Blueprint Academic Publishers

Journal of Business, Economics and Management Research Studies
Journal ISSN: 3005-2173
4(3)
Received: October 06, 2026
Accepted: November 04, 2026
Published: November 12, 2026

Turning Perceived Ethnic Diversity into Strategic Performance: The Moderating Role of Inclusive Leadership in Kajiado County Government, Kenya

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Abstract

Public organizations in ethnically plural societies are expected to draw on the local knowledge and community ties of a diverse workforce, yet evidence that ethnic diversity improves public-sector performance remains inconsistent. Drawing on Social Identity Theory and Inclusive Leadership Theory, and using the Balanced Scorecard to define the outcome, this study examined whether inclusive leadership moderates the relationship between employees' perceptions of ethnic diversity and their perceptions of strategic performance in the County Government of Kajiado, Kenya. Perceived ethnic diversity captured employees' experience of ethnic representation, respect, voice, collaboration and fairness rather than the actual ethnic composition of the workforce; perceived strategic performance captured ratings of timely implementation of priorities, budget utilization and service-delivery quality. A cross-sectional survey of a proportionate stratified random sample of 361 employees yielded 264 usable questionnaires (73.1%). Hierarchical moderated regression following Baron and Kenny (1986) showed that, after controlling for organizational age and size, perceived ethnic diversity was positively associated with perceived strategic performance ($B = 0.319$, $p < .001$, $\Delta R^2 = .143$). The ethnic diversity × inclusive leadership interaction was positive ($B = 0.223$, 95% CI [0.160, 0.286]) and explained an additional 10.9% of variance (final $R^2 = .422$). Simple-slope analysis showed that the association was virtually nil at low inclusive leadership ($B = 0.018$) but became progressively stronger at mean ($B = 0.285$) and high ($B = 0.552$) levels. Because the data are cross-sectional and self-reported, the findings indicate association rather than causation. County public service boards should complement statutory representation rules with the deliberate development and appraisal of inclusive supervisory practice.

Keywords: Perceived Ethnic Diversity; Inclusive Leadership; Strategic Performance; Kajiado County Government; Moderated Regression; Kenya

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Funding: The author received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article
Data Availability Statement: The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article [and/or] its supplementary materials or upon reasonable request.

Competing interests: The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

1. Introduction

Kenya's county governments are judged on their ability to convert plans and budgets into completed programmes and reliable services. Kajiado County illustrates the difficulty. In the 2023/2024 financial year the county collected KSh 9.14 billion against a target of KSh 11.59 billion, absorbed 74% of its total budget and only 58% of its development budget, and it projects a resource gap of about KSh 7.7 billion for 2025/2026 (County Government of Kajiado, 2025). Low development absorption is, in part, an implementation problem: planned projects are not started, completed or paid for on time. This study focuses on that problem, which it terms strategic performance: the extent to which the county implements its priorities on time, uses its budget as planned and delivers services that are reliable and of acceptable quality. Fiscal constraints have many causes; they are presented here as context for the outcome studied, not as evidence that ethnic diversity affects performance.

The people who implement county priorities are a diverse workforce serving diverse communities. Employees from different ethnic communities can bring local knowledge, social networks and perspectives that help public institutions understand heterogeneous populations (Ding & Riccucci, 2023). In planning, this knowledge may improve the identification of community needs; in coordination, cross-group ties may speed up the resolution of implementation problems; and in service delivery, employees who share a community's language and norms may improve access and trust. The same differences, however, can activate in-group and out-group boundaries that weaken trust, restrict information flows and complicate coordination (Stahl & Maznevski, 2021; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). These mechanisms depend on how employees experience diversity at work, which is not the same as the demographic composition of the workforce. This study measures the former: employees' perceptions of ethnic representation and inclusion.

