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Enhancing Employer Attractiveness: the impact of inclusive leadership on prospective employees' intention to apply

Md. Abu Issa Gazi^a , Sanjida Sumaya^b, Abdullah Al Masud^{b,c} , Tareq Mahamud Abir^d,
Mohammad Bin Amin^e , Reda Abdelfattah Mohammad^f, Nusrat Sharmin Lipy^b  and
Veronika Fenyves^g 

^aSchool of Management, Jiujiang University, Jiujiang, China; ^bDepartment of Management Studies, University of Barishal, Barishal, Bangladesh; ^cPeter B. Gustavson School of Business, University of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada; ^dDepartment of Sociology, University of Barishal, Barishal, Bangladesh; ^eDoctoral School of Management and Business, Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Debrecen, Debrecen, Hungary; ^fBusiness Administration Department Applied College, King Khalid University, Khams Mushait, P. C, Saudi Arabia; ^gFaculty of Economics and Business, University of Debrecen, Debrecen, Hungary

ABSTRACT

This study delves into the intricate dynamics among inclusive leadership (IL), perceived organizational justice (POJ), person-environment fit, employer attractiveness (EA), psychological empowerment (PE) and intention to apply, highlighting mediating and moderated mediation effects, grounded in Attraction-Selection-Attrition (ASA) and person-environment fit theories. A survey of 420 potential employees in Bangladesh was conducted online; the data were analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM) to test the proposed hypotheses and use process macro-Model 14 for moderated mediation model with bootstrapped confidence intervals. The outcomes indicate that IL enhances EA through POJ and person-environment fit (P-E fit), which subsequently increases jobseekers' intention to apply; PE operates as a moderated mediation, indicates that higher levels of PE weaken individuals' reliance on IL and work environment cues when forming application intentions. The study extends ASA and P-E fit theories to the pre-entry stage by demonstrating a moderated mediation framework. These insights are essential for HR managers and policymakers in Bangladesh to attract top talent by creating compatible working environments.

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SUBJECTS

Business, Management and Accounting; Industry & Industrial Studies; Social Psychology

1. Introduction

Inclusive leadership (IL), characterized by valuing diverse perspectives and fostering a sense of belonging for all employees, is no longer just a feel-good practice it's a strategic inevitability for organizations intending to lure and retain highly skilled individuals. A scholarly article in the Harvard Business Review revealed that teams led by inclusive leaders are 17% more likely to report superior performance and 20% more inclined to make high-caliber decisions (Zheng et al., 2023). This competitive advantage transcends domestic boundaries. According to Satzger and Vogel (2023), organizations with inclusive cultures are more likely to attract top-tier global talent. The adoption of inclusive workplace practices and policies is on the rise globally for a multitude of reasons (Jansen et al., 2021). Workplace inclusivity serves two primary objectives. First, it acts as a 'moral case,' aligning with the ethical assertions made by organizations in their vision and mission statements, thereby assisting in upholding the principles of social equality, justice and responsibility (McDougall, 1996). Secondly, inclusive workplaces also serve as a 'business case,' potentially facilitating the effective delivery of public services by capitalizing on an increasingly diverse and dynamic workforce (Jansen et al., 2021). IL practices have been adopted in various countries, including Australia, China, Germany, India, Mexico and the United States (Prime & R. Salib, 2014), and

CONTACT Md. Abu Issa Gazi  maigazi@yahoo.com  School of Management, Jiujiang University, Jiujiang 332005, China; Abdullah Al Masud  aamasud@bu.ac.bd  Department of Management Studies, University of Barishal, Barishal 8254, Bangladesh; Mohammad Bin Amin  binamindu@gmail.com  Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Debrecen, Debrecen, Hungary

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have been shown to foster a positive work environment, ultimately driving innovation, collaboration and organizational excellence.

Bangladesh grapples with the persistent issue of 'brain drain', depicted by the emigration of highly educated individuals seeking professional opportunities abroad. Of 31.7% of Bangladeshi university students express interest in studying, working and residing overseas, according to the Aanchal Foundation (Tribune Desk, 2024). This exodus stems from a complex interplay of factors, encompassing access to superior educational facilities, robust economic structures and the promise of social security and flourishing career trajectories in foreign lands (Jansen et al., 2021). However, amidst this confluence of consequences, the lack of fair organizational practices within Bangladeshi organizations emerges as a paramount factor that may indicate the failures of not attracting the top talents (Mazzetti & Schaufeli, 2022). IL, embrace uniqueness of individuals and ensure fairness practices and distinguished by its appreciation for diverse perspectives and its cultivation of a sense of belonging for all employees, fosters an environment that empowers individuals (Satzger & Vogel, 2023). IL practice may able to ensure fair organizational culture. It allows them to leverage their unique skill sets and contribute meaningfully to the innovation engine within the organization. In the same way, it empowers their advocates and enables them to flourish in their professional journey. By establishing inclusive workplaces, companies in Bangladesh can effectively appeal to highly skilled individuals. The recognition is based on the understanding that human capital is the fundamental element for attaining a competitive advantage in the midst of unyielding global competition (Santa et al., 2022).

Omonijo Dare Ojo (2011) argues that insufficient leadership is the cause of brain drain and qualified worker migration in Southeast Nigeria. If Bangladesh embraces an inspiring leadership style as a strategy for establishes an empowering work atmosphere, ensures fair treatment and provides clear career routes, it may effectively harness its potential to talent acquisition (Suryanarayana & Bhusal, 2021). Shore and Chung (2022) emphasize the need to recognize the other appealing aspects, such as competitive and fair compensation and compatibility with the organization and job role and individual factors, in addition to the transformative power of IL. Intricately linking these factors generates a robust feeling of affiliation and direction. Thus, employee engagement and efficiency rise, boosting Bangladeshi businesses. This eventually leads to a workforce that is more productive and passionately involved, which propels Bangladeshi companies into a bright future. Even though there is a growing body of research on IL in industrialized countries, little is known about how effective it is in attracting talent in developing countries like Bangladesh (Abdul Rajun et al., 2022). Recent researches emphasize IL as a significant driver of positive organizational outcome, demonstration its role in reshaping employee attitudes and behaviors through Psychological Empowerment (PE) and psychological safety and fairness practice (Li et al., 2025; Tamasevicius et al., 2026). Studies profoundly examined EA as a critical determinant of talent acquisition, emphasizing factors such as employer branding, organizational reputation and corporate image (P. & S., 2022; Wei et al., 2016).

Despite growing interest in IL and EA, the research streams remain theoretically disconnected and empirically fragmented. Leadership research has predominantly investigated post-entry outcomes such as employee engagement, performance and retention, while attraction research has broadly focused on employer branding and symbolic organizational signals (Choi et al., 2016; Gomes & Neves, 2011; Soeling et al., 2022). This cleavage has scanted theoretical understanding of how leadership behaviors function as anticipatory signals affecting attraction decisions prior to organizational entry. Furthermore, existing research rarely integrates POJ and P-E fit mediating role on EA and ITA in the pre-employment stage (Hanh Tran & Choi, 2019). Moreover, PE moderated mediation condition shapes the indirect relationship that remains unexamined integrally, particularly in the context of prospective employees' perception and a developing economy (Amarneh et al., 2021; Morfaki & Morfaki, 2022; Fang et al., 2021; Hanh Tran & Choi, 2019). Consequently, the field lacks an integrated framework elucidating how IL shapes EA and ITA through interconnected organizational (such as POJ and P-E fit) and individual (PE) aspects at the recruitment stage. Addressing this theoretical and empirical gap, this study develops and tests a moderated mediation model that advances ASA theory and person–environment fit theory into the pre-entry domain. Per the research voids stated earlier, we endeavored to preach the subsequent research questions (RQs):

RQ1: Does Inclusive Leadership (IL) influence prospective employees' perceptions of Employer Attractiveness (EA) and Intention to Apply (ITA) through Perceived Organizational Justice (POJ) and Person-environment Fit (P-E fit)?

RQ2: How does an individual's psychological empowerment (PE) level impact the practice of inclusive leadership (IL) and intention to apply (ITA) *via* person-environment fit (P-E fit) in the context of Bangladesh?

Building upon the RQ, our objective is to design a thorough model that delves into the mediating and moderating influences of specific factors in the association among IL and desired applicant outcomes, within the framework of the Attraction-Selection-Attrition (ASA) and Person- Environment (P-E) theory. In the context of pre-employment decision-making, we hypothesize that perceptions of IL will positively influence prospective employees' perceptions of Employee Attractiveness (EA) and foster their Intention to Apply (ITA). Furthermore, we propose that POJ, Person-Environment Fit (P-E fit), and EA serve as mediating mechanisms. We present that nurturing a culture of fairness and faith within an employer (POJ) amplifies the beneficial significance of IL on EA. Moreover, when individuals discern a harmony between their personal attributes, skills and values and the company's culture and anticipations (P-E fit), they are more inclined to embrace the positive impacts of IL. These practices are self-enforcing for them and therefore have become their 'perception' of EA as they now have a higher ITA. We further suggest PE as a moderated mediation. The focus control and sense of autonomy, supported by IL practices, engenders PE, thereby augmenting job appeal and reinforcing the effect of IL on ITA through P-E fit.

