

## Fostering Employees' Scouting Behavior through Inclusive Leadership: The Serial Mediating Roles of Exchange Norms and Megaphoning

Ishfaq Ahmed

College of Business, University of Buraimi, Oman  
*ishfakahmed@gmail.com; ishfaq.a@uob.edu.om*

**Abstract.** This study investigates the impact of inclusive leadership on employees' scouting behavior (i.e., voluntary acquisition and sharing of information) through the serial mediation of exchange norms and megaphoning (i.e., positive and negative information sharing). Drawing upon Organizational Support Theory, the authors propose that inclusive leaders foster an environment of open communication and exchange, which encourages employees to engage in positive megaphoning and reduces negative megaphoning. In turn, positive megaphoning is expected to increase scouting behavior, while negative megaphoning is expected to decrease it. The hypotheses are tested using a time-lagged survey of 432 employees from various organizations in Pakistan. The results of structural equation modeling provide support for the serial mediation model, indicating that inclusive leadership indirectly influences scouting behavior through exchange norms and megaphoning. The findings highlight the importance of inclusive leadership and exchange norms in fostering employees' communication and information-seeking behaviors. The study contributes to the literature by offering a novel theoretical explanation for the relationship between leadership and employee communication behavior and provides practical implications for organizations seeking to promote scouting behavior.

**Keywords:** Inclusive leadership; Employees' scouting behavior, Exchange norms; Negative megaphoning; Positive megaphoning.

## 1. Introduction

Out of many workplace resources, employees are valued the most due to their ability to influence overall organizational effectiveness (Lee et al., 2018). Therefore, the extent of literature has focused on the ways to promote positive employee behavior. One of such behaviors is employees' scouting behavior (i.e., employees' volunteer behavior of acquisition of information from the environment) (Kim and Rhee, 2011). Such communication behaviors have a positive influence on organizations and employees in the form of improved performance, creativity, and effectiveness (Chen and Hou, 2016; Kang and Sung, 2017; Kim and Rhee, 2011; Morrison, 2014; Park et al., 2014). It is therefore considered important to study the determinants of voluntary communication behaviors like scouting (Lee, 2021), where one such behavior is "Megaphoning" which is defined as the information sharing behavior about the strengths and weaknesses of the people in the personal networks (Kim and Rhee, 2011). Both megaphoning and scouting are different constructs, as scouting covers the actions that aim at information seeking while megaphoning is sharing information about the internal environment with others (Lee and Kim, 2022). Both of these constructs are equally important for firms as it is through effective communication, that a firm can build and maintain good relationships with the public and external stakeholders (Verhoeven and Madsen, 2022; Zhou and Xu, 2022). Therefore, organizations want their employees to communicate positive aspects of their work (positive megaphoning) more than the negative aspects (negative megaphoning). Despite the centrality of the issue of communication, very few studies have investigated the determinants of scouting and megaphoning behavior.

Against this backdrop, this study uses Organizational Support Theory (OST, Eisenberger et al., 1986) to propose and investigate the mechanism through which both megaphoning and scouting can be enhanced. A profound look at literature highlights the fact that communication behavior of employees is significantly influenced by the quality of relationships at work (Kim and Rhee, 2011). Others have highlighted the role of various organizational level interventions e.g., management, leadership, structure, and policies (Kang and Sung, 2017; Lee et al., 2018; Men, 2014). Extant literature has focused on leadership and its role in determining the employees' communication behavior because the leader-employee relationship fosters a culture of communication (Men and Stacks, 2014). Such culture nurtures relationships and communication of employees with the organization and its agents (leaders and supervisors) (Carter et al., 2013; Mahmoud, 2008; Major et al., 2008). Therefore, it has been observed that communication is a function of transformational leadership (Lee and Chon, 2021; Men, 2014; Tian et al., 2020; Yue et al., 2019), authentic leadership (Hsiung, 2012; Men and Stacks, 2014), and charismatic leadership (Men, 2020). This can be attributed to the fact that good treatment from a leader is considered a favor from the organization, thus positive feelings about a leader can create a positive image of the organization (Iqbal et al., 2018; Men, 2014). Such a leader-employee relationship tends to create positive feelings about the working environment and makes employees feel responsible for reciprocation of such favors from the leader (Ahmed et al., 2015; Ahmed and Nawaz, 2015; Eisenberger et al., 1986). Employees may reciprocate the favor by sharing the positive image of the organization with others (positive megaphoning) and avoid sharing negative information (negative megaphoning).