Ethnic diversity is particularly relevant in Kajiado. The county combines pastoralist, agricultural, peri-urban and urban communities, and its workforce and residents span several ethnic groups. Devolution was itself intended partly to diffuse ethnic tensions, although it has also created new local controversies over the distribution of county resources and jobs (Cheeseman et al., 2016). Kenyan law therefore sets explicit composition rules for county public services: the National Cohesion and Integration Act requires that no public establishment have more than one-third of its staff from the same ethnic community (Republic of Kenya, 2008, s. 7(2)), and the County

Governments Act requires that at least 30% of vacant entry-level posts be filled by candidates who are not from the dominant ethnic community in the county (Republic of Kenya, 2012, s. 65(1)(e)). In its 2023 ethnic and diversity audit of the county public service, the National Cohesion and Integration Commission found that only 13 of Kenya's 47 counties complied with the statutory ethnic-composition requirement; Kajiado was among the 34 non-compliant counties (National Cohesion and Integration Commission [NCIC], 2023). Compliance with composition rules, however, says little about whether employees from different communities are respected, heard and given fair opportunities once employed, which is the dimension examined here.

Existing evidence leaves three gaps. First, evidence from county governments is limited. Kenyan studies of ethnic diversity have mainly examined universities, hospitals, museums, constitutional commissions and faith-based organizations (Kalei & Matelong, 2021; Lemunen et al., 2020; Mande et al., 2020; Muange & Kiptoo, 2020; Nguta & Omuya, 2024; Ochieng & Kamau, 2024), while the county-government studies identified examined socio-cognitive or gender diversity rather than ethnic diversity (Chepkemoi et al., 2022; Kamweru et al., 2023). Meta-analytic syntheses of diversity and performance draw predominantly on studies from Western and private-sector settings (Ding & Riccucci, 2023; Wallrich et al., 2024). Second, evidence on inclusive leadership as a moderator of the diversity–performance relationship is limited and mixed (Ashikali et al., 2021; Jerónimo et al., 2021; Turi et al., 2022), and none of the studies reviewed tested it in an African sub-national government. Third, most Kenyan studies link diversity to individual employee performance rather than to the organization's strategic performance. Because the evidence base reviewed here is not exhaustive, these gaps are stated with respect to the studies identified rather than as claims that no such study exists.

The study therefore addresses the following research question: Is employees' perception of ethnic diversity associated with their perception of the county government's strategic performance, and does that association differ across levels of perceived inclusive leadership? It contributes by examining perceived ethnic diversity as a distinct dimension rather than folding it into a broad diversity index, by linking it to perceived organizational-level performance rather than individual task performance, and by providing moderation evidence from a devolved government in sub-Saharan Africa.

2. Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

2.1 Theoretical foundations

Two theories explain the relationships tested, and a third framework defines the outcome. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and Self-Categorization Theory (Turner et al., 1987) explain how people classify themselves and others into social groups and tend to favour members of their own group. Ethnicity is a salient category in Kenyan workplaces, so ethnic boundaries may shape whom employees trust, consult and cooperate with. The theory does not predict that diversity is always harmful: its consequences depend on how salient group boundaries become and on the norms that govern interaction (van Knippenberg et al., 2004). Social Identity Theory therefore explains why ethnic diversity can either divide a workforce or supply complementary

knowledge, but it does not say which outcome will occur.

Inclusive Leadership Theory identifies the leader behaviours that may tip this balance. Nembhard and Edmondson (2006) described leader inclusiveness as words and actions that invite and appreciate contributions across status differences, Carmeli et al. (2010) emphasised openness, accessibility and availability, and Randel et al. (2018) integrated these ideas around employees' needs for belongingness and for being valued for their uniqueness (see also Shore et al., 2011; Korkmaz et al., 2022). The two theories work together: Social Identity Theory explains how ethnic boundaries may shape interaction, and Inclusive Leadership Theory explains how supervisors may change that interaction. The proposed mechanism is that inclusive supervisors enable cross-group voice, information sharing and collaboration (Homan et al., 2020; van Knippenberg & van Ginkel, 2021). These mechanisms were not measured in this study; they are offered as the theoretical rationale for the moderation hypothesis. Inclusive leadership is also not assumed to eliminate intergroup tension: employees may perceive their supervisor as inclusive while institutional inequalities and unequal access to opportunities remain.