This research provides an in-depth examination of the impact of IL practices on EA and ITA among potential employees, thereby making a notable contribution to human resource practices and academic discourse. By ensuring equitable treatment and respecting individuality, IL fosters an attractive work environment that is positively spoken of, enhancing the organization's reputation and potentially attracting and retaining top talent. By investigating how IL cultivates an organizational environment rooted in POJ, encompassing fairness in distribution, procedural, and interactional justice, this research emphasizes the critical role of these factors in enhancing EA. Considering the alignment between an individual's characteristics, abilities and values with the organization's culture (P-E fit) is pivotal in making employment decisions and fostering long-term organizational commitment. Additionally, probe PE as a moderated mediation; while IL enhances jobseekers' ITA through P-E fit, highly empowered individuals may rely less on leadership signals when forming their intentions. Thus, the strength of this indirect effect is contingent upon levels of PE.

In conclusion, this research provides critical insights for organizations aiming to enhance their HR strategies by recognizing IL, POJ, P-E fit and PE, alongside ASA and P-E theories, as essential factors in attracting and retaining top talent. These discoveries significantly contribute to the establishment of comprehensive and empowering work environments, offering a robust framework for enhancing organizational appeal. This research holds substantial implications for advancing HR practices and enriching the extensive literature on organizational behavior.

2. Literature review and hypotheses development

2.1. Theoretical ground and research model

The foundation of our research is in the ASA framework, which highlights the significance of talent acquisition and retention by emphasizing the need for congruence between individuals' values and their employers (Schneider, 1987). In addition, we examine the impact of IL on ITA and EA, emphasizing the need to cultivate an inclusive culture to recruit a more diverse pool of talent (Carless, 2005; Bux et al., 2025). We also utilize the P-E fit hypothesis. This article makes an important contribution to the field of management by examining the concept of P-E fit. P-E fit, the degree to which to which an organization's regulations and functions affect the attitudes and behaviors of its workers. The study was conducted by Amarneh et al. (2021). According to the P-E fit hypothesis, companies aim to match the characteristics of their personnel with the work environment to meet job requirements, promote career growth and adjust to evolving demands. On the other hand, prospective employees look for organizations that can effectively utilize their distinct set of skills and fulfill their specific needs (Caplan, 1987). These theoretical frameworks provide us with a comprehensive comprehension of ITA, EA and leadership practice (Figure 1).

2.1.1. Intention to apply (ITA)

The scholarly examination of the focus of candidate intentions in recruitment and selection primarily revolves around ITA, pursuing, and accepting a job (Fang et al., 2020; Robertson et al., 2005). ITA to a job serves as a robust oracle of demeanor during the attraction phase of recruitment and is rudimentary for comprehending job choice. Those decisions forecast the action, as per Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) theory of reasoned action. Consequently, ITA to a job reliably forecasts actual job applications. Despite

their significance, research primarily focuses on intentions to apply for a job during the attraction stage. Predictors of preferences to seek a job and discretions to accept a job offer insights into applicants' behavioral intentions. Although diverse applicant intentions have been examined, predictors of the ITA for a job remain a crucial inquiry (Fang et al., 2020; Gomes & Neves, 2011). Job choice decisions are influenced by job characteristics, such as person job (P-J) fit, organizational attributes like IL practices, POJ and person-organization (P-O) fit, and applicant perceptions of EA (Choi et al., 2016; Satzger & Vogel, 2023; Hanh Tran & Choi, 2019). Each of these factors is considered pivotal in talent attraction.

2.1.2. Inclusive leadership (IL)

Incorporating a leadership approach that emphasizes both individual distinctiveness and a sense of inclusion is essential for nurturing collaborative relationships across all tiers of an organization to achieve enduring strategic objectives (Satzger & Vogel, 2023). Fang et al. (2020) posit that inclusive leaders nurture an environment where diverse perspectives are genuinely considered, ensuring that all voices are authentically valued. These leaders are approachable, accessible, and open to interacting with their team, attentively listening to suggestions and concerns, addressing needs, and encouraging participation in decision-making processes (Hanh Tran & Choi, 2019). They indicate their appreciation for employees by treating them with respect, acknowledgment, and tolerance, emphasizing their viewpoints and valuing their efforts (Choi et al., 2017). This leadership style exemplifies ethical behavior by treating employees fairly and encouraging corporate congruence (Liu et al., 2017). Furthermore, inclusive leaders exhibit great availability and openness, encouraging helpful activities and making subordinates feel appreciated by their organization.

2.2. Hypothesis development

2.2.1. Inclusive leadership (IL) and employer Attractiveness (EA), perceived organizational justice (POJ) and person-environment fit (P-E fit)

Regardless of background, the IL tenet is to give individuals a fair and unbiased work environment. The International Labor Organization (ILO) states that modern organizational initiatives give the application of fair workplace rules priority to promote an inclusive atmosphere where all members feel respected and like they belong (Satzger & Vogel, 2023). Such workplaces were shown to be very appealing to potential employees and become an attraction factor based on the reputation which come through with existing employees' experiences with the leadership practices by Choi et al. (2016). Our study intends to

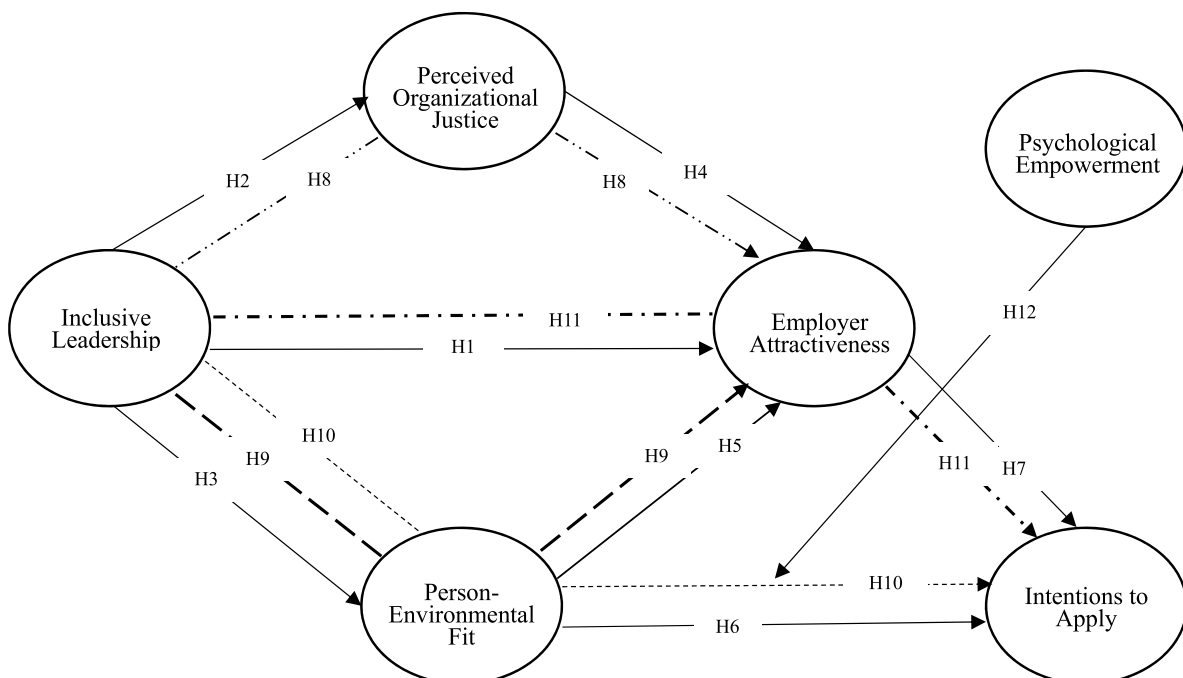


Figure 1. Proposed model.

investigate the association between IL and EA from the perspective of potential employees. The emphasis on leadership behaviors is consistent with the P-O fit theory, which postulates that prospective workers are drawn to companies whose leaders uphold principles that they find appealing (Kristof, 1996). The goal of our IL study is to advance knowledge of the elements that make a workplace appealing to bright people. Thus, we posit the succeeding hypothesis:

H1: *IL has a positive relationship with EA*

POJ concerns employees' perceptions of the equity and probity of their organizational treatment (Hanh Tran & Choi, 2019). According to Shabeer et al. (2023), organizational justice encompasses individuals' fairness perceptions regarding financial, ethical, and regulatory treatment by alliances. The notion of organizational justice comprises trifold primary components: 'distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice.' Distributive justice pertains to the perceived equity of consequences in comparison with those of others (Bakotić & Bulog, 2021). The perceived equity in management procedures and mechanisms is the subject of procedural justice (Lee & Byrne, 2019), emphasizing impartiality and providing voice and rationale (Bayles, 1990). Interactional justice concerns the perceived fairness of interpersonal interactions during organizational procedures (Bies & Moag, 1986) and includes informational and interpersonal justice subdimensions (Folger & Cropanzano, 2001). Organizations can allure top talent by exemplifying equity, inclusivity, and deference and establish a robust, favorable reputation among potential hires. Enhanced perceptions can increase job acceptance rates and establish a foundation for favorable employee attitudes and behaviors, significantly contributing to the alliance's prevailing success and sustainability. Thus, cultivating IL is not only advantageous for current employees but also confers a strategic advantage in talent acquisition. Thus, we posit the succeeding hypothesis:

H2: *IL has a positive impact on POJ*

IL is intrinsically linked to enhancing P-E fit, which defines the unity among individual traits and organizational settings (Kristof, 1996). P-E fit includes person-job (P-J) fit and P-O fit, ingrained in the ASA model (Schneider, 1987). P-O fit, frequently examined, is defined as individuals' judgments of their compatibility with an organization based on shared values, goals and personality-climate congruence. P-J fit pertains to the alignment between job demands and individual abilities or between job supplies and individual values (Edwards, 2008; Vesudevan et al., 2024). Recent research emphasizes nonlinear individual-environment interactions, the significance of compatibility and the adverse impact of misfits (Stone et al., 2019).