But it is worth mentioning that there is a dearth of empirical literature that has focused on the role of inclusive leadership in improving megaphoning and scouting. This study tries to address this gap in the literature and hence it is one of the contributions of the present study. An inclusive leader is one who possesses and displays the traits of accessibility, availability, and openness (Nembhard and Edmondson, 2004) and through these traits encourage followers to share and communicate new ideas (Carmeli et al., 2010). As such leaders are accessible and approachable to all, the followers tend to feel easy with such leaders in sharing new ideas (Hirak et al., 2012). Thus, a culture of sharing and communication comes into existence (Lee, 2021). Through their actions (i.e., information seeking, challenging acceptance and valuing others' voices), such leaders foster an environment where employees can openly seek and share information (Hirak et al., 2012). The actions of an inclusive leader

help him/her win the trust of followers and in turn, employees feel attached and connected with the organization (Qi and Liu, 2017). As such leaders are accessible, open, and available to all, employees tend to feel psychological safety (Mitchell et al., 2015) and thus can seek and share information without any fear. The role of inclusive leaders is valued by past studies as well; for instance, Hollander (2013) highlighted the role of inclusive leadership in the following words: “*Inclusive leadership (IL) emphasizes this role of active followership by showing consideration in doing things with people, rather than to people--- stressing respect, recognition, responsiveness, and responsibility, in both roles*” (p. 122). Therefore, this study proposes that inclusive leaders can improve employees’ megaphoning and scouting behavior which is another contribution of the current study.

Yet another main consideration of the study is the mechanism of exchange norms between inclusive leadership and communication behaviors (megaphoning and scouting). The basic traits of inclusive leaders (accessibility, availability, and openness) influence the working environment and create a culture where information seeking and sharing are encouraged. Based on Organizational Support Theory (OST, Eisenberger et al., 1986), the leaders are considered agents of the organization (Ahmed et al., 2015; Ahmed and Nawaz, 2015), and they can influence employees’ feelings about the organization (Carter et al., 2013; Mahmoud, 2008; Major et al., 2008; Men, 2014), and they can even determine the level of employees’ relationship with the organization (Iqbal et al., 2018). Inclusive leaders, through the exhibition of accessibility, availability, and openness, develop an environment where it’s easy to communicate and share ideas (Carmeli et al., 2010; Nembhard and Edmondson, 2004). These leaders ensure an environment of receiving and accepting the voice of employees (Hirak et al., 2012), which fosters trust in leaders and attachment with the organization (Qi and Liu, 2017). In the presence of such an environment, employees tend to reciprocate favors to the organization and its agents (Ahmed et al., 2015; Eisenberger et al., 1986) by indulging in positive behaviors towards the organization. This environment of support and reciprocation keeps on flourishing and an everlasting environment of exchange comes into existence. Based on the given discussion, this study asserts that when leaders would be inclusive, an environment of exchange norms would come into existence and employees would tend to reciprocate organization, through megaphoning and scouting, for the favors in the shape of inclusive leaders and exchange norms at work.

All in all, this study aims to contribute to the existing literature on communication and its determinants through explanatory mechanisms. Particularly, this study intends to investigate the role of inclusive leadership in predicting employees’ scouting behavior which is drawn upon OST (Eisenberger et al. 1986). The findings of the study also provide an insight into the mechanism through which inclusive leaders can foster communication behavior i.e., exchange norms and megaphoning (positive and negative). This study also contributes to the theoretically, by investigating the exchange relations based on OST, which has not gained researchers’ attention in communication literature. The study provides evidence that exchange with a leader is translated as an exchange with an organization and employees tend to reciprocate organization positively when the leader is inclusive. Thus, the findings have both theoretical and practical usefulness, as the empirical evidence from a developing country (Pakistan) may be used by the management to improve and influence employees’ communication.

## **2. Hypotheses Development**

### **2.1. Inclusive leadership and exchange norms**

Inclusive Leadership, by the virtue of its relational nature, has been identified to have important implications for communication and relationships in the workplace (Men, 2014). According to Men and Stacks (2013), it’s the employee – leader relationship that sets the culture and norms for the approaches of relationship management and internal communication at the workplace. Extant literature has identified that leadership can improve the employees’ relations with the organization and its agents (e.g. supervisors) (Carter et al., 2013; Mahmoud, 2008; Major et al., 2008). This can be attributed to the fact that leaders and supervisors represent the organization and employees’ positive feelings about the leader

can improve the image of the organization (Men, 2014). It is therefore believed that the relationship with the leader can foster the relationship with the organization (Iqbal et al., 2018), an exchange norm at work.

In terms of exchange norms at the workplace, inclusive leadership seems to foster it as such leaders possess and demonstrate the key attributes required for such relationships. When a leader exhibits availability, accessibility, and openness, they are likely to develop an environment where communication is easy and relationships are valued (Nembhard and Edmondson, 2004). Inclusive leaders encourage followers to come up with new ideas, communicate them, and ensure that there would be positive responses for opening up and no negative consequences for failure. Such leaders encourage communication by showing the traits of accessibility, availability, and openness. Through availability and accessibility, a leader sends a signal that there is an environment where employees can find him/her at any time for sharing and communicating information. Similarly, when a leader is open and listens to employees' new ways of doing things are shared, attention is given to opportunities and employees tend to share their thoughts without losing their reputation and image (Carmeli et al., 2010).

