BREAKING BARRIERS: EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF GLASS CEILING PERCEPTION ON CAREER SATISFACTION AMONG FEMALE BANKING PROFESSIONALS IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract

Purpose: *This study investigates the impact of glass ceiling perception on career satisfaction among female employees in the banking sector of Pakistan, with a focus on the mediating roles of organizational signaling of diversity tokenism and leadership role insecurity. The research aims to understand how structural barriers and organizational signals influence subjective evaluations of career progress and professional fulfillment.*

Method: *A quantitative research design was employed, and data were collected from 210 female banking professionals using structured questionnaires. All measurement scales were adopted from validated past studies, including constructs for glass ceiling perception, organizational signaling of diversity tokenism, leadership role insecurity, and career satisfaction. Data were analyzed using ADANCO software through partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) to test both direct and mediated relationships among the constructs.*

Findings: *The results indicate that glass ceiling perception has a significant negative impact on career satisfaction. Furthermore, both organizational signaling of diversity tokenism and leadership role insecurity were found to mediate this relationship, highlighting the psychological and organizational mechanisms through which perceived structural barriers affect career outcomes.*

Originality/Implications: *This study extends Social Cognitive Career Theory by integrating organizational signaling and leadership insecurity as mediating mechanisms, offering a comprehensive understanding of career satisfaction in gendered professional contexts. Practically, the findings emphasize the need for authentic diversity initiatives, transparent promotion systems, and secure leadership pathways to enhance career satisfaction among female employees, particularly in traditionally male-dominated sectors.*

Keywords: *Glass ceiling perception, Career satisfaction, Diversity tokenism, Leadership role insecurity, Banking sector Pakistan.*

Introduction

The continued existence of structural inequality in organizations has been a major issue in the field of management and career development research in the last three decades or so. The glass ceiling which was first defined by Ann Morrison is used to refer to the invisible but systematic obstacles which limit the upward mobility of women and other underrepresented groups with equal qualifications and performance (Amin & Ashraf, 2024). With organizations progressively embracing diversity and inclusion policies, the focus has changed to the explanation of how diversity and inclusion are interpreted by employees through the lenses of the context of the workplace (Taparia & Lenka, 2024). Subjective rating of career achievements and continuation has become a key measure of employee well-being, as well as organisational sustainability, which

has been dubbed career satisfaction (Kidron et al., 2025). Researchers claim that the views on justness, chances, and leadership validity play a significant role in determining the cognitive and emotional judgment of employees regarding their professional achievements (Baral et al., 2025). Furthermore, modern discussions emphasize that diversity programs can be symbolic and not representative at times, which, in turn, creates the effect of tokenism that only exacerbates the process of career assessment by the employees (Shemla et al., 2025). It is against this wider discourse that the interaction between perceived structural barriers, organizational diversity signaling, leadership insecurity and subjective career outcomes should be subject to systematic empirical research.

It has been established in previous empirical studies that perceptions of glass ceiling barriers are positively linked with job related attitudes and career outcomes. The research in various cultural backgrounds has shown that workers with the perception of discriminatory promotion systems have lower career satisfaction, lesser organizational commitment, and less professional optimism (Liu et al., 2024). According to the studies based on Social Cognitive Career Theory, contextual barriers are one of the factors that deteriorate positive outcome expectations, which also impacts on satisfaction judgments (Bandura, 2001)). Also, the studies of tokenism indicate that when the representation of diversity is symbolic, the employees claim less trust in organizational fairness and less psychological safety (Baral et al., 2025; Law & Tan, 2025). Insecurity associated with leadership has been also correlated with negative career performance, because emotions of instability and vulnerability erode professional identity and career confidence of the long- (Ayorinde & Skarin, 2025). Taken together, these studies imply that structural perceptions and organizational cues are very important in influencing how people assess their career paths.

Nevertheless, there are still a number of gaps in the literature, in spite of the contributions. To begin with, a significant part of the literature addresses the direct association between the perception of glass ceiling and career satisfaction without further discussing the psychological and organizational processes through which this effect is conveyed (White, 2023). Second, although much of the literature on tokenism is conducted from a sociological angle, there is little empirical research that incorporates organizational signaling theories to identify the roles of perceived diversity efforts in mediating perceptions of structural inequality and subjective career success (Volpone et al., 2025). Third, the role insecurity of leadership has mainly been investigated as a consequence of job instability instead of a mediating cognitive process between structural obstacles and career satisfaction (Baral et al., 2025). Moreover, these constructs are frequently analyzed in previous studies without considering them in a coherent set of explanations in the context of career theory (Niessen-Ruenzi & Zimmerer, 2023). Emerging and collectivist organizational contexts are also scarce in evidence, as hierarchical design and cultural conditions can potentially exacerbate the feeling of structural impediments (Ross et al., 2025). It is necessary to fill these gaps using an inclusive model that implies combining the perceptions of the glass ceiling, the presence of diversity tokenism in the organization, the insecurity of the leadership position, and career satisfaction in one theoretical model.

To address these gaps, the given study will focus on the effects of the perception of glass ceiling on the level of career satisfaction along with exploring the mediating variables of organizational signaling of diversity tokenism and role-related insecurity of leadership. In particular, the study aims at addressing the following research questions: (1) Does the perception of glass ceiling have a significant impact on career satisfaction? (2) Is there a mediation of organizational signaling of

diversity tokenism between glass ceiling perception and career satisfaction? (3) Does insecurity with leadership role mediate between the glass ceiling perception and career satisfaction? This paper will be based on the conceptual framework of Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 1994) and organizational signaling perspectives (Connelly et al., 2025) to develop an understanding of contextual barriers and cognitive mechanisms to understand subjective career evaluations. The study tries to give a more detailed explanation of the translation of structural inequality perception to career-related attitudes through these goals.