Shah et al. (2022) find that IL increases perceptions of organizational support and cue, essential for P-E fit. When employees feel valued and are treated fairly by leaders, they experience greater value congruence with the organization. In that way, IL fosters P-E fit by creating supportive environments. Thus, we posit the succeeding hypothesis:

H3: *IL has a positive relationship with P-E fit*

2.2.2. Perceived organizational justice (POJ) and employer Attractiveness (EA)

According to POJ and EA, equity makes a company far more appealing to potential candidates. Prior studies show that applicants who are approached fairly during the assessment stage are more drawn to the position and the company than those who are treated unfairly (Bustaman et al., 2020; Hanh Tran & Choi, 2019). During this crucial time, candidates absorb knowledge and develop opinions on their prospective employees; how they are treated at this time shapes their expectations for how they will be treated as workers in the future (Krys & Konradt, 2022). This viewpoint, which bases recruiting data on the group-value concept of procedural fairness, is consistent with relational measurements of procedural justice (Hanh Tran & Choi, 2019). These models assert that procedural fairness reflects an organization's valuation of its fellows and reassuring them that their draws will be protected and nurtured within the organization. It also leads applicants to perceive the organization as reputable, regard themselves as valuable to the organization, and develop a strong identification sense (Shah et al., 2022). Thus, we posit the succeeding hypothesis:

H4: *POJ has a positive relationship with EA*

2.2.3. Person-Environment fit (P-E fit) and employer Attractiveness (EA) and intention to apply (ITA)

An increasing amount of literature supports have supported the idea that the relationship between workers and their workplaces has a special effect on behaviors at work. Contemporary studies validate that P-J and P-O fit, the two critical components of P-E fit, are strongly associated with consequences for potential employees, such as EA and job acceptance, as well as for incumbent employees, containing job satisfaction, identification of organizations, dedication, output and intention to quit (Carless, 2005). As a prospective employee, the perception of P-E fit plays a critical part in determining EA. The accessory form of need-supply fit has the most splendid effect on individual stances and demeanors (Gomes & Neves, 2011). According to psychological necessity fulfillment theories (Edwards, 2008), employees' attitudes ameliorate when there is a cognitive comparison between the desired rewards and those perceived. The more an organization meets these requirements, the more positively prospective employees view the organization. Thus, we posit the succeeding hypothesis:

H5: *P-E fit has a positive relationship with EA*

The approach of inferential action and the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), further illuminate how the perceptions of exploit job-pursuit behaviors and attitudes. These theories propose that beliefs about an employers will shape attitude toward job-related behaviors. These attitudes, in turn, influence preferences to pursue those behaviors, which predict actual job pursuit actions. In the job choice context, a prospective employee's ITA is related to behavior and attitude, which is driven by their perception of the company's attractiveness (Bednarska, 2016). Organizations that prioritize establishing a positive fit for their workforce tend to be more enticing to prospective candidates. This harmonization not only satisfies individual employees but also augments the overall prosperity of an organization. Thus, we posit the succeeding hypothesis:

H6: *P-E fit has a positive relationship with ITA*

2.2.4. Employer attractiveness (EA) and intention to apply (ITA)

Applicants' perceptions of EA are crucial for attracting candidates (Lambert et al., 2019; Carless, 2005). EA defined as the favorable perception of an organization as a workplace (Satzger & Vogel, 2023), strongly influences job choice decisions, predicting job application intentions (Bustaman et al., 2020; Carless, 2005). Employers brand image and reputation significantly impact EA (El-Menawy & Saleh, 2023; P. & S., 2022; Satzger & Vogel, 2023). According to the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975), individuals' belief shapes their behavior and actions. So, the prospective employees' perceptions of EA have a paramount impact on their ITA due to their beliefs about job attributes forming attitudes, which shape behavioral intentions and subsequent actions. Thus, we posit the succeeding hypothesis:

H7: *EA has a positive relationship with the ITA*

2.2.5. The mediating role of perceived organizational justice (POJ) and person-environment fit (P-E fit) and employer attractiveness (EA)

Prior research has established that IL fosters perceptions of organizational justice by promoting voice, respect and equitable treatment (Bayles, 1990; Bustaman et al., 2020; Folger & Cropanzano, 2001). Empirical studies further demonstrate that organizational justice mediates the relationship between leadership behaviors and positive employee outcomes, such as organizational citizenship behaviors (Hanh Tran & Choi, 2019). Research shows that POJ boosts employee trust and satisfaction, which EA requires (Satzger & Vogel, 2023).

Extending this logic to the pre-employment stage, this study advances theoretical understanding by exhibiting that justice functions not only as a post-entry exchange mechanism but also as an anticipatory evaluative signal influencing attraction-related outcome. From an ASA perspective, job seekers rely on leadership cues to infer organizational fairness and ethical standards before entering (Schneider, 1987). Thus, this mediating mechanism of POJ between the relationship of IL and EA explains how IL behaviors are transformed into attraction-related outcomes through fairness-based evaluations, leading to the following hypothesis:

H8: *POJ mediates the relationship between IL and EA*

Empirical studies highlight the profound impact of P-E fit congruence on employees' workplace perceptions, influencing their engagement, satisfaction and organizational loyalty (Caplan, 1987). Inclusive leaders engage employees in decision-making, enhancing P-J and P-O congruence, characterized by openness and endorsement (Bayles, 1990; Folger & Cropanzano, 2001). Optimal P-E fit congruence correlates with positive employee outcomes, crucial for EA (Caplan, 1987). From ASA perspective (Schneider, 1987), individuals are drawn to organizations they perceive as compatible with their own values and expectations. Prospective employees exhibit a more lavish propensity to be attracted to an organization when their individual preferences coincide with the practices and culture upheld by the organization (Dassler et al., 2022). Our study has explored the mediating role in pre-employment attraction processes. Thus, we posit the succeeding hypothesis:

H9: *P-E fit mediates the relationship between IL and EA*

Prospective employees are likely to perceive that an organization's promotion of P-E fit aligns with their personal and professional values, enhancing their ITA (Wei et al., 2016). Empirical evidence supports the significant impact of P-E fit on job pursuit decisions (Carless, 2005). According to Stone et al. (2019), prospective employees are more prone to companies where they believe their qualities and the work environment align well, which heightens their interest in the company and their desire to proceed with the application process. Thus, we posit the succeeding hypothesis:

H10: *P-E Fit mediates the relationship between IL and the ITA*

EA directs to the breadth to which prospective employees perceive an organization as desirable to work (Bustaman et al., 2020). Attractive and inclusive workplaces are fostered by IL, which is determined by behaviors involving accessibility, encouragement and engaged interaction with employees (Bayles, 1990; Folger & Cropanzano, 2001). Leaders who practice inclusivity foster a work environment that promotes diversity and employee engagement, which raises EA (Satzger & Vogel, 2023). Studies show that EA is a significant factor in determining the ITA for jobs. As these companies are considered to support their beliefs and create an encouraging place to work, prospective employees are inclined to apply to those they find appealing (Soeling et al., 2022). By enhancing IL practice through P-E fit, organizations can positively impact potential applicants' ITA (Dassler et al., 2022). Thus, we posit the succeeding hypothesis:

H11: *EA mediates the relationship between IL and ITA*

2.2.6. Physiological empowerment (PE)

PE is essential for comprehending employee behavior and attitudes within the work environment. It refers to how employees perceive their level of control, competence, and meaningfulness in their work environment (Satzger & Vogel, 2023). It is comprised four distinct dimensions: purpose, competence, self-determination and effect. The purpose involves integrating personal ideals with organizational aims. Competence implies trusting in one's skills to complete tasks. Self-determination implies the feeling of strength and independence in starting and regulating one's endeavors. Effectiveness is the extent to which one can influence outcomes during the creation process (Amarneh et al., 2021). Psychologically empowered individuals are more likely to regard their work environment as supportive and in line with their values (Tamasevicius et al., 2026; Spreitzer, 1995; Seo, 2023). Although preceding research has established the motivational consequences of PE, limited attention has been given to its function as a moderated mediation in attraction processes, particularly within mediated leadership frameworks by scrutinizing PE as a moderator of the indirect relationship between IL and ITA through P-E fit. We proposed that individuals high in PE are less dependent on leadership and working environment congruence when forming attitudes toward ITA, as their decisions are guided more strongly by internal agency. Consequently, the indirect effect of IL *via* P-E fit is expected to weaken at higher levels of empowerment. In contrast, individuals with lower empowerment may rely more heavily on leadership signals and environment cues to evaluate organizational attractiveness and adjust their attitude toward ITA, thereby

strengthening the mediated relationship. This deconstruction advances understanding of how organizational cues and individual psychological characteristics jointly shape pre-entry decision-making. Thus, we posit the following hypothesis (Table 1):

H12: PE Moderate the mediating relationship of IL and ITA through P-E fit

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

Our extensive study, based on scholarly literature, investigated the interconnectedness of IL, POJ, P-E fit, PE, EA and ITA. The development process was comprehensive, involving an in-depth literature review, a focus group analysis with esteemed scholars, and a preliminary study. This rigorous process enhanced the clarity of questions, reduced the number of items and removed redundancies. The final questionnaire consisted of threefold. Initially delineated research objectives and assured participants of response confidentiality. Second, assessed participants' perceptions across six constructs with 38 questions. IL items were sourced from Yasin et al. (2023) and Choi et al. (2017); POJ from Shah et al. (2022) and Bakotić and Bulog (2021); P-E fit from Caplan (1987); PE from Spreitzer (1995) and Seo (2023); EA and ITA from Aiman-Smith et al. (2001) and Gomes and Neves (2011). Finally, it contained statements related to participants' experiences with IL and their perception of EA and ITA through POJ and P-E fit with the moderated mediating role of PE, evaluated using a seven-point Likert scale.