According to HIRAK et al., (2012), an inclusive leader implies such actions and behaviors that exhibit information seeking, receiving, and accepting challenges and listening to the voice of employees. In response, employees tend to have a positive attitude towards work and organization through display of the higher level of trust in the leader and organization and improved attachment with the organization (Qi and Liu, 2017). Due to the accessibility, availability, and openness of the leader, the followers tend to feel psychological safety and identify with the organization (Mitchell et al., 2015).

Similarly, in presence of basic traits of an inclusive leader, an employee is expected to feel it a positive reciprocation from the leader and organization for the suggestions and communication made by them (Ashikali et al., 2021). Building on the Organizational Support Theory (OST, Eisenberger et al., 1986), the inclusiveness of the leader can be believed as the value an employee receives from organization in terms of openness, availability, and accessibility of leader, and they tend to reciprocate the organization favorably. Hollander (2013) has expressed the value of inclusive leadership in the following words: "*Inclusive leadership (IL)* emphasizes this role of active followership by showing consideration in "*doing things with people, rather than to people*", stressing *respect, recognition, responsiveness, and responsibility, in both roles*" (p. 122), and named it idiosyncrasy credits (IC). They further highlighted that such leaders have strong leader-follower ties for their support and open communication helping employees reciprocate in similar ways. Based on the given discussion, the following assertion is made:

**H1:** Inclusive leadership and exchange norms are positively related.

## 2.2. Exchange norms and megaphoning

Workplace relationships are not only important in work setting but also valued across the organizational boundaries (Kim and Rhee, 2011). While looking at the megaphoning behavior of employees, past studies have found that the employees' intentions to share positive or negative information depend upon their relationships in the workplace (Lee and Kim, 2017, 2022). Such relationships result in a situation of win-win where both the organization and employees are benefited (Hung, 2005), and often employees select their behavioral response while keeping the nature of the relationship in their minds (Lee and Kim, 2017; Walden and Westerman, 2018). The relationship can be attributed to the fact that when employees perceive that their efforts (time, energy, and performance) are fairly reciprocated through tangible and intangible rewards (e.g., growth opportunities, career development, and salary increase), they tend to share this positive aspect of their job to others (Lee and Chon, 2020). In such cases, employees tend to hold back the information about negative aspects of a job and organization while sharing only the positive information (Lee and Kim, 2017). The same can be asserted as the outcomes of the exchange relationship (OST perspective) between organization and employees (Ahmed et al., 2015; Ahmed and Nawaz, 2015; Eisenberger et al., 1986; Men et al., 2020), created by the environment prevalent at work and the information sharing (megaphoning) as the

reciprocation by the employees (Gouldner, 1960). Based on the given debate following hypothesis is generated:

**H2:** Exchange norms and positive megaphoning are positively related

**H3:** Exchange norms and negative megaphoning are negatively related

### 2.3. Megaphoning & Scouting

Though both megaphoning and scouting have been considered employees' voluntary behaviors of sharing work-related information, these types of communication behaviors are distinct (Lee, 2021). Megaphoning deals with the voluntary behavior of information sharing (about organizational strengths and problems) while scouting is a voluntary behavior of looking for important information that may benefit the organization (to deal with its problems) and sharing it with the organization (Kim and Rhee, 2011). According to Lee (2021), megaphoning can influence employees' scouting behavior because when an employee aims to share information (megaphoning), they would require updated information, and thus, they would seek and acquire both internal and external information (scouting). It is therefore assumed that when employees would intend to megaphone, they would scout more for information which in turn implies that megaphoning intentions would increase scouting behavior.

To support his assertion, the current study has adopted the main assumptions of reciprocation norms (Gouldner, 1964) and OST (Eisenberger et al., 1986) which is an offshoot of Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964). OST, like SET, is built on the assumptions of exchange norms at work which exist between an organization (or its agents) and its members (Ahmed et al., 2015). The relationship is based on the exchange which is an outcome of long-term interaction, attachment, and trust between both parties. This could be attributed to the fact that exchange emphasizes the socioemotional aspect of the relationship which makes employees feel indebted and make them reciprocate the favors by taking proactive and extra role measures (Thompson et al., 2020; Shore et al., 2006). As communication behaviors are voluntary and one must move beyond the scope of the work (Lee, 2021), it is expected that OST can work as an underlying theoretical explanation for the relationship.

It is rightly argued that megaphoning behavior (sharing important information with stakeholders, e.g., employees and managers) can build attachment, commitment, and trust between both the recipient and the disseminator of the information and therefore, an exchange relationship between the organization and employees comes into existence. Interestingly, the greater the level of exchange, the more frequent and easier it would be to share information with an employee (Men and Sung, 2022; Men et al., 2020; Smith et al., 1994; Wang, 2022), which engender trust and reciprocity among group members (Uzzi, 1997). According to Kwon and Suh (2004), sharing of information reduces uncertainty and improves the level of trust among members. The level of trust further reduces the knowledge-sharing barriers and increases comfort in sharing it (Hsu and Chang, 2014; Nerstad, 2018, Xiao and Wang, 2021). Charoensukmongkol and Phungsoonthorn (2022) also highlighted that a communication system at work can offer better outcomes when it is backed by support from an organization. Similarly, when the organization provides the required support, employees tend to pay back through positive communication that is favorable for the organization.