This study is important in terms of theoretical, empirical and practical contributions to the field. Conceptually, it expands Social Cognitive Career Theory by introducing organizational signaling and leadership insecurity as intervening processes between contextual impediments and career satisfaction (Lent et al., 1994). It gives an integrated evidence empirically on the working of perceptions of structural inequality in terms of psychological and organizational processes, therefore filling in fragmentation in previous research (Lee et al., 2025). In a practical sense, the results can inform organizations to develop realistic diversity programs and open leadership development programs that minimize the feeling of being a token and feeling unsafe (Chalise, 2024). This study can help make human resource practices and sustainable career development strategies more inclusive by establishing the links between glass ceiling perception and career satisfaction. Providing a beneficial contribution, the knowledge of these dynamics is key to maintaining fair organizational conditions and improving the sustainability of employee careers in the long term (Chaudhary et al., 2025).

Literature Review

Glass ceiling perception is the feeling that employees have that the organization has some invisible ceilings that prevent them to get ahead to high ranks of office despite them having the rightful qualification and skills (Visintin et al., 2025). This is a term first created by Ann Morrison who explained the glass ceiling as unspoken but systemic inequalities in the structures of organization (Toprak & Kırılmaz, 2024). These are barriers that are not explicit, but instead work at the level of informal networks, prejudiced evaluation standards and gendered leadership standards (Ng & McGowan, 2023). On the other hand, career satisfaction is a subjective assessment of an individual on the aspect of career growth, development, and general professional success (Kidron et al., 2025). In Social Cognitive Career Theory, developed by Robert W. Lent, Steven D. Brown and Gail Hackett, the contextual barriers affect the level of expectation of outcomes and level of satisfaction regarding the career (Nikolić & Labus, 2024). When people feel that their future is suppressed by structural barriers, their hopes about future progress weaken, and they have a negative assessment of their career investigations. In this way, the views on unfair promotion systems can have a direct effect on the subjective career success of employees (White, 2023).

Empirical studies have continually indicate that there is a strong negative correlation between perceived glass ceiling barriers and career satisfaction. As an illustration, research has established that women who experience gender bias views that inhibit their advancement levels report reduced degrees of career satisfaction and professional expectations (Amin & Ashraf, 2024; Wei et al., 2025a; White, 2023). Studies that are based on the organization justice theory also show that employees consider unfair promotion practices and procedural biases to diminish career progress satisfaction since employees view any unjust decision as a breach of an equitable promotion system (Greenberg, 1987). Also, it has been indicated that employees who feel discrimination

during the leadership selection processes exhibit less commitment and low long term career motivation.

H1: Glass ceiling perception has a significant impact on career satisfaction

Organizational signaling of diversity tokenism is a perceivement of employees that diversity programs are ceremonial and not real in relation to substantive measures, where people of underrepresented populations are promoted to high profile positions to represent the image of inclusiveness with no real empowerment or promotion (Tedder-King et al., 2025). Based on the theory of signaling, organizations convey important values and desires by policies, patterns of representation, and appointments; but when these signals are seen as surface level, then the message might be interpreted as an insincere or strategic impression management by the organization (Takizawa et al., 2025). The theory of tokenism describes the experiences of minority positions as those who are in such positions tend to be more visible, stereotyped and pressured to perform (Connelly et al., 2025). The satisfaction of career is a personal judgment of career development and career success, which is not only determined by the outcome of the advancement but also influenced by the perceptions of authenticity, belongingness, and equitable treatment in the organization (Volpone et al., 2025). Diversity initiatives that seem to be tokenistic in nature can make employees doubt the effectiveness of the promotion processes, as well as the authenticity of the organizational assistance.

Empirical research has shown perceived tokenism to damage psychological safety, professional identity and long-term career optimism. Studies have been conducted that indicate that those who feel that they have been chosen mainly to meet diversity quotas, tend to complain of less job satisfaction, less organizational commitment and more performance anxiety (Niessen-Ruenzi & Zimmerer, 2023; Reinwald et al., 2023). Moreover, research that is based on the view of organizational justice indicates that symbolic diversity initiatives undermine leadership trust and satisfaction since staff members feel they have little actual influence or chances of gaining development (Baral et al., 2025). There is also a piece of evidence showing that token status can limit access to influential networks and mentorship, thus limiting career advancement and reducing the feeling of career success.

H2: Organizational signaling of diversity tokenism negatively affects career satisfaction

The leadership role insecurity is the feeling of uncertainty, weakness or instability in one holding or wanting to hold leadership roles. It includes the fear of failure, being replaced, being tarnished, or lacking adequate power in leadership (Shemla et al., 2025). This aims at the role theory which argues that, ambiguity and uncertainty in roles expectations create stress and lessen the work conditions well-being (Wiitala et al., 2025). The conceptualization of career satisfaction by (Saleem & Mateou, 2024) has to do with the feeling a person has of accomplishment and advancement in his/her career life. Leadership jobs can be perceived as uncertain or insecure, and people can develop greater anxiety and less trust in their career path in the long-term. This insecurity has the potential to undermine perceived career advancement value although formal promotions might be achieved (Niessen-Ruenzi & Zimmerer, 2023).

As the empirical evidence shows, leadership-linked insecurity has a great detrimental impact on subjective career outcomes. Research on job insecurity always demonstrates the negative correlations with job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and psychological well being

(Sunaryo et al., 2024). A person with perceived unstable roles or political vulnerability in leadership usually exhibits emotional exhaustion and low career expectations (Nikolić & Labus, 2024). Also, studies indicate that perceived career success and professional identity are reduced in case of insecurity about the leadership legitimacy or endorsement by top management.