3.2. Data collection and analysis/survey administration and sample

Our study, based on extensive literature, examined the interaction among IL, POJ, P-E Fit, PE, EA and ITA. A non-probability convenience sampling strategy was employed. Data was gathered from January to May 2025 through professional social media platforms, prominently LinkedIn and professional networking groups and online forums, to reach individuals who aligned with the study's objectives to solicit participant responses. To ensure the research objective relevancy, respondents were required to meet the inclusion criteria (being actively engage in job seeking, having bachelor's degree or being in the final year students and possessing sufficient familiarity with organizational recruitment process to evaluate EA and ITA). The questionnaire was disseminated and garnered 450 responses. After discarding incomplete responses and examined for outliers using standardized scores, we have 420 valid samples for further analysis. The adequacy of the sample size was assessed following established guidelines for multivariate analysis. After data screening and measurement validation, 33 items were retained from the original 38-item instrument. Consistent with the commonly applied 10-times rule (Hair et al., 2019), the minimum sample size should be at least ten times the number of measurement items, the final sample size exceeded this requirement. Accordingly, the dataset was examined for outliers using standardized scores, and cases exceeding the recommended threshold were reviewed. Moreover, the study involving multiple constructs and mediating and moderating variables, necessitates larger sample sizes for accurate parameter estimation and model fit testing in SEM analysis (Hair et al., 2010; Kline, 2023). IBM SPSS Statistics version 24 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY) was utilized for demographic features and descriptive statistics. SEM, using AMOS version 24 software, was employed to examine the hypothetical paths. A bootstrapping analysis was perpetrated to estimate the mediating effects in the proposed model and we used process macro in IBM SPSS Statistics version 24, Model 14 to analyze moderated mediation, further fortifying the validity of our findings (Hayes, 2015). This study aimed to comprehensively understand how IL influences ITA through POJ, P-E fit and EA and how it is affected by the presence of PE. This was achieved by targeting a diverse group of prospective employees, both employed and unemployed and ensuring a substantial sample size.

3.2.1. Common method variance (CMV)

The analysis utilized Harman's single-factor test to assess CMV. According to Podsakoff et al. (2003), the result revealed that the primary factor explains 33.92% of the total variance, indicating an absence of CMV issues in the data (Table 2).

Table 1. Literature chart (previous studies related to the current research).

Authors/ years	Purpose/objectives	Country and context	Samples	Theoretical frameworks	Main construct	Key findings	Key limitations/implications for this study
Amarneh et al. (2021)	The study probes p-E Fit's effect on nurses' job satisfaction and turnover, with psychological empowerment as a moderator	Pakistan	3 83	'p-E fit theory'	'Person-job (p-j) fit; person-organization (p-o) fit; job satisfaction; person-supervisor (p-s); turnover intention; psychological empowerment'	Found a relationship between how well a person fits with their job and their supervisor, and their job satisfaction	Focuses on post-entry employees and turnover outcomes; does not explore attraction or application intentions. Informs this study's focus on pre-employment attraction mechanisms.
Bakotić and Bulog (2021)	The article examined how organizational justice and leadership behavior affect job satisfaction.	Croatia	298		'Organizational justice; leadership behavior; job satisfaction'	Justice types and relations-oriented leadership significantly impact job satisfaction, highlighting social ties' importance	Examines justice outcomes without integrating EA or recruitment-stage outcomes. Motivates linking justice perceptions to attraction-related decisions.
Carless (2005)	Examined how person-job and person-organization fit affect organizational attractiveness and job offers.	Australia	193	'Attraction, Selection, and Attrition Realistic Job Preview'	'PO fit and PJ fit; Attraction to the organization; intentions to accept a job offer'	Perceptions of job fit persuading attraction at different phases of the selection process. Providing adequate job information to applicants during recruitment and selection is vital.	Focuses on fit perceptions without considering leadership signals or fairness mechanisms. Informs inclusion of inclusive leadership as an attraction signal.
Choi et al. (2017)	Inclusive leadership's impact on employee wellness and innovation is mediated by person-job fit	Vietnam	207	'Person-job fit'	'Inclusive leadership; employee well-being; innovative behavior; person-job fit'	Contributes to the fields of leadership and organizational psychology by confirming the impact of inclusive leadership on employee well-being.	Concentrates on employee outcomes rather than jobseekers or attraction. Highlights the need to extend inclusive leadership research to pre-employment contexts.
Gomes and Neves (2011)	The study explains how job applicants evaluate job vacancies and how inclusive leadership improves career sustainability and well-being at work	Portugal	124		'Perceived job characteristics; Organizational attributes; Perceptions of organizational attractiveness'	Organizational appeal mediates job traits' impact on application intent	Does not incorporate leadership or justice-based mechanisms. Supports adding leadership and fairness as antecedents of attractiveness.
Satzger and Vogel (2023)	Inclusive workplaces and their impact on employer attractiveness vary across sectors and can influence recruitment policies and retention management.	Germany	16,086	'Person-organization fit theory'	'Inclusive workplace policies; Employer attractiveness; Employment Sector'	Inclusive workplaces are strongly related to EA	Large-scale sectoral focus without examining psychological mechanisms or boundary conditions. Supports inclusion of psychological empowerment as a moderator.
Seo (2023)	Inclusive talent development influences turnover intention via work passion	China	290	'Self-determination; conservation of resource Theory'	'Inclusive talent development model; Dualistic work passion; Turnover intention'	Inclusive talent development influences turnover via work passion	Examines inclusive talent development and turnover intention among organizational incumbents, focusing on post-entry outcomes mediated by work passion. Does not address pre-employment attraction processes or jobseekers' application intentions. This limitation informs this study's focus on EAS and ITA at the attraction stage.

(Continued)

Table 1. Continued.

Authors/ years	Purpose/objectives	Country and context	Samples	Theoretical frameworks	Main construct	Key findings	Key limitations/implications for this study
Shah et al. (2022)	This study examines how inclusive leadership impacts employee withdrawal behaviors.	Pakistan	264	'Justice theory'	'Inclusive leadership; perceived insider status; employee withdrawal'	Inclusive leadership affects employee belonging and lessens disengagement, benefiting workforce relations	Examines inclusive leadership effects on employee belongingness and disengagement in post-entry contexts, without considering attraction-stage outcomes. Motivates extending inclusive leadership research to jobseekers.
Fang et al. (2021)	Inclusive leadership influences career sustainability <i>via</i> thriving at work and supervisor feedback	China	363	'Inclusive leadership; Career sustainability'	'Inclusive leadership; career sustainability; supervisor developmental feedback; thriving at work'	IL promotes job endurance and success, filling a research gap and advising businesses.	Investigates career sustainability and supervisor feedback among incumbents, excluding employer attractiveness or application intentions. Supports examining leadership signals at the pre-employment stage.
Hanh Tran and Choi (2019)	Inclusive leadership affects organizational citizenship behavior <i>via</i> organizational justice and learning culture.	Vietnam	268	'Organizational justice'	'Inclusive leadership; organizational citizenship behaviors; organizational justice; Organizational learning culture'	IL influences employee OCB, mediated by organizational justice and learning culture.	Studies IL, organizational justice, and learning culture among employees, without linking justice to attraction decisions. Informs this study's mediation framework.

4. Data analysis and results

4.1. Sample profile

The data depicts the demographic composition of the participants. Among the sample, 50.40% are male and 49.60% are female. The age distribution reveals that 34.30% of participants are under 25 years old, while only 8.3% are 55 years or older, indicating a predominantly youthful demographic. In terms of education, 28.1% are undergraduates (final year students), 40.2% are graduates and 27.9% are postgraduates, with only 9% holding a PhD. Regarding employment, 34.8% are employed, 14% are unemployed and 51% are seeking employment. These figures offer valuable insights into the education and employment trends within this population (Table 3). The inclusion of demographic control variables did not substantively alter the hypothesized relationships.

4.2. Inter-item correlation matrix

The results show that ITA has the largest positive link with PE, with a value of the coefficient being 0.514. This is followed by EA, with a value of the coefficient being 0.397. The third largest positive link is with IL, where the value of the coefficient is 0.393. These correlations indicate significant relationships among the constructs. In Appendix A, it shows that all the correlation values between variables are within their critical limits, which represents there is no serious concern about multi-collinearity (Hair et al., 2019).