Based on the theoretical assertion, it is assumed that the proactive behavior of information sharing (megaphoning) can increase trust, help in socializing at work, and thus ensues exchange relationships at work. The exchange relationship with the organization and its agents makes the employees feel obliged to reciprocate the gesture towards the organization positively by acquiring more useful information (scouting). The information-based exchange creates more opportunities to discuss various issues of the organization and enables various members to work together to build insights (Ling and Kellermanns, 2010). The level of megaphoning tends to increase the understanding of the work processes, organizational culture, norms, and values, and the more one is familiar with the workplace realities the more trust, attachment, and bond one may feel with the organization (Vasin et al., 2020). With the presence of a high level of trust, the individuals would be working for the enhanced positive information sharing (positive megaphoning) and reduced negative information sharing (negative

megaphoning) may help individuals to indulge in additional information seeking (scouting) to continue the information sharing exchange. Based on the given reasoning, the following assertion is being made:

**H4a:** Positive megaphoning is positively related to employees' scouting behavior

**H4b:** Negative megaphoning is negatively related to employees' scouting behavior

#### **2.4. Serial Mediation of Exchange Norms and Megaphoning**

The relationship between inclusive leadership and scouting behavior could also be assumed through serial mediation of exchange norms and internal megaphoning. The relationship is based on the fact that leadership is relational in nature (between leader and followers) (Men, 2014), which fosters the norms and culture of relationship building at work and internal communication (Men and Stacks, 2013). Leaders being representatives of the organization influence the employees' feelings about the organization (Carter et al., 2013; Mahmoud, 2008; Major et al., 2008; Men, 2014), and relationships with leaders can influence the relationship with the organization (Iqbal et al., 2018). Inclusive leaders, through the exhibition of accessibility, availability, and openness develop an environment where it's easy to communicate (Men and Sung, 2022; Nembhard and Edmondson, 2004). Such leaders, through their core traits, encourage followers to share new ideas, communicate and provide positive responses (Carmeli et al., 2010). These leaders ensure an environment of receiving and accepting the voice of employees (Hirak et al., 2012), which fosters trust in leaders and attachment with the organization (Qi and Liu, 2017) and feelings of the presence of exchange norms at work. The same is ensured by positive reciprocation by the inclusive leader by openness, accessibility, and availability for new ideas, information, and communication, resulting in the assurance of employees' feelings of the presence of exchange norms at work.

The exchange norms are further believed to foster employees' communication or megaphoning. This could be attributed to the fact that the employees' intentions are largely influenced by their feelings about the organization (Lee, 2020; Lee and Kim, 2017). Employees often select their behavioral responses based on nature and the type of relationship they perceive with the organization (Lee and Kim, 2017). This relationship is strong when there is a reciprocation norm (Ahmed and Nawaz, 2015), and employees tend to share organizational information with others when the bond is strong (Lee and Chon, 2020). Based on this argument it is expected that when there is an exchange norm prevalent at work, employees tend to share positive (i.e. positive megaphoning) and hold negative information (negative megaphoning).

The internal megaphoning (being one's response to exchange norms at work), is also assumed to lead to voluntary behavior of information seeking (from the environment) and sharing at work (i.e. scouting). The megaphoning represents the presence of an environment where communication is encouraged, and while considering it the norm at work, employees tend to reciprocate by indulging in volunteer information seeking and sharing internally (scouting). Such behavior is the outcome of motivation processes based on exchange norms (Ahmed et al., 2015; Saks, 2006; Walden and Westerman, 2018), resulting in employees' display of behavior that aims at moving an extra mile in the communication process. According to Kwon and Suh (2004) and Xiao and Wang (2021), employees' volunteer behaviors are the outcome of their trust in the organization and environment. According to Walden and Westerman (2018), the exchange relationship between employees and organization fosters employees' advocacy (a form of volunteer behavior) and they tend to do it often. The inclusive leader through their availability, accessibility, and openness ensures an environment where exchange (sharing) is in practice, which increases employee megaphoning. The relationship is based on trust and the more trust employees have the more they would involve in further communication that is beyond their formal roles i.e. scouting. Thus, a serial mediation relationship can be assumed between inclusive leadership and employees' scouting through exchange norms and internal megaphoning. The same relationship can be asserted based on OST (Eisenberger et al., 1986) which proposes an exchange relationship between the organization/its agents and employees, and favors from the organization are reciprocated by employees positively. The inclusive leader (being a workplace agent) is believed to be a leader that

encourages an environment of openness and communication to become easy at work. Madlock and Hildebrand (2019) also observed that leaders have a significant role in determining the employees' perceptions of the communication system. This fosters an environment where communication from one party is reciprocated by the recipients (exchange norms) and employees tend to reciprocate it favorably through megaphoning (increased positive and reduced negative megaphoning) and scouting (volunteer information seeking and sharing behavior). Based on the given discussion following serial mediation hypothesis is assumed:

**H5:** There exists a positive relationship between inclusive leadership and scouting through serial mediation of exchange norms and internal megaphoning (positive – H5a and negative – H5b).