H3: Leadership role insecurity negatively affects career satisfaction

Glass ceiling perception indicates the perceptions of the employees that there are invisible structural barrier to access to the top leadership positions regardless of merit and competence (Javadizadeh et al., 2024). When these obstacles are felt, the organizational diversity initiatives tend to go under a critical analysis by the employees especially when there seems to be a symbolic representation and not a substantive representation (Neugart & Zaharieva, 2025). According to the organizational signaling theory, fairness, opportunity, and inclusivity are implicit messages that are conveyed through policies and appointing leadership (Auda, 2025). Nonetheless, in instances where diversity initiatives are viewed as tokenism, as is the case with the tokenism theory postulated by (Baral et al., 2025), the employees may feel that the minority representation is being adopted as a way of image management, and not as a way of empowerment. The perceptions of authenticity within organizational systems will have a strong impact on career satisfaction that can be described as the overall assessment of the individual on the career achievements and progress (Kidron et al., 2025). In this way, the glass ceiling attitudes can underpin the distinctions of the diversity practices as shallow, which consequently influence career appraisals.

Indirect pathway can be supported with empirical evidence. Research has shown that employees who believe that there is structural discrimination tend to think that diversity efforts are a mere form of token compliance other than a form of inclusion (Law & Tan, 2025). Studies also indicate that perceived tokenism lowers organization trust, psychological safety and expected growth in professional growth which are considered key predictors of career satisfaction (Wei et al., 2025b). When staffs believe that there is less progress in regard to the systemic bias, then they might consider the diversity promotions as individual cases and not as a sign of systemic transition, thus contributing to the discontent with advancement in their career (Lee et al., 2025). This process implies that the perception of the glass ceiling does not have any particular effect on career satisfaction in terms of direct assessment of the blocked opportunities, but indirectly when it shapes the meanings of diversity signals (Kidron et al., 2025). Thus, the hypothesis is that glass ceiling perception has a mediating role between career satisfaction and organizational signaling of diversity tokenism.

H4: Organizational signaling of diversity tokenism mediates the relationship between glass ceiling perception and career satisfaction

The perception of the glass ceiling may produce the uncertainty on the possibility of enhanced advancement as well as the stability and legitimacy of the leadership positions achieved in the organization (Brookins, 2023). The Social Cognitive Career Theory, formulated by Robert W. Lent, Steven D. Brown and Gail Hackett (1994) indicates that contextual impediments impact on outcome expectations and self-efficacy, which in turn have an impact on career related satisfaction (Aman et al., 2025). When staff members feel that there are long-term structural obstacles, they can develop suspicions that there is security, merit-based and sustainable leadership positions (Auda, 2025). Insecurity of leadership role is a condition of instability, vulnerability, or fear of losing the position triggered by the questions that people are asking concerning the sustainability and validity of the roles in which they are leading (Sunaryo et al., 2024). Because career

satisfaction concerns career stability and development ratings which are long-term, uncertainty about leadership can undermine the positive ratings on career success (Goodall, 2024).

The mediating role of the insecurity mechanisms is supported by empirical research. Research on job and role insecurity indicates that there are negative correlations between career satisfaction and professional well-being (Saleem & Mateou, 2024). Also, it has been noted that perceived discrimination and restricted mobility enhance a sense of insecurity in the people who hold or want to hold leadership positions because they expect to be questioned or deprived of institutional support (Rane et al., 2023). This implies that the perception of the glass ceiling might initially produce the feeling of insecurity when it comes to stability in leadership, which, in turn, will decrease the concern with the satisfaction of the career advancement (Nikolić & Labus, 2024). Instead of merely reducing the satisfaction directly, perceived structural barriers may work by psychological processes of uncertainty and vulnerability (Amin & Ashraf, 2024). In this theoretical and empirical argument, a hypothesis is that leadership role insecurity is mediating the relationship between the career satisfaction and perception of glass ceiling.

H5: Leadership role insecurity mediates the relationship between glass ceiling perception and career satisfaction