4.3. Descriptive statistics

Post the exclusion of erroneous and redundant responses, a total of 420 responses were preserved for analytical scrutiny. Descriptive statistics for all six constructs are delineated in Table 3, encompassing 'mean values (\bar{x}), standard deviations (σ), skewness, kurtosis, minimum, maximum, Cronbach's alpha (α), and factor loadings'. The calculated mean values insinuate a predominant concurrence of respondents with the study's formulated items. The construct of IL exhibits mean values oscillating between 5.78 and 5.90, standard deviations within the range of 1.136 and 1.171, skewness values from -1.365 to -1.742 , and kurtosis values between 2.356 and 3.695. The Cronbach's alpha for IL is 0.924, signifying robust internal consistency, with factor loadings from 0.844 to 0.942. POJ items display mean values between 5.54 and 5.78, standard deviations from 1.399 to 1.541, skewness values from -1.318 to -1.611 and kurtosis values between 1.364 and 2.166. The Cronbach's alpha for POJ is 0.952, indicating excellent reliability, with factor loadings from 0.885 to 0.932. The P-E fit construct demonstrates mean values from 5.69 to 5.79, standard deviations between 1.158 and 1.296, skewness values from -1.835 to -1.421 and kurtosis values between 1.686 and 3.474. The Cronbach's alpha for P-E fit is 0.976, indicating superior internal consistency, with factor loadings from 0.914 to 0.943. EA items exhibit mean values from 5.75 to 5.93, standard deviations between 1.244 and 1.331, skewness values from -1.638 to -1.610 and kurtosis values between 2.475 and 3.472. The Cronbach's alpha for EA is 0.950, indicating high reliability, with factor loadings from 0.905 to 0.950. ITA items display mean values between 5.87 and 6.11, standard deviations from 1.099 to 1.297, skewness values from -2.386 to -1.600 and kurtosis values between 2.713 and 4.394. The 'Cronbach's alpha' for ITA is 0.949, indicating excellent internal consistency, with factor loadings from 0.920 to 0.979. The PE construct exhibits mean values between 5.75 and 5.93, standard deviations from 1.153 to 1.296, skewness values from -1.982 to -1.205 and kurtosis values between 2.020 and 4.095. The Cronbach's alpha for PE is 0.979, reflecting a high degree of internal consistency, with factor loadings from 0.868 to 0.965. Skewness and kurtosis values within ± 2 and ± 7 , respectively, are generally

Table 2. Harman's single-factor test results.

Component	Eigenvalue	% Of variance explained	Cumulative %
1	11.836	33.92	33.92
2	5.613	17.01	50.93
3	3.882	11.76	62.69
4	2.886	8.75	71.44
5	2.321	7.03	78.47
6	1.803	5.46	83.93

Table 3. Demographic characteristics ($n=420$).

	Categories	Frequency	Percentage %	Cumulative %
Gender	Male	211	50.4	50.4
	Female	199	49.6	100
Age	Below 25 years	144	34.3	34.3
	25–34 years	181	43.1	77.4
	35–44 years	41	9.8	87.1
	45–54 years	36	8.6	95.7
	55 or above	18	4.3	100
Level of education	Under Graduate	118	28.1	28.1
	Graduate	169	40.2	68.3
	Post Graduate	117	27.9	96.2
	PhD	16	3.8	100
Employment status	Employed	146	34.8	34.8
	Seeking employment	274	65.2	100

accepted as indicative of normality (Fabrigar et al., 1999; Field, 2009). All constructs have Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.7, reaffirming their high internal consistency reliability and all item's factor loadings surpass the threshold values of 0.70, indicating robust reliability and convergent validity of the measurement model (Hair et al., 2019) (see Appendix B).

4.4. Measurement model evaluation

The reliability and validity of the measurement model were assessed through following established of SEM guidelines (Figure 2). The constructs' reliability was evaluated using 'Cronbach's alpha (α)', with values oscillating between 0.924 and 0.979, exceeding the recommendation threshold of 0.70 and indicating strong internal consistency (O'Brien, 2007; Hair et al., 2019). 'Composite Reliability (CR)' values, ranging from 0.920 to 0.975 (Table 6), corroborated this, surpassing the minimum threshold of 0.70, thereby validating the measurement model's reliability (Hair et al., 2019). 'Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)' conducted using the remaining 33 items to assess the adequacy of the measurement model (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). The fit indices demonstrated that the postulated six-factor model exhibited a good fit (Table 4) supporting the validity of the measurement structure. Convergent validity was confirmed as the 'Average Variance Extracted (AVE)' for each construct surpassed the 0.50 threshold (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), with values between 0.747 and 0.832, thereby indicating adequate convergent validity confirming the model's adequacy. Moreover, 'factor loadings' for all items ranged from 0.806 to 0.965, significantly above the standard value of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019). Discriminant validity was evaluated using the 'Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)', all the values were below 3.3 (Table 5), suggesting the absence of multicollinearity issues (Hayes, 2015).

4.5. Structural model analysis

In Table 5, established on the soundness of the measurement model, we proceeded to conduct SEM (Figure 3) aspired to evaluate the hypothesized paths. The SEM model has a satisfactory model fit to the data ($\chi^2/d=2.36$, GFI = 0.89, AGFI = 0.87, CFI = 0.97, TLI = 0.97, IFI = 0.94, NFI = 0.95 and RMSEA = 0.057) (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 6 details the research model's findings, including standardized estimates (β), standard errors (S.E), t -values, significant values and hypotheses decisions. In particular, IL positively impacts EA (H1: $\beta = 0.223$, $t=4.296$, $p<0.001$). IL positively influences POJ (H2: $\beta = 0.241$, $t=4.879$, $p<0.001$). Additionally, IL positively impacts P-E fit (H3: $\beta = 0.288$, $t=5.867$, $p<0.001$). POJ positively influences EA (H4: $\beta = 0.101$, $t=1.973$, $p<0.05$). P-E fit positively affects EA (H5: $\beta = 0.155$, $t=3.018$, $p<0.01$). Moreover, P-E fit positively impacts ITA (H6: $\beta = 0.220$, $t=4.653$, $p<0.001$). Finally, EA positively influences ITA (H7: $\beta = 0.347$, $t=7.060$, $p<0.001$). The structural model (Figure 3) explains modest variance in 6% in POJ and P-E fit ($R^2 = 6\%$ and 8%), and comparatively higher variance in EA and ITA ($R^2 = 12\%$ and 20%). Control variables were included to mitigate omitted variable bias. Among these, only employment status significantly predicted EA, while other demographic variables were not significant (Appendix C). Thus, all the hypotheses are accepted. These findings suggest that organizations aiming to attract and retain top talent should prioritize IL practices, which cultivate a sense of justice and fit within the organization, ultimately making the organization more attractive to prospective employees and increasing their ITA.

4.6. Mediation model analysis

In Table 7, we established guidelines (Baron & Kenny, 1986), and conducted bootstrapping tests using structural equation modeling (SEM) with a bootstrap sample of 5000 to examine the mediating effects of POJ, P-E fit and EA. This approach provides robust bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals (CI) for indirect effects. Table 5 reveals a significant mediation trajectory. Specifically, POJ mediated the IL and