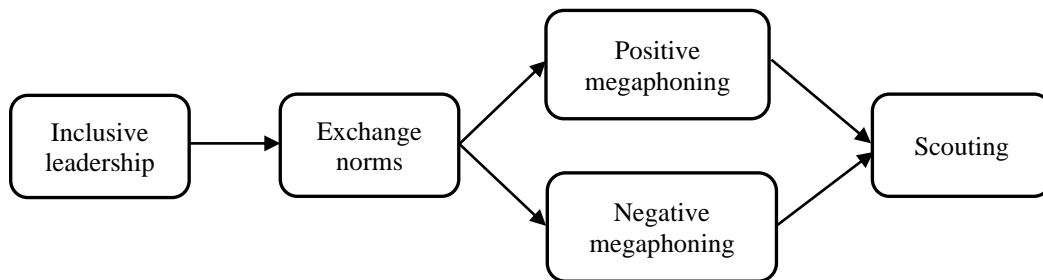


Fig.1: Conceptual model

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1. Participants and Process

The data for the current study were collected from employees of various organizations (IT, banking, hospitals and educational institutions) located in Lahore, the provincial capital of the largest province, Punjab, Pakistan. Using convenience sampling, the employees were approached at two points of time (March 2022 and May 2022). Though this sampling approach restricts generalizability, but a sample from multiple organizations may offer widely applicable results (Farrokhi and Mahmoudi-Hamidabad, 2012).

At time 1, employees responded for inclusive leadership and positive megaphoning, while at time 2 they filled the questionnaire on exchange norms, scouting, and negative megaphoning. According to Podsakoff et al., (2012), data collected in multiple times ensures the CMB (common method biases) free data. As the population size was not known, the size of the sample was determined using the rule-of-thumb approach, and the size was estimated to be 680, which was determined by multiplying 20 by the number of items on the scale ( $34 \times 20 = 680$ ) (Costello and Osborne, 2005). The way of determining is commonly used in management and social sciences literature (Islam et al., 2022). At time-1 only 513 employees filled the questionnaire, where the same employees were contacted after a six-week interval. At this point in time only 478 employees were available at their office, thus the researcher distributed questionnaires to all of them. The researcher managed to get back 456 questionnaires were 24 of them were incompletely or carelessly filled thus removed from the response list. Finally, the researcher had only 432 useful responses left for analysis. All in all, most of the respondents were male ( $n=256$ ), with an average age of 28.5 years, and work experience from 1 – 10 years ( $n=302$ ), had a university degree ( $n=316$ ), belong to service organization ( $n=296$ ) and had been working on lower level management ( $n=343$ ).

#### 3.2. Measures

The questionnaire used for data collection was taken from previous studies. The details of measures of the study are provided below:

**Scouting** – Scouting behavior's measure was taken from the work of Lee (2021) which covered questions on employees' environment scanning attitude with an aim to collect organization specific information and share the same with the organization. The 12 items scale covered exemplary items like

“I listen to public complaints during my time off work and deliver it to my superiors or relevant colleagues” and “I Think one of any employees’ important responsibilities is to collect and report information about my company”. The items were measured on five points Likert scale ranging from 1 (very unlikely) to 5 (very likely).

**Megaphoning** - The megaphoning was operationalized using the Kim and Rhee (2011) eight items scale where four items focused on positive while the other four on negative megaphoning behavior. The positive megaphoning had exemplary items like “When I meet people who are angry about my company (or service/product), I am eager to defend the company” while the negative megaphoning had items like “Even when I meet people who are angry about my company (or service/ product), I hesitate to defend the company”. The scale was also measured on five points Likert scale ranging from 1 (very unlikely) to 5 (very likely).

**Exchange norms** – Five items scale of exchange norms was taken from the work of Lee and Chon (2020), which was based on the work of Lee and Kim (2020), who modified the original version of Hon and Grunig (1999) about exchange norms. It covered items like “If nothing would be gained, I would stop making efforts for my organization”.

**Inclusive leadership** – Inclusive leadership was measured using nine items scale of Carmeli et al., (2010). The scale was operationalized using three dimensions: accessibility (three items), availability (three items), and openness (three items).

The questionnaire comprised two major sections, where the first section covered the personal/demographic information (age, gender, qualification, organization, and experience). The second part of the questionnaire covered questions related to variables of interest.