The Balanced Scorecard (Kaplan & Norton, 1992, 1996) plays a different role. It is a performance-management framework rather than an explanatory theory, and it is used here only to define and structure the dependent variable. It treats performance as multidimensional and, in public organizations, is adapted to mission, accountability and citizen value (Gomes & Azevedo, 2025). Three of its perspectives informed the 15 performance items: the internal-process perspective (timely implementation of county priorities), the financial-stewardship perspective (budget utilization) and the customer or citizen perspective (service-delivery quality and reliability). These dimensions correspond to the implementation, absorption and service obligations through which county governments are held accountable under their integrated development plans (County Government of Kajiado, 2023).

2.2 Perceived ethnic diversity and perceived strategic performance

Evidence on ethnic diversity and performance differs systematically by how diversity and performance are measured. A first group of Kenyan studies used surveys in which respondents rated their experience of ethnic diversity, and most linked it to individual employee performance. These studies, conducted in public universities (Mande et al., 2020; Muange & Kiptoo, 2020), the National Museums of Kenya (Nguta & Omuya, 2024) and constitutional commissions (Lemunen et al., 2020), generally report positive associations. Fewer survey studies examined team or organizational outcomes: Kalei and Matelong (2021) reported a positive association with team performance at Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital, and Ochieng and Kamau (2024) a positive association with the organizational performance of faith-based organizations (r = .707). Survey evidence from Nepal (Lama et al., 2025) and Bangladesh (Roy, 2022) points the same way. Because these studies typically measure perceived diversity and performance with the same instrument, their positive results may partly reflect a general favourable climate and shared method variance rather than the effect of workforce composition itself.

A second group measured actual ethnic composition and objective output, and its findings are less favourable. In a Kenyan flower-processing plant, Hjort (2014) found that workers under-supplied co-workers from rival ethnic

groups, reducing output; the losses rose after the 2007–2008 post-election violence and fell when the firm introduced team pay. In a field experiment in a Kenyan organization, Marx et al. (2021) found that ethnic diversity among teammates reduced team performance, whereas ethnic difference between teammates and their supervisor often improved it. Read analytically, these studies suggest three conditions that shape the effect of composition: incentives (whether pay rewards cooperation across groups), intergroup relations (whether political events heighten ethnic salience) and supervision (whether the supervisor's position reduces favouritism). Other studies report null or indirect effects on employee or organizational performance (Mehari et al., 2024; Tjimuku & Atiku, 2024), and meta-analyses find small and highly context-dependent average effects (Ding & Riccucci, 2023; Wallrich et al., 2024).

Findings from universities, hospitals, museums and faith-based organizations may transfer to a county government only in part. These organizations share features with county administrations, including ethnically mixed staff, hierarchical supervision and public or community mandates, but county governments also operate under political leadership, devolved budgets and statutory composition rules. Survey-based studies also differ from the present study in their outcome: most rated individual performance, whereas this study asks employees to rate the county government's performance. With these differences in mind, and because the construct measured here combines perceived representation with perceived fair and respectful treatment across groups, the study expected a positive association, tested against the following null hypothesis:

H_{01}: *Perceived ethnic diversity has no statistically significant association with perceived strategic performance.*

2.3 The moderating role of inclusive leadership

The central argument of this study is that inclusive leadership changes how perceived ethnic diversity relates to performance. Social Identity Theory implies that the same diversity can yield complementary knowledge or subgroup division depending on interaction norms. Inclusive supervisors shape those norms through observable processes: they invite participation from employees of all communities, share information fairly, make it psychologically safe to raise concerns and give equitable access to decision-making and development opportunities (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006; Randel et al., 2018). Where these processes are present, employees who experience their workplace as ethnically diverse and fair are more likely to contribute community knowledge to planning and to coordinate across groups when implementation problems arise. Where they are absent, the same diversity may remain unused, or may be expressed through cautious, within-group communication, so the association with performance may be neutral or even negative.