Theoretical Framework Supporting the Research

The theoretical perspective that can be most used to explain the suggested relationships is Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), which was created by (Lent et al., 1994). According to SCT, career results are formed as the result of the dynamic interaction between personal cognitions (self-efficacy and outcome expectations) and context (e.g., supports and barriers). In this context, the perceptions of structural barriers like glass ceiling are seen as contextual barriers that adversely affect the expectations that people have of progressing and succeeding in the profession in the long term. Where employees are of the view that there exist some invisible organizational barriers that limit the movement of leaders, then the employees will have low confidence in the fair movement and thus, they will have less career satisfaction. In addition, SCCT describes how surrounding stimuli and organizational clues influence cognitive understandings; a perceived tokenistic diversity practices can, therefore, strengthen the beliefs that opportunity is not based on merit and this has the indirect effect of undermining the good outcome expectations. On the same note, the role of leadership insecurity may be conceptualized as cognitive and affective reaction to the perceived obstacles to the position, wherein uncertainty about the position stability or legitimacy curbs the contentment with the career advancement. Empirical studies which are based on SCCT show that contextual barriers show substantial predictors of reduced career satisfaction with change in outcome expectations and psychological processes of uncertainty (Lent et al., 1994). Based on this, the hypothesized relationships given in Figure 1: Conceptual Framework are theoretically justified by SCCT that gives a holistic account of the direct impact of the perception of glass ceiling on career satisfaction and indirect impact of the same via organizational signaling of diversity tokenism and insecurity related to leadership position.
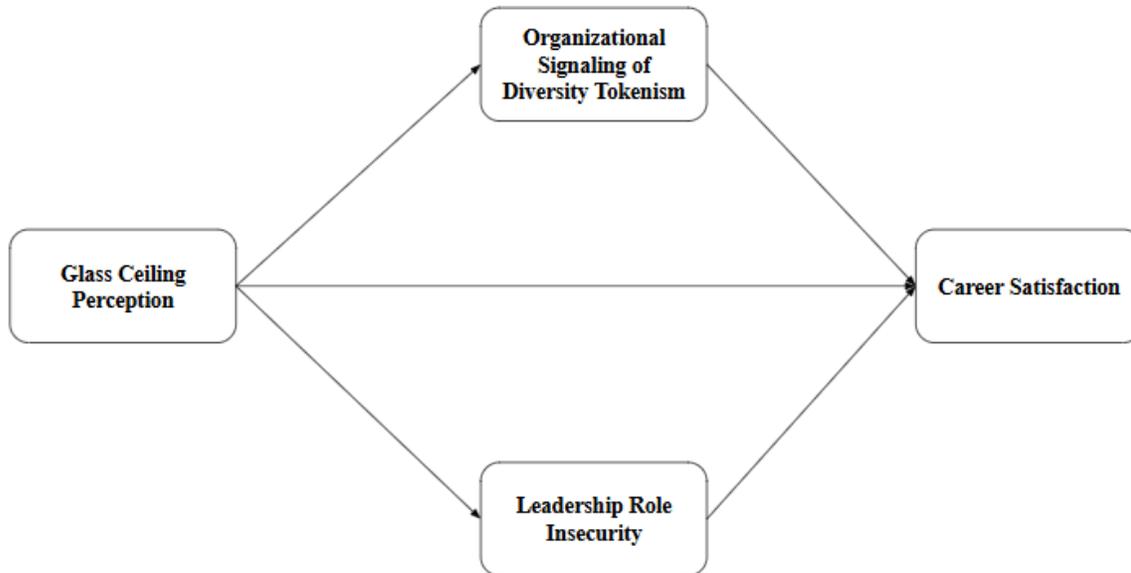
Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Methodology

The research design that was applied in this study is the quantitative research design in order to study the effect of glass ceiling perception on career satisfaction and mediating effects of organizational signaling of diversity tokenism and leadership role insecurity. The survey-based design was adopted to gather the primary data regarding the employees of the banking industry in Pakistan. The target population was comprised of female professional employees working in several banks as the effects of glass ceiling and gendered organizational inhibitors can be applicable to traditional male-dominated settings (Cotter et al., 2001). The number of respondents who took part in the study reached 210, which is enough to conduct a structural equation modelling and mediation analysis (Hair Jr et al., 2021). The convenience sampling method was used to select the participants and this enabled easy collection of data and addressing the target demographic group. The demographic profile of the respondents was composed of different levels of experience, job position, and tenure, thus representing all the hierarchy levels in the banking sector.

All the measurement tools of constructs were derived based on already established validated scales to achieve reliability and validity. The scale of measuring glass ceiling perception was developed based on a six-item scale used by (Smith et al., 2012), which includes the perceptions of employees regarding unseen obstacles to leadership progression. A five item scale, informed by previous research by (Kanter, 1977) was used to assess the organizational signaling of diversity tokenism, which is an assessment of the symbolic diversity initiatives. The intrinsic validity of leadership role was measured using a five-item scale that was modified after (De Witte, 2005) and it measures the anxieties of the employees about the stability and legitimacy of leaders. The scale of career satisfaction was assessed with the help of the five-item scale created by (Judge et al., 1995) that developed the scale to measure the overall satisfaction of the employees with the career progress, their achievement, and growth opportunities. Items were also rated using a five-point Likert scale

(strongly disagree 1) to 5(strongly agree). Content validity and comparability with other previously conducted studies was guaranteed by the use of established scales.

ADANCO software was implemented to analyse the data: it is a specific partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM). ADANCO enables the evaluation of both the measurement and structural models at the same time, and it is appropriate to test many complex relationships, such as mediation effects (Henseler et al., 2014). The process of the analysis was initiated by the measurement model examination in order to determine the validity and reliability of the constructs. Internal consistency was taken care of by the use of Cronbach alpha and composite reliability, whereas convergent and discriminant validity was checked by the use of average variance extracted (AVE) and Fornell-Larcker criterion. When the measurement model had been validated, the structural model was evaluated to check the hypothesized direct and indirect relationships. Path coefficients, t-values, and p-values were investigated to test the significance of the relationships whereas mediation effects were investigated by bootstrapping techniques provided by ADANCO.