### 3.3. Control Variables

Considering the guidelines of past studies (Lee and Chon, 2020; Lee, 2021) employees’ education level, organization type, level of job, and experience were controlled for analysis purposes.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Preliminary Analysis

Initially, the data was analyzed for reliabilities of measures, normality of data, descriptive statistics, and correlations coefficients. The data were normally distributed as the values for skewness and kurtosis ranged within threshold limits (i.e. -1.00 to +1.00) (Lee, 2021). All the measures were also reliable as the tabulated value was greater than the standard value of 0.70 (Babbie, 1992). Participants described their leader as inclusive (MS = 3.94 on five points scale), and high level of communication behaviors, i.e. scouting behavior (MS = 4.12), positive megaphoning behavior (MS=4.06), and negative megaphoning (MS=4.34). Moreover, the correlation results highlight that inclusive leadership is positively related with the exchange norms ( $r = .407$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) and positive megaphoning ( $r = .165$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), while negatively related with the negative megaphoning ( $r = -.208$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) and not related with scouting ( $r = .091$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). These results highlight the presence of a relationship among variables of interest. Thus, helped moved a step further with data analysis.

Table 4.1 Descriptive statistics, reliability, and correlation matrix.

	N=312	Mean (SD)	$\infty$	1	2	3	4	5
1	Inclusive leadership	3.94 (0.884)	.790	-				
2	Exchange norms	3.88 (0.546)	.776	.407**	-			
3	Positive megaphoning	4.12 (0.734)	.816	.165*	.220**	-		
4	Negative megaphoning	4.06 (0.719)	.907	-.208*	-.307*		-	
5	Scouting	4.12 (0.648)	.891	.091	.424**	.197**		-

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

### 4.2. Common Method Variance (CMV)

Although the researcher tried to overcome the issue of CMV methodologically by using two lags data collection approach (Podsakoff et al., 2012), the issue was further reassessed using Harman’s single factor score. The single factor explained 32.5% variance which was below the limit of 50%, thus the issue of CMV was not present/severe. Furthermore, the one-factor CFA model also failed to meet the model fitness indices ( $\chi^2/df=4.56$ , CFI=0.78, RMSEA=0.12, SRMR=0.16), which conferred that the CMV was not a threat to the study data.

### 4.3. CFA & Validity Assessment

In follow-up, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was carried out using the thresholds of factor loading ( $\geq 0.50$ ), composite reliability ( $\geq 0.60$ ), and average variance extracted ( $\geq 0.50$ ) (Hair et al., 2010). In addition to model fitness indices values were adopted from the work of Williams et al. (2015), which covered values of chi-square/df ( $\chi^2/df \leq 0.30$ ), SRMR ( $\leq 0.10$ ), RMSEA ( $\leq 0.08$ ), CFI ( $\geq 0.90$ ). The five factors model offered highest model fitness values ( $\chi^2/df=2.18$ , CFI=0.91, RMSEA=0.06, RMR=0.07). The factor loadings of all the factors were above the threshold values of 0.50, except for two items of inclusive leadership, that were removed for analysis purposes. The AVE and CR thresholds were also met, thus the five factors proved to be distinct and independent ensuring the validity of measures as well. As the MSV values (see table- 4.2) were also below the threshold values, the validity was further ensured.

Table 4.2 CFA and Validity

		Loadings	CR	AVE	MSV	1	2	3	4	5
1	Inclusive leadership	0.52-0.78	0.798	0.50	0.428	<b>0.758</b>				
2	Exchange norms	0.61-0.95	0.810	0.51	0.425	0.542	<b>0.733</b>			
3	Positive megaphoning	0.55-0.86	0.795	0.50	0.441	0.385	0.508	<b>0.746</b>		
4	Negative megaphoning	0.57-0.88	0.892	0.56	0.475	0.528	0.452	0.248	<b>0.726</b>	
5	Scouting	0.53-0.79	0.851	0.51	0.352	0.647	0.521	0.275	0.407	<b>0.798</b>

### 4.4. Structural Model and Hypotheses Testing

The hypothesized relationships were tested using SEM, the results of which are shown in table 4.3. The structural model was found fit as it met the desired fitness indices (CMIN/DF= 1.894, RMR= 0.015, GFI= .987, AGFI= .964, CFI= .985, RMSEA= .027). The findings highlight that hypothesis 1, which assumed a positive relationship between inclusive leadership and exchange norms, is supported by the ( $\beta=.102$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). This indicates that inclusive leadership does not directly influence employee scouting (information seeking from the environment and sharing within the organization). Moreover, exchange norms are positively related to positive megaphoning ( $\beta=.345$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) and negatively related to negative megaphoning ( $\beta=-.307$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), while both these megaphoning behaviors are positively and negatively (respectively) related to scouting ( $\beta=.472$ ,  $p<0.001$ ;  $\beta=-.142$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). These results highlight that H2 – H4 are accepted and supported.

