
Company D	15.5
Company E	12.3
Company F	9.9
Company G	4.4
Company H	2.4
Company I	1.7

Table 11. Results of the mediation model

Model	Result of mediation analysis
Diversity- Oriented Leadership > Symmetrical Internal Communication > Employee Advocacy	Symmetrical Internal Communication partially mediates the relationship of Diversity- Oriented Leadership and Employee Advocacy
Diversity- Oriented Leadership > Work Engagement > Employee Advocacy	Work Engagement partially mediates the relationship of Diversity- Oriented Leadership and Employee Advocacy

Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal that diversity-focused leadership exerts a strong influence on both internal communication and employee engagement. Furthermore, the research confirms that the effect of diversity-oriented leadership on employee advocacy is partially mediated by symmetrical internal communication and work engagement. Among the covariates examined, company affiliation emerged as the only significant factor influencing employee advocacy and work engagement, while it did not significantly affect symmetrical internal communication. Given that the potential of workplace diversity in India is yet to be fully harnessed, it is vital to explore how organizational practices, particularly in public relations, can foster inclusive environments while enhancing overall organizational performance. Creating a supportive atmosphere for employees from diverse backgrounds is key to achieving this objective.

The results underscore the importance of effective leadership, robust internal communication, and high levels of work engagement in promoting employee advocacy, in line with the integrative social exchange theory. Leaders who embrace diversity actively value the perspectives of team members from various backgrounds, which enhances organizational communication. By being attentive to employee needs and recognizing their contributions, employers can build lasting support. Treating employees as valuable organizational assets can motivate them to act as advocates for the company. Ultimately, organizational culture and values play a pivotal role in shaping how employees perceive and promote their organization externally.

Limitations, Future Directions, and Implications

With technological advancements, globalization, and evolving social movements, fostering diversity in the workplace has become increasingly essential. Establishing fair and inclusive work environments is critical, and leaders must ensure that all employees feel respected, empowered, and equipped to perform their roles effectively.

This study has certain limitations. It focuses solely on employees from ten selected companies, excluding others from the broader list. Future research could expand the sample to include additional companies or use different organizational indices to gain a more comprehensive understanding of diversity-promoting leadership practices. Collecting perspectives from employers could also provide valuable insights. Employing a longitudinal design could help examine how diversity-oriented leadership, communication practices, and employee engagement evolve over time and influence advocacy behaviors. Comparative studies across countries, including India and other developing nations, could offer further insights.

A notable contribution of this study is the development of a tool to assess diversity-focused leadership practices in the selected companies. Future researchers could adapt this tool to study other sectors, while managers can use it to evaluate how employees perceive their leadership behaviors and the extent to which these influence workplace outcomes. The findings provide actionable insights for professionals in diversity management, talent development, and analytics, helping them understand organizational challenges and guiding middle-level managers in creating positive, inclusive work environments that support employee success.

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