Empirical evidence must be read with a distinction in mind. Several studies show that inclusive leadership improves employee outcomes directly: Naseer et al. (2023) found that it improved performance-related behaviour through insider status, Orekoya (2023) that it improved team climate in Nigerian manufacturing teams, and Mulinge (2017) that leadership commitment to inclusion was positively related to staff performance in Kenyan public universities. These are direct effects. Fewer studies test moderation of a

diversity–outcome relationship, and their results are mixed. Ashikali et al. (2021) found that inclusive leadership buffered the negative relationship between ethnic-cultural diversity and inclusive climate in Dutch public-sector teams, and Kanya and Johan (2025) linked inclusive leadership and ethnic diversity to coordination in Indonesian university teams. By contrast, Jerónimo et al. (2021) found no moderating effect of inclusive leadership on the link between diversity practices and engagement, and Turi et al. (2022) found that diversity beliefs did not moderate the diversity–performance relationship. Among the studies reviewed, none tested this moderation for perceived organizational performance in an African sub-national government.

The study therefore predicted a positive interaction: the association between perceived ethnic diversity and perceived strategic performance becomes more positive as inclusive leadership increases. On the study's 1–5 scales, a positive interaction coefficient means that each one-point increase in inclusive leadership increases the slope of perceived strategic performance on perceived ethnic diversity by the value of the coefficient. The theory allows the slope to be weak, null or negative at low levels of inclusive leadership. The corresponding null hypothesis was:

H_{02}: *Inclusive leadership does not significantly moderate the relationship between perceived ethnic diversity and perceived strategic performance.*

2.4 Conceptual framework

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework.

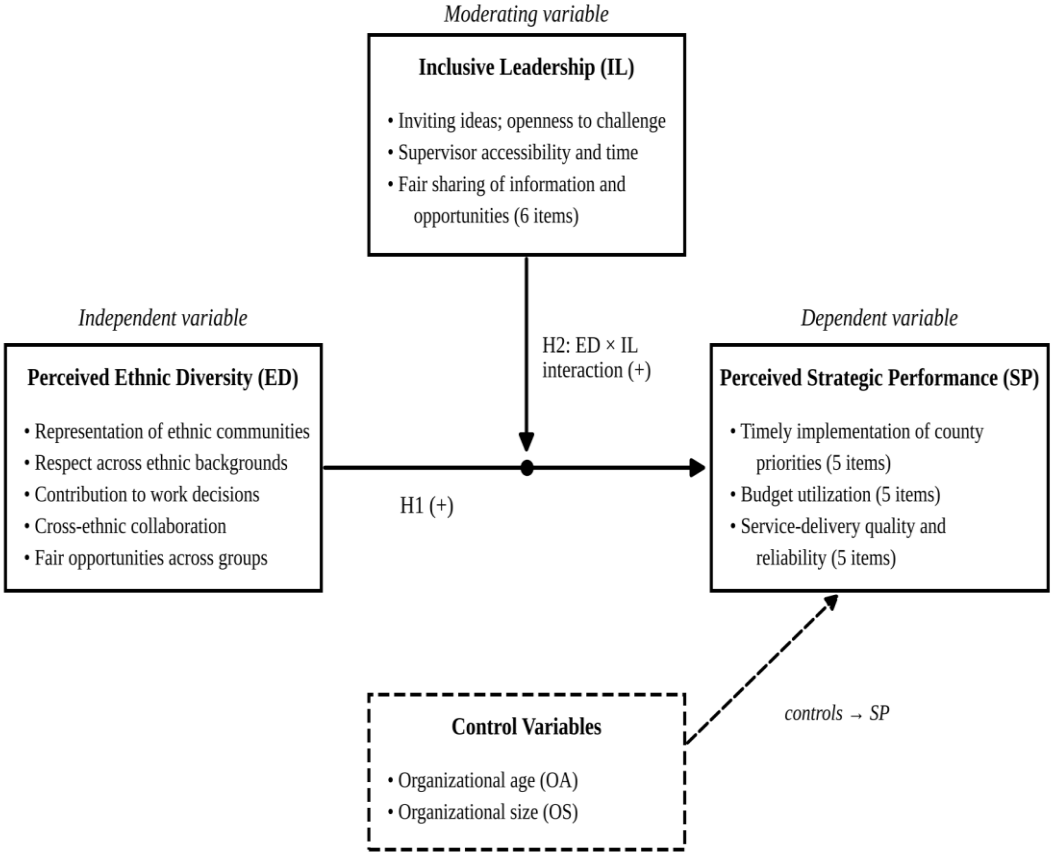


Figure 1.Conceptual Framework
Source: Researcher (2026).