Results for mediation analysis are also provided in table 4.3 where the mediation paths are supported. It is evident from the tabulated values that inclusive leadership indirectly influences the outcomes (positive megaphoning, negative megaphoning, and scouting). It is also evident that the other indirect paths showing scouting relationship with the predictors are supported which in the end help in testing the serial mediation relationship. The study also assumed that exchange norms and megaphoning serially mediate the relationships of inclusive leadership and scouting behavior. The findings of the study reveal that the inclusive leadership and scouting relationship is serially mediated by exchange norms and positive megaphoning ( $\beta= .135$ , LLCI= 0.1790, ULCI= 0.7458), thus H5a is supported. Similarly, H5b, assuming the serial mediation of exchange norms and negative megaphoning is also supported ( $\beta= .186$ , LLCI= 0.4057, 0.9975). These statistical results help the researcher confer that there is a full mediation relationship between inclusive leadership and scouting, to indulge employees in scouting behavior the leadership works through various mechanisms.

Table 4.3: Path Analysis using SEM

Hypothesized Path	Effect	Standardized Regression weights	LLCI	ULCI	Results
	IL - Sc	0.096			Not supported
H1	IL – EN	0.102*			Supported
H2	EN – PM	0.354*			Supported
H3	EN – NM	-0.307***			Supported
H4a	PM – Sc	0.472***			Supported
H4b	NM – Sc	-0.142*			Supported
<b>Mediation Analysis</b>					
	IL – EN – PM	0.036	0.035	0.124	
	IL – EN – NM	-0.031	0.089	0.257	
	IL – PM – Sc	0.063	-0.154	-0.839	
	IL – NM – Sc	-0.036	-0.008	-0.089	
	EN – PM – Sc	0.167	0.074	0.158	
	EN – NM – Sc	-0.449	0.125	0.549	
H5a	IL – EN – PM – Sc	0.135	0.1790	0.7458	Supported
H5b	IL – EN – NM – Sc	0.186	0.4057	0.9975	Supported

Note: \*<.05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001

IL= inclusive leadership, EN=exchange norms, PM=positive megaphoning, NM=negative megaphoning, Sc=Scouting

## 5. Discussion & Conclusion

### 5.1. Discussion on Findings

Grounding on OST (Eisenberger et al., 1986) in communication literature, the current study investigated the information-seeking and sharing behaviors of employees often called employee communication behavior, and its important dimensions i.e. megaphoning and scouting. It also covered the analysis of a conceptual model that covers the inclusive leadership and exchange norms as the predictors of employees' such behavior. The statistical analysis of the data collected through questionnaires highlighted important findings. The results showed that inclusive leadership alone cannot predict employees' scouting behavior. The results are interesting as these results offer a new insight. Previously, only Lee (2021) investigated the said relationship and found a positive relationship between them. Thus, our findings contradict the findings of Lee (2021) and open a horizon for debate and further investigation. The study of Lee (2021) covered millennial employees (birth between 1981 – 1996 or aged between 26 – 41 years), while the average age of the respondents of this study was 28.5 years which can be the age bracket of millennials. Thus, the difference may be attributed to factors other than age. Culture could be one of the attributes as Pakistan is a collectivist society where working with others is more important; thus, inclusivity of a leader may not be taken as a special trait but rather a requirement. Moreover, the mechanism between inclusive leadership and scouting could be yet another stronger predictor and the combination of both leadership and exchange norms may give a clearer picture of the relationship.

The results further highlighted that inclusive leadership only influences employees scouting behavior through the serial mechanism of exchange norms and megaphoning. The relationship is investigated using a series of steps, at the first instance the inclusive leadership and exchange norms relationship is statistically evaluated and the results support the assertion (H1). Though empirically there is a dearth of literature on this relationship the findings still support the premise of OST that explains the ways of formation of exchange relations with an organization and its agents (supervisor and leadership). Furthermore, the exchange norms are found to influence the employees' megaphoning behavior as employees indulge in positive megaphoning and avoid negative megaphoning when they

feel a high level of exchange norms at work. The results are in line with the findings of Lee and Chon (2020), who observed that exchange relations at work lead to positive megaphoning and reduced negative megaphoning, and the findings of Men et al., (2020), Men and Sung (2022), and Wang (2022), who observed that exchange relationship determine employees' communication behavior for the organization. The findings of the current study added by including the role of inclusive leadership and assumed and empirically proved that such leaders foster exchange norms at work which further influences megaphoning behaviors of employees.