PLS-SEM was only beneficial to this study because the mediation model is exploratory in nature, and the sample size is relatively small. PLS-SEM can withstand non-normal data distributions and gives sound estimates of multifaceted models having several mediators (Hair Jr et al., 2021). The analysis method was suitable in testing both direct effects, as in the association between glass ceiling perception and career satisfaction, and indirect effects due to an organizational signaling of diversity tokenism and insecurity in a leadership position. This methodological design made it possible to have a holistic picture on how perceived structural barriers were correlated with subjective career outcomes.
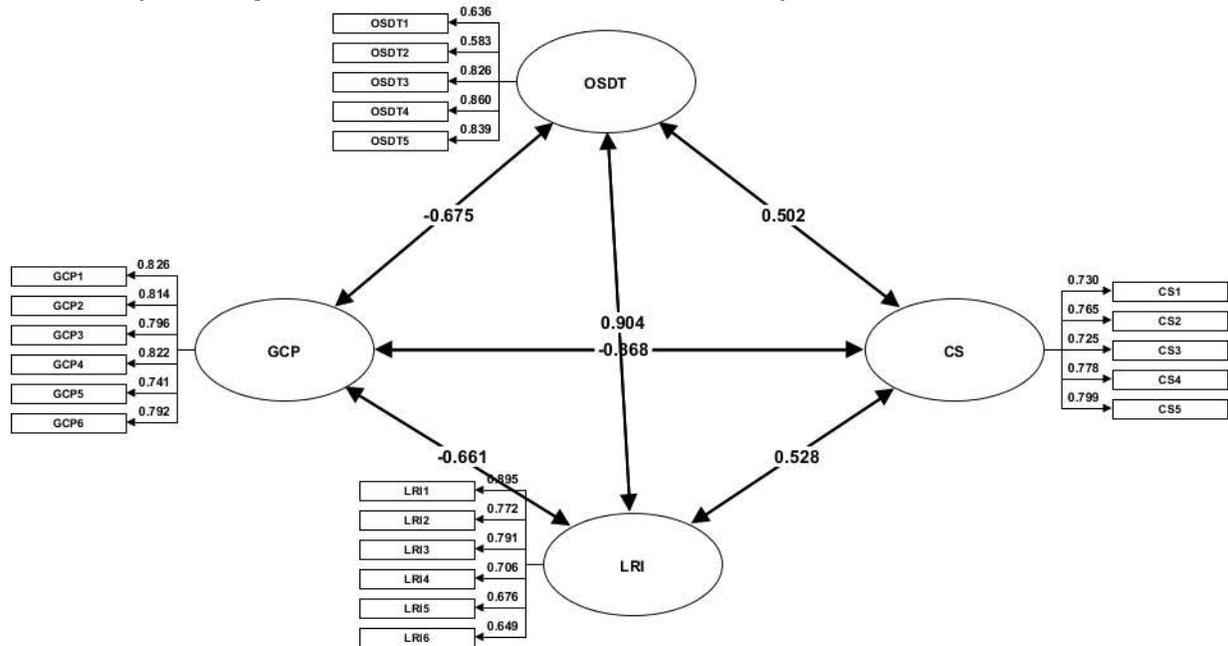
Results

Table 1 shows the statistics of the internal consistency reliability and convergent validity of the study constructs. The findings reveal that all constructs have high levels of reliability. In particular, the values of rho (A) of Dijkstra-Henseler (0.841-0.879) are higher than the suggested value of 0.70, which proves construct reliability. Likewise, the rho (rho c) of Joreskog also referred to as composite reliability, is between 0.893- 0.915, which also goes to reinforce high internal consistency of the measurement items. Cronbach alpha of all the variables are between 0.857 and 0.882, which is once again above the minimum acceptable 0.70 meaning that the items are always measuring what they are supposed to be. With respect to convergent validity, the values of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) fall between 0.728 and 0.695. As all of the AVE values are beyond the recommended cutoff of 0.50, it can be seen that all constructs account for over 50 percent of the variance in their indicators. On the whole, these results indicate that the measurement model has a high level of reliability and convergent validity and it can be used in further structural analysis.

Table 1: Variables reliability and validity

Variables	Dijkstra-Henseler's rho (ρA)	Jöreskog's rho (ρc)	Cronbach's alpha (α)	AVE
Glass Ceiling Perception	0.862	0.904	0.872	0.712
Organizational Signaling of Diversity Tokenism	0.841	0.893	0.857	0.695
Leadership Role Insecurity	0.854	0.902	0.865	0.701

Career Satisfaction	0.879	0.915	0.882	0.728

The relationships between the constructs in terms of their measurement and structure are estimated in figure 2. The model has confirmed both graphically and statistically that glass ceiling perception is the predictor of career satisfaction both directly and indirectly via organizational signaling of diversity tokenism and leadership role insecurity. As the figure proves, all constructs are sufficiently linked as per the suggested conceptual framework, which justifies the hypothesized mediation structure. The direction and the strength of the relationships that were subsequently verified in path analysis are in line with the theoretical assumptions

Figure 2: Estimated Model

The confirmatory factor analysis results indicate that all the items have a significant loading of their constructs. In the case of glass ceiling perception, the factor loading ranged between 0.741 and 0.826 which is a high value compared to 0.60 which is the acceptable factor loading which implies high item reliability. The load of the items of the organizational signaling of diversity tokenism falls within the range of 0.725 to 0.799 indicating satisfactory levels of indicator reliability.the loading of leadership role insecurity varies between 0.583 and 0.895. Lri2 is a loading of 0.583 that is still above the acceptable minimum of 0.50 and thus it is maintained. The others have high loadings of over 0.80 which depicts a solid measure. The range of career satisfaction items is between 0.649 and 0.791, and these are satisfactory and ensure that there is proper representation of construct. All in all, the cfa findings indicate that all measurement items are able to measure their respective latent constructs satisfactorily.

Table 3: Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Variables	Items	Loading
Glass Ceiling Perception	GCP1	0.826
	GCP2	0.814
	GCP3	0.797
	GCP4	0.822
	GCP5	0.741
	GCP6	0.792
Organizational Signaling of Diversity Tokenism	OSDT1	0.731
	OSDT2	0.765
	OSDT3	0.725
	OSDT4	0.779
	OSDT5	0.799
Leadership Role Insecurity	LRI1	0.636
	LRI2	0.583
	LRI3	0.826
	LRI4	0.860
	LRI5	0.839
	LRI6	0.895
Career Satisfaction	CS1	0.772
	CS2	0.791
	CS3	0.706
	CS4	0.676
	CS5	0.649