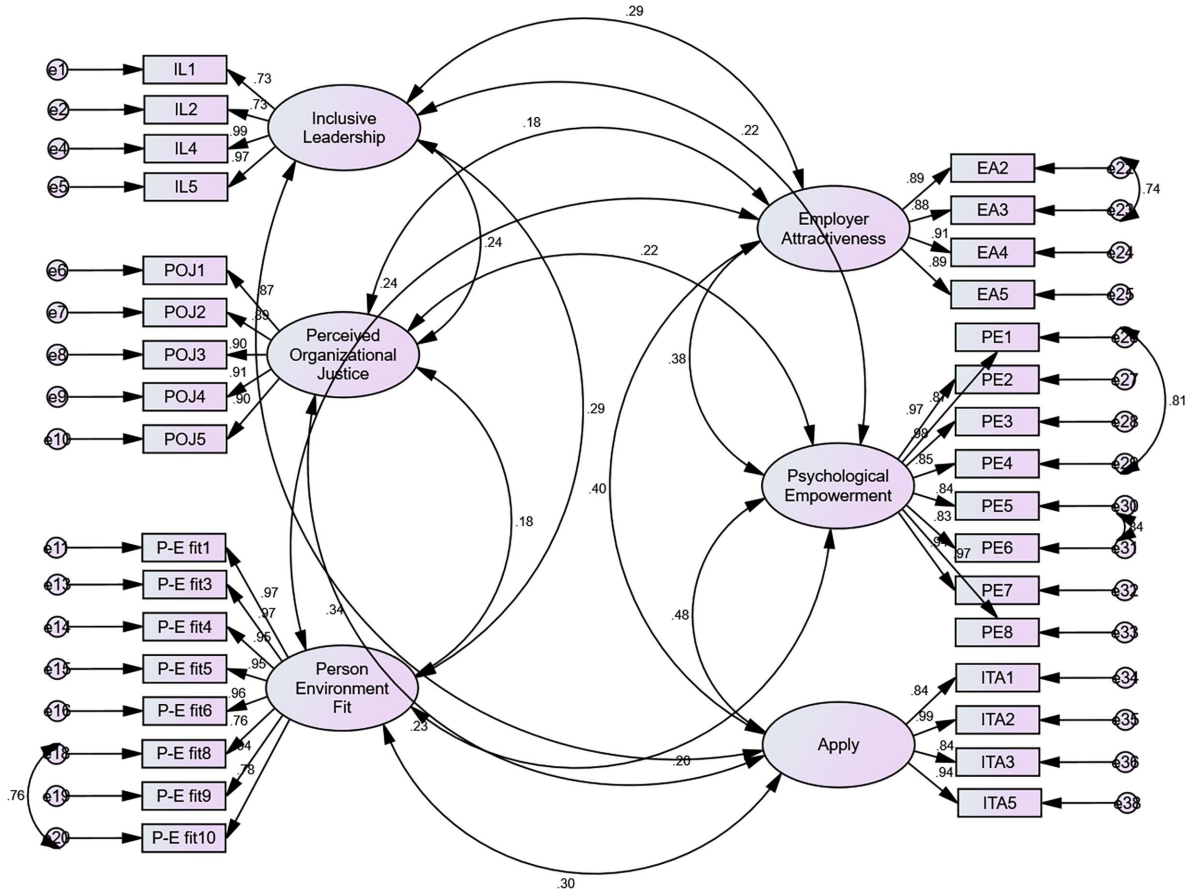


Figure 2. Measurement model.

Table 4. Model fit indices.

Fit indices	Measurement model	Suggested value
χ^2 / d	2.124	≤ 3.000
GFI	0.871	≥ 0.950
AGFI	0.849	≥ 0.800
NFI	0.951	≥ 0.900
CFI	0.973	≥ 0.900
TLI	0.970	≥ 0.900
SRMR	0.048	≤ 0.080
RMSEA	0.052	≤ 0.060
P-Close	0.248	≥ 0.050

Table 5. Construct validity statistics.

	CR	AVE	MSV	PE	IL	POJ	P-E fit	EA	ITA	VIF
Psychological Empowerment	0.974	0.826	0.228	0.909						1.212
Inclusive Leadership	0.920	0.747	0.114	0.216	0.864					1.215
Perceived Organizational Justice	0.951	0.797	0.058	0.223	0.241	0.893				1.104
Person-Environment Fit	0.975	0.832	0.091	0.199	0.286	0.181	0.912			1.149
Employer Attractiveness	0.941	0.800	0.157	0.380	0.285	0.178	0.236	0.895		1.239
Intention to Apply	0.948	0.822	0.228	0.477	0.337	0.227	0.302	0.396	0.907	

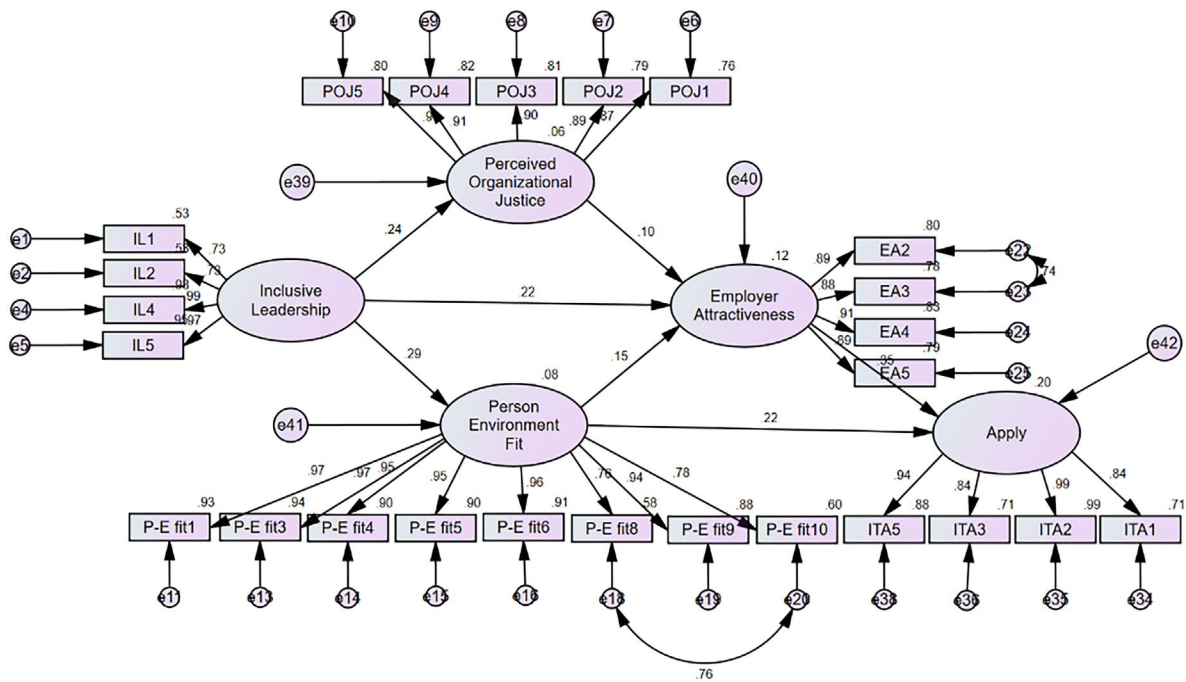


Figure 3. Structural model.

Table 6. Hypotheses results.

Results	Factors	Estimate	S.E & T value	p Value	Decision
Inclusive Leadership	IL EA	0.223	0.051 (4.296)	***	H1 = Accepted
	IL POJ	0.241	0.055 (4.879)	***	H2 = Accepted
	IL p-E fit	0.288	0.040 (5.867)	***	H3 = Accepted
Perceived Organizational Justice	POJ EA	0.101	0.045 (1.973)	*	H4 = Accepted
Person-Environment Fit	P-E fit EA	0.155	0.062 (3.018)	**	H5 = Accepted
	P-E fit ITA	0.220	0.047 (4.653)	***	H6 = Accepted
Employer Attractiveness	EA ITA	0.347	0.041 (7.060)	***	H7 = Accepted

Notes: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.050$; n.s. = not significant; t-values are in parentheses.

EA relationship (standardized indirect effect: 0.024; 95% CI: 0.004–0.062, $p < 0.01$), supporting H8. P-E fit also mediated the IL and EA relationship (standardized indirect effect: 0.053; 95% CI: 0.017–0.114, $p < 0.01$), validating H9. Furthermore, P-E fit mediated the IL and ITA relationship (standardized indirect effect: 0.080; 95% CI: 0.030–0.160, $p < 0.001$), supporting H10. Lastly, EA mediated the IL and ITA relationship (standardized indirect effect: 0.081; 95% CI: 0.034–0.159, $p < 0.001$), affirming H11. These findings confirm the mediating roles of POJ, P-E fit and EA in the IL and EA and IL and ITA relationships, highlighting these mediators' significance in understanding how IL can enhance EA perceptions and influence employees' ITA.

4.7. Moderated mediation analysis

The moderated mediation analysis using the SPSS process macro, model 14, provided insightful results regarding the indirect effects of IL on the ITA through P-E fit at different levels of PE (Table 8). At a low level of PE, the indirect effect of IL on ITA through P-E fit was positive and significant ($\beta = 0.156$, SE = 0.036, 95% CI [0.089, 0.229]) and remained positive but weaker at moderate levels ($\beta = 0.049$, SE = 0.014, 95% CI [0.026, 0.079]), suggesting that the mediating impact of P-E fit on the relationship between IL and ITA persists at a moderate level of PE. However, at a high level of PE, the indirect effect of IL on ITA through P-E fit was negative and significant ($\beta = -0.056$, SE = 0.017, 95% CI [-0.097, -0.026]), indicating that high levels of PE might diminish the positive impact of IL on ITA through P-E fit. These findings highlight the complexity of the relationship and indicate that PE act as a significant moderating impact that attenuates and at higher levels reserves the positive indirect effect of IL on ITA via P-E fit.

5. Discussion

The examination strived to probe the relationships between IL, POJ, P-E fit, PE, EA and the ITA. The study also thoroughly examined the moderating effect of PE in such associations. The resulting insights provide a comprehensive understanding of these procedures and are based on moderated mediation analysis with AMOS and SEM. Based on our observations, the hypothesis that IL enhances EA is supported (H1: $\beta = 0.223$, $t=4.296$, $p<0.001$), it aligns with Satzger and Vogel (2023) and Carmeli et al. (2010). The aforementioned hypothesis aligns with findings regarding the positive impact of IL on cultivating an inviting and engaging work environment. This, in turn, enhances an organization's capacity to attract prospective candidates, often bolstered by the organization's favorable reputation, which is propagated through positive endorsements from current employees. Furthermore, in agreement with previous studies, which show IL increases openness and fairness in firms (Shabeer et al., 2023; Hanh Tran & Choi, 2019), our results corroborate that IL improves POJ (H2: $\beta = 0.241$, $t=4.879$, $p<0.001$) as fair practices of inclusive leaders also ensure the organizational justices. It was also clear that IL had a positive effect on P-E fit (H3: $\beta = 0.288$, $t=5.867$, $p<0.001$), which is in line with what Shore et al. (2021) found: that IL helps people align their traits with the values of the organization, which leads to a better P-E fit and enrich long-term commitments. Also, there was a strong link between POJ and EA (H4: $\beta = 0.101$, $t=1.973$, $p<0.05$), which supports the idea that fair and open organizational policies make a company more appealing, as suggested by studies of Krys and Konradt (2022). Furthermore, the study confirmed that P-E fit positively influences ITA (H6: $\beta=0.220$, $t=4.653$, $p<0.001$), indicating that enhancing P-E fit can immensely boost applicants' interest in the organization, consistent with research by Judge and Cable (1997). Lastly, the study found that EA thoroughly impacts ITA (H7: $\beta=0.347$, $t=7.060$, $p<0.001$), consistent with the findings of Bustaman et al. (2020), Jaswal and Bhattacharya (2022) and Lambert et al. (2019) emphasizing the significance of constructing a strong employer brand to attract prospective employees.