In follow-up, the results of the study also highlighted that in presence of exchange norms the employees indulge in megaphoning and for that, they become scouts and seek and acquire information (scouting behavior). The results offer a new explanation as the relationship between exchange norms and scouting through megaphoning has largely been ignored. The results of the current study support the assertion built on OST, which proposes that employees reciprocate the exchange norms at work and indulge in information seeking and sharing (megaphoning and scouting). In the end, the study also investigates the serial mediation between inclusive leadership and scouting behavior through exchange norms and megaphoning. The results of the study highlight that when the leader is inclusive (open, available, and accessible) an environment of openness is nurtured and exchange norms come into existence. In presence of such an environment, employees feel the care and support provided by the organization and its agents (leader) and tend to reciprocate it further by spreading positive words and good mouthing about the organization (megaphoning). But for megaphoning, they tend to seek important information from the environment and share it within the organization (scouting). Thus, inclusive leadership through serial mechanisms influence the scouting behavior. The statistical results also support this assertion, as the direct relationship between inclusive leadership and scouting is not proven but the serial mediation mechanism is supported, so highlighting a full mediation mechanism.

## **5.2. Theoretical and Practical Implications**

The study offers useful findings for both theory and practice. Theoretically, the study provides new insight by building on this study on OST (Eisenberger et al., 1986). The results support the premise of this study and highlight that the employees consider leaders as the representative and agents of the organization and translate their actions in terms of the behavior of the organization. In return, employees reciprocate the organization favorably. In line with these implications, the study found that exchange norms at work are considered a favor and support by the employees, as they can work freely, and this exchange arises when the leader is available, accessible, and open (inclusive). Such leaders, through nurturing an environment of openness, a high level of idea sharing, recognizing the successes, and accepting failure, can foster a culture and environment of openness where employees feel psychologically safe (Mitchells et al., 2015). In response to such an exchange (reciprocation), employees tend to indulge in information-seeking and sharing behaviors that are not part of their formal job. The results confer that the exchange norms are a "win-win" state (Hung, 2005; Lee and Chon, 2020), and make employees involved in communication behavior (Lee and Kim, 2017; Verhoeven and Madsen, 2022; Zhou and Xu, 2022). The serial mediation mechanism hypothesized and tested in the current study offers a novel explanation, as there is a dearth of literature that focuses on the serial mediation mechanism and a more robust path that links leadership and employees' communication behavior.

With these theoretical implications, the study also carries some useful messages for managers. The foremost is the increased focus on their leadership behavior. Managers should adopt such behaviors that foster the exchange norms at work as employees tend to reciprocate all such norms positively. The management can also use this study as a piece of evidence to build a system where leaders are trained for being inclusive (open, available, and accessible), thus organizations can adopt a system, structure, and culture where a leader is to make herself open, available and accessible to all. When such a system is built, employees would feel a favor and exchange offered by the organization, thus organization can have two benefits from such leadership programs, where the first is from the leadership point of view

where leaders would become more inclusive and the other is from employees' point of view, where employees would consider it an effort aimed at employees benefits. Thus, such programs should be part of the organizational routine and along with employees, supervisors and managers should be trained for inclusiveness. This study also highlights that employees can also be a source of marketing for the organization, by adopting megaphoning and scouting behaviors. Public relations literature, focusing on organizations, has highlighted that the public considers employees' communication more neutral than formal communication through public relations (Center and Jackson, 2003). Moreover, employees through their communication influence organizational image, reputation, and public-organization relationship quality (Kim and Rhee, 2011). Employees, through their communication, become informal agents of their organizations and share important information within and outside the organization (Okura et al., 2008). The role of employee-level communication is even considered more valuable in crises, as the public often relies on information from the employees to seek a true picture of an organization (Rhee, 2008). In addition to that various studies on media have also reported that the conventional media (e.g. TV, radio, and newspaper) are losing their value and the public rely more on word of mouth and real-time information generated through human interaction. The current study can be an answer to all these studies as it provides an explanation and mechanism through which management can increase employees' communication behavior.

### 5.3. Limitations and Future Directions

Though the current study is carried out using rigorous research methodology, it is not free from limitations. The foremost is the use of time lags design. Though this design is commonly used in the management literature and is famous for its ability to overcome the issue of CMB. Future studies could work on longitudinal or daily diary method studies. The daily diary method study is important as employees tend to spend the most refreshing and movements at work and their feelings at work may influence their off-hours/family and social life. Moreover, communication is not a single episode happening but rather a continuous process done regularly, thus daily diary method would offer a better understanding and explanation of the determinants and outcomes of communication. The study is also carried out by selecting respondents from multiple organizations, while future studies could focus on specialized sectors to see the level of communication, its determinants, and outcomes. Future studies, could also consider some other leadership aspects, for instance, the latest literature highlights that negative personality traits are on the rise both in followers and leaders (Krasikova et al., 2013), thus future studies should investigate the dark/negative leadership styles and dark triad personality (Machiavellianism, psychopathy, and narcissism). Supervisor's communication behavior e.g. Phubbing (Yasin et al., 2020) could be a good inclusion for future studies to investigate the megaphoning and scouting behaviors of employees. Inclusive leadership, even could be investigated from various other perspectives, for instance, such leaders influence openness at work thus the organization's culture, creativity, and within organization communication (megaphoning) could be yet another aspect to investigate.

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