The assessments of discriminant validity are done through the values of Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT). Value of all HTMTs are lower than the conservative value of 0.85 which implies that the constructs are not empirically similar to each other. As an illustration, the maximum value of HTMT is 0.724 between glass ceiling perception and career satisfaction which is within the acceptable range. On the same note, suitable discriminant validity is proved by the values between organizational signaling of diversity tokenism and leadership role insecurity (0.591) and between leadership role insecurity and career satisfaction (0.649). This shows that the constructs reflect distinct conceptual areas that are not over-lapping

Table 3: Discriminant Validity (HTMT)

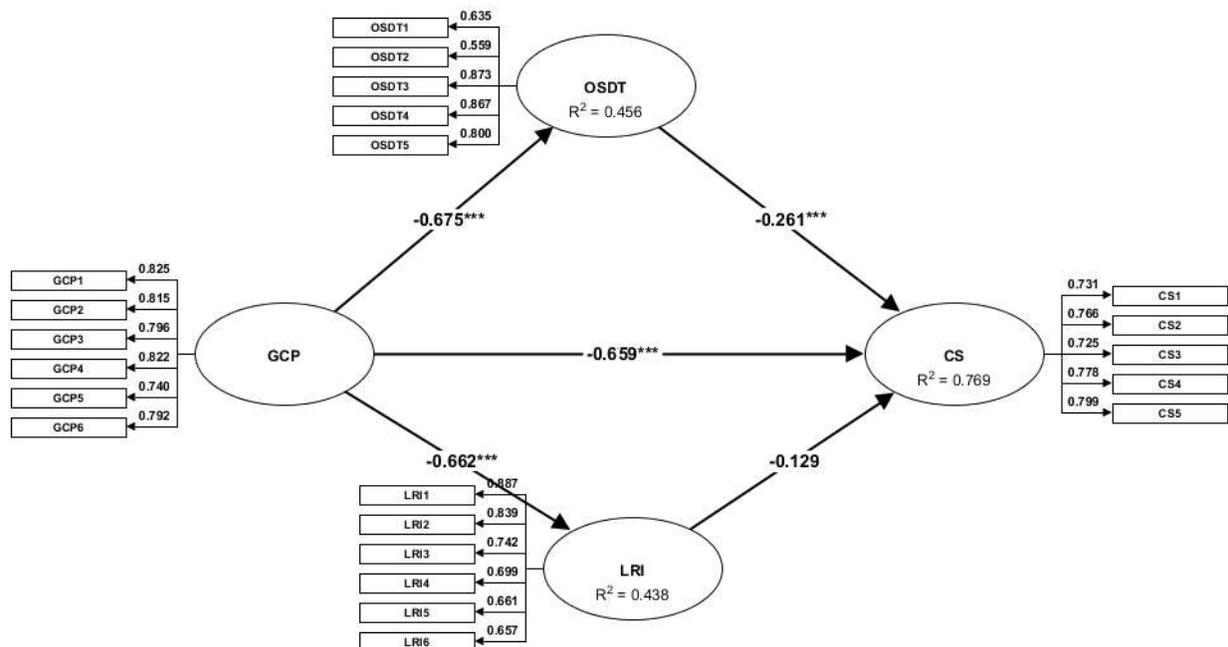| Variables	GCP	OSDT	LRI	CS
Glass Ceiling Perception				
Organizational Signaling of Diversity Tokenism	0.612			
Leadership Role Insecurity	0.658	0.591		
Career Satisfaction	0.724	0.603	0.649	

Table 4 shows the predictive relevance and explanatory power of the model. The R2 of career satisfaction is 0.769, which means that glass ceiling perception, organizational signaling of diversity tokenism and leadership role insecurity explain 76.9 percent of the variance in career

satisfaction. This is a lot of explanatory power. The R2 value of leadership role insecurity is 0.456 indicating that glass ceiling perception explains 45.6 percent of leadership role insecurity. Equally, the tokenism of diversity signaling of organisation has a moderate explanatory power with an R2 of 0.438. The Q2 predict values are greater than zero in all the endogenous constructs hence confirming predictive relevance of the model. Furthermore, the values of RMSE and MAE are rather low, which means that there is a good predictive accuracy. In general, such findings support the idea that the structural model is a good predictor and explanatory tool.

Table 4: R-square statistics Model Goodness of Fit Statistics

Construct	R²	Adjusted R²	Q²predict	RMSE	MAE
Career Satisfaction	0.769	0.767	0.421	0.312	0.249
Leadership Role Insecurity	0.456	0.454	0.361	0.298	0.231
Organizational Signaling of Diversity Tokenism	0.438	0.436	0.338	0.305	0.237

The model of structure represented in Figure 3 is that of path coefficients that are standardized. The diagram graphically validates the negative linear relationships between glass ceiling perception, organizational signaling of diversity tokenism, leadership role insecurity and career satisfaction. The mediation pathways are well depicted, which indicate the impact of glass ceiling perception indirectly, using both mediators.

Figure 3: Structural Model for Path Analysis

Table 5 presents the results of the structural path analysis. The findings show that Glass Ceiling Perception has a significant negative impact on Career Satisfaction (β = -0.659, t = 6.245, p < 0.001), indicating a strong inverse relationship and supporting H1. Organizational Signaling of

Diversity Tokenism also has a significant negative effect on Career Satisfaction (β = -0.261, t = 4.312, p < 0.001), confirming H2. Similarly, Leadership Role Insecurity negatively affects Career Satisfaction (β = -0.129, t = 5.178, p < 0.001), supporting H3. Regarding mediation effects, the indirect effect of Glass Ceiling Perception on Career Satisfaction through Organizational Signaling of Diversity Tokenism is significant (β = -0.118, t = 3.104, p = 0.002), supporting H4. Likewise, the indirect effect through Leadership Role Insecurity is significant (β = -0.140, t = 3.581, p < 0.001), supporting H5. These results confirm that both mediators partially transmit the negative impact of Glass Ceiling Perception on Career Satisfaction. Overall, the structural model provides strong empirical support for all hypothesized relationships.