The mediation analysis demonstrates that POJ and P-E Fit mediate the relationship between IL and EA and ITA (H8, H9, H10 and H11), supported by Bakotić and Bulog (2021) and Bednarska (2016). Again, EA mediates the relationship between IL and ITA, it aligns with Dassler et al. (2022). This suggests that IL enhances EA indirectly through its positive impact on POJ and P-E fit. Fair treatment by inclusive leaders constructs trust and commitment among employees and potential employees. When potential employees align with POJ, they are likely to find the organization alluring and develop a more robust ITA. This trust and perceived fairness make the organization stand out as an alluring place to work. Again, when potential employees state that their matters align with the organization's culture (P-E fit), they are conceivable to be tempted to the organization and develop an ITA. Again, potential employees desire workplaces where they sense their skills, values and personality will be appreciated and utilized. Consequently, the perception of organizational magnificence fosters a more vigorous ITA. Thus, IL influences prospective employees' perceptions of EA and ITA through its impact on POJ and P-E Fit. It addressed the RQ1.

The moderated mediation analysis revealed that PE significantly moderates the relationship between IL and ITA through P-E fit (H12), addressed RQ2. At low and moderate levels of PE, the indirect effect of

Table 7. Mediation model analysis.

	Estimate	SE	Bootstrapping			
			Bias-corrected			
			95% CI			
			Lower	Upper	p Value	Decision
Indirect effect						
IL --> POJ --> EA	0.024	0.14	0.004	0.062	**	H8 = Accepted
IL --> p-E fit--> EA	0.053	0.25	0.017	0.114	**	H9 = Accepted
IL --> p-E fit --> ITA	0.080	0.33	0.030	0.160	***	H10 = Accepted
IL --> EA --> ITA	0.081	0.31	0.034	0.159	***	H11 = Accepted

Notes: *** $p<0.001$; ** $p<0.01$.

Table 8. Conditional indirect effects of IL on ITA via P-E fit (H12).

PE level	Indirect effect	SE	Bootstrapping		Moderated
			Lower	Upper	
Low	0.156	0.036	0.089	0.229	Yes
Mean	0.049	0.014	0.026	0.079	Yes
High	-0.056	0.017	-0.097	-0.026	Yes

Index of moderated mediation = -0.012, SE = 0.003, 95% CI [-0.017, -0.007].

IL on ITA through P-E fit was positive and significant. However, at high levels of PE, this indirect effect was negative and significant. These findings align with Spreitzer (1995), who proposes that high PE might lead to higher expectations and diminished consequences of leadership practices. However, as the employees already feel highly psychologically empowered, the optimistic influence of IL on their ITA through P-E fit diminishes or even reverses. This could be because highly empowered employees already have a strong sense of autonomy and control over their work environment. They may not rely as heavily on the IL to feel a fit with the environment or to enhance their ITA.

Finally, the findings provide prominent support for ASA and P-E fit theories by elucidating how IL shapes prospective employee's attraction related judgements. Consistent with ASA theory, IL acts as a salient organizational signal that directly enhance EA and indirectly fosters POJ. The observed relationships among IL, PO and P-E fit indicate that leadership cues communicate organizational values that guide jobseekers' evaluations of organizational compatibility. It leads POJ and P-E fit strength EA and further enhance the ITA, underscoring the central role of fit-based evaluations in converting attraction into behavioral intentions. Together, these findings extend ASA theory by emphasizing leadership-driven signals in early attraction processes and advance P-E fit theory by demonstrating that fit perceptions are formed prior to organizational entry.

6. Conclusion

This deconstruction scrutinized how IL shapes EA and ITA at the pre-employment stage through fairness- and fit-based mechanisms. The spotting demonstrates that POJ and P-E fit serve as paramount mediating pathways linking IL to attraction outcomes, while PE operates as a boundary condition influencing the effect on the mediating role of P-E fit. By extending ASA and P-E fit theories to the attraction stage and integrating organizational and individual aspects, this study advances the theoretical understanding of how leadership signals influence job seekers' decisions. Practically, the results suggest that organizations seeking to enhance EA should prioritize IL within behaviors that signal fairness and value congruence, while also recognizing the function of individual psychological characteristics in shaping attraction processes. Overall, this research contributes to leadership and HRM scholarship by proffering a more integrated explanation of pre-entry attraction dynamics.

7. Theoretical implications

This deconstruction makes several important theoretical contributions to the literature on IL, ASA theory, and P-E fit theory (Schneider, 1987; Amarnah et al., 2021). First, the findings extend ASA theory by demonstrating that IL functions as a leadership-driven organizational signal at the pre-employment stage. While ASA theory has traditionally emphasized attraction based on perceived fit and organizational characteristics, this study demonstrates that leadership behaviors indirectly shape EA and ITA through POJ and P-E fit-based factors. This highlights the importance of considering indirect pathways, particularly POJ and P-E fit, when evaluating the theoretical impact of IL on attraction-related outcomes. Second, the study advances P-E fit theory by demonstrating that perceptions of fit are formed prior to organizational entry and are influenced by leadership queues rather than direct work experience. This finding reconceptualizes P-E fit as an expectant evaluative aspect, rather than exclusively a post-entry outcome of socialization, thereby widening the application of P-E fit theory to early-stage attraction decisions. Finally, by comprising PE as a boundary condition, the study contributes to leadership and HRM theory by highlighting how individual differences shape the effectiveness of leadership-driven attraction. This integrated perspective clarifies how organizational signals and individual psychological resources jointly influence attraction outcomes, providing a more subtle theoretical understanding of how IL, POJ and P-E fit interact to shape job seekers' decisions.

7.1. Practical/managerial implications

Based on the findings, several actionable implications emerge for HR managers and organizations seeking to enhance EA and attract high-quality applicants:

- This study significantly deepens the understanding of IL and its relationships with POJ, P-E fit, PE and EA. By expanding expertise in these areas, managers can optimize their leadership strategies and HR policies to enhance talent attraction and retention.
- The research clarifies how IL practices can significantly enrich organizational appeal when synchronized with POJ and P-E fit. These aspects function pivotally with POJ, fostering fairness in the work environment and P-E fit, ensuring the selection of candidates whose values align with the organization's culture. HR Managers can leverage this understanding to craft recruitment strategies with making an allure working environment for employees that resonates with potential candidates, thereby bolstering staff numbers and improving the caliber of hires.
- The study further emphasizes the necessity of examining PE in practical applications. It reveals how the degree and execution of IL within an organization can shape employee reactions, especially among those with heightened levels of PE. People with high PE often find workplaces appealing regardless of factors like IL and P-E fit, because they naturally create a positive atmosphere. This understanding enables HR professionals to tailor leadership and HR interventions to align with different levels of employee empowerment, resulting in more effective and impactful strategies.
- Recognizing how various organizational elements influence ITA through P-E fit and POJ can help organizations refine their recruitment and retention strategies. HR can use these insights to discover additional methods that, while not directly tied to IL, still improve hiring outcomes.

7.1.1. Limitations and future research

The research is subject to constraints due to its cross-sectional nature as limiting the ability to establish causality. The reliance on self-reported data may introduce self-report bias, despite efforts to mitigate common method variance (CMV). Further exploration in diverse cultural contexts and longitudinal studies or incorporating multiple sources to validate and expand the findings. It is recommended that future research consider employing alternative theoretical frameworks, such as Social Exchange theory and Self-Determination Theory, with larger cohorts and organizational assessments for a more comprehensive analysis.

Human ethics and consent to participate declaration

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Faculty of Business Studies, Barishal University, Bangladesh on dated 12/17/2024 under the memo no. IQAC/TEM/EP-00154/12-17/2024. Written informed consent was obtained from all individual participants to the collection, storage and use of their given information for research purposes.

Author contribution

CRedit: **Md. Abu Issa Gazi**: Data curation, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Project administration, Resources, Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing; **Sanjida Sumaya**: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Methodology, Resources, Software, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing; **Abdullah Al Masud**: Conceptualization, Investigation, Resources, Software, Supervision, Visualization, Writing – review & editing; **Tareq Mahamud Abir**: Resources, Validation, Visualization, Writing – review & editing; **Mohammad Bin Amin**: Funding acquisition, Investigation, Supervision, Visualization, Writing – review & editing; **Nusrat Sharmin Lipy**: Data curation, Investigation, Resources, Validation, Visualization, Writing – review & editing; **Veronika Fenyves**: Funding acquisition, Investigation, Validation, Visualization, Writing – review & editing.