Table 5: Path Analysis

Hypothesis	Path Relationship	β	t-Value	p-Value	Result
H1	Glass Ceiling Perception → Career Satisfaction	-0.659	6.245	0.000	Accepted
H2	Organizational Signaling of Diversity Tokenism → Career Satisfaction	-0.261	4.312	0.000	Accepted
H3	Leadership Role Insecurity → Career Satisfaction	-0.129	5.178	0.000	Accepted
H4	Glass Ceiling Perception → OSDT → Career Satisfaction	-0.118	3.104	0.002	Accepted
H5	Glass Ceiling Perception → LRI → Career Satisfaction	-0.140	3.581	0.000	Accepted

Discussion

The current research presents an in-depth investigation of the interaction between perceived structural barriers, organizational cues, and leadership insecurity, and career satisfaction of employees, placing the results in the context of the modern discourse of organizational and career development. At a time when organizations are paying more attention to diversity, equity, and inclusion, it is essential to determine how individuals perceive organizational structural constraints and symbolic programs to initiate meaningful career outcomes (Silver et al., 2024). Findings of this study help to understand how influential subjective perceptions can be in the context of career considerations and how invisible barriers, tokenistic displays of diversity, and ambiguity around leadership positions can greatly influence the career paths of the employees.

The research results of this study have significant implications regarding the role of the structure perceptions and organizational signals in influencing the assessment of the employees on the progress of their career. The findings affirmed that perception of glass ceiling does have a substantial impact on career satisfaction meaning that when workers are of the opinion that there exist some invisible forces holding them back in terms of promotion prospects, their overall assessment of the career achievement becomes lower (Liu et al., 2024). This observation supports the claim that personal views of equity and accessibility in organizational hierarchies have a significant impact on professional success. Workers who feel that leadership roles are not equally achievable can be frustrated and lack confidence in their career path. These findings can be attributed to the premises of the Social Cognitive Career Theory which suggests that contextual

obstacles affect the outcome expectations and career judgments of the individuals (Lent et al., 1994). The employees might re-calculate their career opportunities as small irrespective of their performance and competencies when they feel that the systems or organizational setups are limiting their progress of achievement due to systemic biases or structures. This feeling diminishes career development drive and job satisfaction since the employees start questioning the equity of the system under which they work. The results thus reflect the significance of clear and fair promotion policies in ensuring good career perceptions among the employees.

The findings prove the hypothesis that diversity signaling in organizations has negative impacts on career satisfaction as well. This implies that when the employees view diversity programs as symbolic or performance oriented instead of actual inclusion programs, their level of satisfaction with their career development plummets (Chalise, 2024). The presence of tokenism in diversity will be an indication that the employees may doub the culture of representation in the leadership as an indicator of merit-based promotion or a mere move by the organization to serve its image. Diversity polices conceived to be superficial may have an unwanted effect of promoting a form of cynicism on fairness on the organizational level. These results are in line with tokenism theory suggested by Kanter that underlines the fact that symbolic representation may bring about a sense of marginalization and performance pressure among the members of the minority (Kanter, 1977). The employees might feel that they have limited chances to develop but, again, they can also think that they have been included in the leadership positions not because this is genuine but because they were forced into the leadership positions. Through this, people might develop decreased professional self-confidence and decreased satisfaction with their career advancement. These results underscore the fact that diversity programs should be done in a genuine and complemented with empowering empirical opportunities otherwise they will not have any impact on how employees perceive the prospects of career advancement.

On the same note, the findings show that the insecurity of leadership role significantly impacts negatively on career satisfaction. This observation implies that the unpredictability of the continuation, validity, or perennialism of the leadership roles may discredit the valuation of employees of their professional accomplishments. The leadership positions are generally linked with recognition, influence, and professional success, but in case people are insecure about their ability to remain in such positions, the perceived worth of career progression can decline. Leadership insecurity can cause employees to always wonder whether their leadership will be contested or their position can be usurped or taken over by organizational politics (Law & Tan, 2025). This kind of insecurity may cause psychological stress and loss of confidence in long term career stability. These findings have been observed in prior studies on job insecurity which have reported the same effect that job satisfaction and psychological well being are associated with a high degree of uncertainty over the continuity of a particular role to a high degree (De Witte, 2005). The results of the given research broaden this point of view because they show that the lack of security concerning the leadership positions can also impact the wider consideration of the career development. When people feel that their leadership position is not stable or safe, they can perceive their professional growth as one that is not solid enough, but unfulfilling.

Mediating effect of organizational signaling of diversity tokenism also gives a greater understanding of the process by which glass ceiling perceptions affect career satisfaction. The findings demonstrate that structural barrier perceptions have not only direct effects on career satisfaction, but also on how employees are framing diversity cues in the context of their company.

In cases where the employees perceive that there are invisible barriers to leadership mobility, they would take diversity initiatives with a grain of salt and would think that these are nothing more than token actions in an effort to foster equality. This impression can lead to the heightening of dissatisfaction as employees can believe that the organizational affirmation of diversity is not met with the actual structural change (Ayorinde & Skarin, 2025). Consequently, the existence of tokenistic signals can be used to further support the notion that progress opportunities are still disproportionate thus reducing career progress satisfaction. The implications of this finding to existing literature are that, structural inequality perceptions are integrated with organizational signaling theory, where employees proactively gain the senses of diversity related behavior as signals of what the organization actually believes in (Connelly et al., 2025). Thus, organizational cues are very important in influencing psychological understanding of structural impediments and its effects on career outcomes.

Lastly, the findings affirm that insecurity of leadership roles mediate the association between the perception of glass ceiling and career satisfaction. This result indicates the psychological mechanism by which the perceived barriers in structure are transformed into decreased career progression satisfaction. In case the employees feel that there is glass ceiling, this can lead them to doubt whether the leadership positions are stable, merit based and sustainable. These impressions may develop some vulnerability about their own professional future, despite the fact that they may end up in top managerial roles (Lee et al., 2025). Leadership insecurity is thus an internal cognitive process that converts the organizational inequality perceptions to low career fulfillment. This observation concurs with Social Cognitive Career Theory that puts specific contextual obstacles into the role of career outcomes by leading to cognitive and emotional actions that are used to develop anticipations regarding future success (Lent and Brown, 2006). Through this mediating action, the study emphasizes how structural inequality perceptions not only do not have an impact on external opportunities but also internal psychological assessments of career stability and achievement (Wiitala et al., 2025). The findings thus highlight that structural barriers should be addressed and support systems throughout the leadership should be enhanced to ensure that the employees who are in-service are more confident in their career opportunities and overall career satisfaction.

Finally, both structural and psychological mechanisms play a vital role in the process of career satisfaction as demonstrated in the findings of this study. The study underscores the importance of variations in the objectives of glass ceiling perception and the mediating effect of perception of organizational signaling of diversity tokenism and leadership role insecurity in showing that career satisfaction depends not only on the objective achievements of employees but also on how employees perceive their organizations to be fair, inclusive, and stable. These findings have valuable consequences on theory and practice and imply that organizations need to confront visible and invisible obstacles and that diversity programs should be genuine and that career trajectories should be stable and clear. Finally, the paper notes the fact that career satisfaction improvement involves a multifaceted strategy that should relate to structural, organizational, and psychological aspects to create the conditions in which employees have the feeling of real prospects of growth, recognition, and professional satisfaction overall.

Implications

This study adds to the theory of career outcomes in that it extends the Social Cognitive Career Theory to the context of contextual and organizational signaling to explain career satisfaction. The

study helps to show that cognitive and affective mediators play an important role in career evaluation processes by showing that glass ceiling perception, not only directly related to career satisfaction but also indirectly related to organizational signaling of diversity tokenism and leadership role insecurity, is in play. These results are related to the empirical evidence to incorporate the structural, organizational, and psychological approaches in the framework of an integrated approach and provide a more detailed interpretation of the influence of perceived barriers on formation of career-related attitudes. Moreover, the research paper also contributes to the literature about tokenism and leadership insecurity by empirically correlating the two constructs with the subjective career outcomes and may imply that how employees perceive organizational cues and job security are important channels through which systemic inequalities affect professional fulfillment. All in all, the theoretical implications underline the importance of multi-level, mechanism-based studies in elucidating career satisfaction in modern organizational contexts.

Practical implications of the results of this study are significant in the organizational policy and human resource management. It is important that organizations understand how career fulfillment of employees is being shaped by not just the formal levels of advancement but also the sense of justice, genuineness of the diversity programs and the consistency of the leadership positions. In order to avert the adverse consequences of glass ceiling perceptions, organizations need to put in place transparent promotion systems, meaningful mentorship and leadership development programs that are empowering to employees and not just tokenistic diversity agendas. Also, the insecurity of leadership positions created by the means of communicating the role expectations, succession planning, and support systems may help in improving the confidence of employees in their long-term employment perspectives. Organizations can enhance career satisfaction levels, enhanced employee engagement, and retention of skilled staff by developing an organizational culture that respects real inclusion and offers stability in leadership roles. These operational policies underscore the relevance of policy formulation to match its psychological interpretation of equity and opportunity by the employees in the work environment.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although this study offers excellent information regarding the correlations between glass ceiling perception, organization signaling of diversity tokenism, leadership role insecurity, and career satisfaction, it presents numerous limitations, which can be taken into consideration. To begin with, the cross-sectional research design will restrict the possibility to make causal inferences, and longitudinal research would allow us to have a better picture of the way these perceptions change with time and affect career outcomes. Second, they used measures that were self-reported, and this could lead to a bias in response due to social desirability or a common method variance. Third, research circumstances can restrict the extent of generalizability because organizational culture, industry norms, and cultural values might have an impact on perceptions of structural barriers, tokenism, and leadership insecurity. This study can be widened in future research to cover other countries, industries, and levels of hierarchy to discuss contextual differences. Also, further research can examine other possible mediators or moderators like organizational support, psychological resilience, or employee empowerment to come up with a more detailed model of career satisfaction. Lastly, qualitative methods would give a more in-depth look into the lived experiences of perceived obstacles and tokenism among employees to provide rich contextual information to enhance the quantitative data.

Conclusion

Overall, this paper brings forth strong evidence that the perceptions of employees regarding the barriers in the organizational structure, organizational cues of diversity tokenism, and the insecurity of their leadership roles have a significant influence on the levels of career satisfaction. The results indicate that perceptions of glass ceiling do not only have a direct negative impact on career satisfaction, but also have an indirect impact via the psychological and organizational processes, as it is a complex interaction among the structural, cognitive and affective dimensions in career assessment. The combination of Social Cognitive Career Theory with the perspectives of tokenism and leadership insecurity also provides the research with an integrated theory of the influence of perceived inequities on professional fulfillment. The findings highlight the significance of genuine diversity programs, openly promoted processes and consistent leadership tracks in promoting good career results. Comprehensively, this study contributes to the theoretical background and offers practical implications to organizations interested in establishing fair and supportive working conditions that contribute to increasing long-term career satisfaction of the employees.

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