Disclosure statement

Authors declare that there is no potential conflict of interest.

Consent to publication

We confirm that all of the authors listed in the article have reviewed and approved the article. We can vouch for that has our unanimous approval to publish our article if accepted.

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About the authors

Dr. Md. Abu Issa Gazi is a Professor of Management at school of Management, Jiujiang University, China and Research Fellow at INTI International University and, in addition, Dr. Gazi is a Post doctorate awardee from Universiti Malaysia Perlis, Malaysia. Prior to that, he worked as an Associate Professor, Assistant Professor, senior lecturer and lecturer at different Universities in China and Bangladesh. He has also successfully performed various administrative responsibilities. He received his PhD, MBA and BBA with outstanding performance in Management. Dr. Gazi is a confident in face of challenges diligent postgraduate faculty and having a strong critical thinking ability as an exceptionally talented researcher with greater insights, more perspectives and stronger research skills. He has great passion in teaching and research in the field of Business and Management. His research focuses on industrial workers' behavior, job satisfaction and job stress, international trade, Green human Resources Management, Green supply chain Management, Green CSR, Sustainability, entrepreneurship, e commerce and broadly on the field of Business, economics and Management.

Sanjida Sumaya is an independent researcher and MBA graduate from the Department of Management Studies, University of Barishal, Bangladesh. Her research focuses on digital technology adoption, FinTech, consumer behavior, and broader areas such as management, leadership, HRM, organizational behavior, and entrepreneurship in developing economies. She has published in the South Asian Journal of Marketing, where her work explores the determinants of continuous electronic payment usage and the shift toward a cashless society in Bangladesh. Her research contributes to advancing knowledge on digital financial inclusion in emerging markets.

Dr. Abdullah Al Masud is an Associate Professor in the Department of Management Studies at the University of Barishal, Bangladesh. His research centers on corporate social responsibility, sustainability, green supply chains, and technological innovation. He has held key academic leadership roles, including Dean and Department Chair, and has led nationally funded research projects. Dr. Masud has published extensively in internationally recognized journals, contributing significantly to global scholarship in sustainability and responsible business practices.

Dr. Tareq Mahamud Abir is an Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Barishal, Bangladesh. He earned his Ph.D. from Central China Normal University, Wuhan, China, in 2019. His research focuses on climate change adaptation, disaster risk analysis, coastal resilience, and the social dimensions of health and disasters. He has collaborated with national and international organizations, including government ministries, NGOs, BRAC, and UNICEF. Dr. Abir has published in SSCI and SCI indexed journals, contributing significantly to research on environmental sustainability and community resilience.

Mohammad Bin Amin is a Doctoral Candidate in the Doctoral School of Management and Business, Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Debrecen, Debrecen, Hungary. Along with his doctoral study, he is working as an Associate Professor of the Department of Business Administration, Bangladesh Army University of Science and Technology, Saidpur. His areas of research interest include management, human resource management, technology management, technology adaptation, leadership, corporate social responsibility, green management, circular economy, environmental economy, green supply chain management, sustainable performance, knowledge management, and renewable energy management. He can be reached at binamindu@gmail.com; binaminbd@mailbox.unideb.hu.

Dr. Reda Abdelfattah Mohammad is an Assistant Professor of Business Administration at the Applied College in Al-Mahalal, King Khalid University. Her general specialization is Business Administration, with a focus on Human Resource Management. Her research interests include organizational behavior and human resource management, particularly workplace development, organizational performance improvement, and human capital development. She serves as Head of the Student Activities Unit and Chair of the Human Resource Management Program Development and Description Committee. She is also a member of the Academic Advising Committee and the Curriculum and Study Plans Committee. Additionally, she is a certified trainer from the Global Council for Peace and Development, Egypt (Accreditation No. 1092.T).

Nusrat Sharmin Lipy is an Associate Professor in the Department of Management Studies at the University of Barishal, Bangladesh. She holds BBA and MBA degrees from the University of Dhaka. Her research focuses on entrepreneurship, plastic recycling, sustainability, and the circular economy. She has published in Q1-ranked journals, including leading outlets under Elsevier and Emerald Publishing. Actively engaged in teaching and research, she contributes to advancing sustainable business practices and innovation in Bangladesh through her academic and scholarly work.

Dr. Veronika Fenyves is a University Professor and Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Business at the University of Debrecen, Hungary. Her research field includes economics, business, management, controlling, ESG, green finance,

green technology, technology adaptation, digitalization in finance, technology management, entrepreneurship, and enterprise development. She can be reached at fenyves.veronika@econ.unideb.hu

ORCID

Md. Abu Issa Gazi  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1397-8855>
 Abdullah Al Masud  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9345-4703>
 Mohammad Bin Amin  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9184-4828>
 Nusrat Sharmin Lipy  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8773-9945>
 Veronika Fenyves  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8737-0666>

Data availability statement

The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

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Appendix A: Control variable analysis

Path	Estimate	p Value	Interpretation
Gender → EA	-0.180	n.s	Not significant
Age → EA	0.037	n.s	Not significant
Education → EA	-0.108	n.s	Not significant
Employment Status → EA	-0.233	***	Significant
Gender → ITA	-0.028	n.s	Not significant
Age → ITA	0.004	n.s	Not significant
Education → ITA	0.019	n.s	Not significant
Employment Status → ITA	0.025	n.s	Not significant

*Notes: *** $p < 0.001$; n.s. = not significant; t-values are in parentheses'*

Appendix B: Descriptive statistics

Items	\bar{x}	σ	Skew	Kurtosis	Min	Max	α	Loading	Overall (\bar{x})	Overall (σ)
IL1	5.78	1.136	-1.365	2.356	1.00	7.00	0.924	0.844	5.8105	1.03729
IL2	5.81	1.167	-1.769	3.695	1.00	7.00		0.868		
IL4	5.89	1.206	-1.751	3.449	1.00	7.00		0.941		
IL5	5.90	1.171	-1.742	3.376	1.00	7.00		0.942		
POJ1	5.54	1.399	-1.318	1.364	1.00	7.00	0.952	0.885	5.6333	1.34538
POJ2	5.50	1.491	-1.236	1.009	1.00	7.00		0.926		
POJ3	5.56	1.509	-1.524	1.686	1.00	7.00		0.932		
POJ4	5.78	1.541	-1.700	2.157	1.00	7.00		0.924		
POJ5	5.79	1.408	-1.611	2.166	1.00	7.00		0.900		
P-E fit1	5.78	1.296	-1.835	3.419	1.00	7.00	0.976	0.934	5.7503	1.15822
P-E fit3	5.75	1.290	-1.865	3.500	1.00	7.00		0.943		
P-E fit4	5.70	1.258	-1.737	3.039	1.00	7.00		0.914		
P-E fit5	5.70	1.249	-1.828	3.474	1.00	7.00		0.933		
P-E fit6	5.73	1.271	-1.756	3.084	1.00	7.00		0.931		
P-E fit8	5.79	1.169	-1.421	2.020	1.00	7.00		0.880		
P-E fit9	5.69	1.286	-1.872	3.470	1.00	7.00		0.918		
P-E fit10	5.85	1.186	-1.802	3.869	1.00	7.00		0.897		
EA2	5.80	1.244	-1.610	2.749	1.00	7.00	0.950	0.935	5.7792	1.20605
EA3	5.82	1.286	-1.846	3.472	1.00	7.00		0.943		
EA4	5.75	1.315	-1.637	2.449	1.00	7.00		0.905		
EA5	5.75	1.331	-1.638	2.475	1.00	7.00		0.924		
PE1	5.81	1.286	-1.982	3.810	1.00	7.00	0.979	0.938	5.8560	1.15133
PE2	5.92	1.229	-2.069	4.542	1.00	7.00		0.965		
PE3	5.92	1.191	-1.892	3.795	1.00	7.00		0.944		
PE4	5.79	1.296	-2.051	4.095	1.00	7.00		0.934		
PE5	5.81	1.318	-1.943	3.796	1.00	7.00		0.878		
PE6	5.84	1.267	-1.793	3.247	1.00	7.00		0.868		
PE7	5.84	1.153	-1.633	2.727	1.00	7.00		0.960		
PE8	5.93	1.144	-1.804	3.343	1.00	7.00		0.961		
ITA1	6.02	1.099	-1.600	2.713	2.00	7.00	0.949	0.909	6.0000	1.17082
ITA2	6.00	1.297	-2.000	3.888	1.00	7.00		0.948		
ITA3	5.87	1.479	-2.362	5.335	1.00	7.00		0.806		
ITA5	6.11	1.153	-2.037	4.394	1.00	7.00		0.979		

Appendix C: Inter-item correlation matrix

	IL	POJ	P-E Fit	EA	PE	ITA
Inclusive leadership	1.000	0.273	0.309	0.287	0.235	0.393
Perceived organizational Justice	0.273	1.000	0.181	0.166	0.190	0.239
Person-Environment Fit	0.309	0.181	1.000	0.235	0.212	0.322
Employer attractiveness	0.287	0.166	0.235	1.000	0.372	0.397
Psychological empowerment	0.235	0.190	0.212	0.372	1.000	0.514
Intention to apply	0.393	0.239	0.322	0.397	0.514	1.000

Source: Authors calculation