Social Identity Theory supplies the predictor–outcome path (H_{01}), Inclusive Leadership Theory supplies the moderator, and the Balanced Scorecard supplies the three outcome dimensions. Perceived ethnic diversity (ED) is the predictor, perceived strategic performance (SP) is the outcome and inclusive leadership (IL) is the moderator. The moderating effect (H_{02}) is represented statistically by the ED × IL interaction term, shown as an arrow meeting the ED–SP path. Organizational age (OA) and organizational size (OS) are control variables with paths directed to SP, as specified in the regression models in Section 3.6.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design and population

This study used an explanatory cross-sectional survey design to test structural relationships and moderation effects (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Saunders et al., 2023), with data collected from March to May 2026. The target population comprised 3,679 active County Government of Kajiado employees enrolled in the performance-management system (County Government of Kajiado, 2025). Using an authorized, de-identified HR roll as the sampling frame, political office holders, contractors, interns with less than three months' service, and employees absent during fieldwork were excluded.

3.2 Sampling and sample size

Using Yamane's (1967) formula at a 5% margin of error, a sample size of 361 was calculated. Proportionate stratified random sampling ensured representation across five cadres: senior management and chief officers, middle-level managers and departmental heads, professional and technical staff, administrative and clerical staff, and operational and support staff. Respondents were selected via simple random sampling within each stratum in proportion to its population share.

3.3 Data collection, ethics and response

Data were collected via anonymous self-administered paper (sealed envelopes) and electronic questionnaires. Due to topic sensitivity, ethnicity, religion, and first language were not collected, and findings are reported in aggregate. Ethical clearance was granted by the Institutional Research and Ethics Committee (IREC), NACOSTI (Licence No. 610842), and the County Government of Kajiado. Participation was voluntary with informed consent, adhering to the Data Protection Act (Republic of Kenya, 2019). Of 361 distributed questionnaires, 298 were returned (82.5%), and screening removed 34 incomplete or inconsistent responses, yielding 264 usable cases (73.1% effective response rate) with zero missing data on study variables.

3.4 Measurement of study variables

All constructs were measured on 5-point Likert scales (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*) and averaged into composite scores, where higher values indicate stronger levels of each construct. Perceived ethnic diversity was assessed with five pilot-tested items covering workplace ethnic representation, respect, voice, cross-ethnic collaboration, and fairness, while inclusive leadership was measured with six items adapted from Carmeli et al. (2010) and Ashikali et al. (2021) capturing supervisor openness, accessibility, participation support, and fairness. Perceived strategic performance was measured using 15 items across priority implementation, budget utilization, and service-delivery quality combined into a single composite score, and organizational size and age were

included as control variables measured on 5-category ordinal scales.

3.5 Reliability and validity

The scales showed excellent internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .962 to .974 (Table 1). Construct validity was assessed with exploratory factor analysis of the 26 items. Sampling adequacy was excellent (KMO = .945; Kaiser, 1974), and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant, $\chi^2(325) = 9{,}378.54$, $p < .001$.

Table 1. *Reliability Statistics*

Variable	Cronbach's α	No. of items
Perceived strategic performance	.962	15
Perceived ethnic diversity	.972	5
Inclusive leadership	.974	6

Table 2. Sampling Adequacy, Rotated Component Loadings and Variance Explained for the Study Constructs (N = 264)

Factor	Construct	Items	Factor loading range	Eigenvalue	Variance (%)	Cumulative (%)
1	Inclusive leadership (IL)	6	.914–.937	5.398	20.76	20.76
2	Perceived ethnic diversity (ED)	5	.905–.931	4.615	17.75	38.51
3	Service-delivery quality and reliability (SQ)	5	.836–.864	4.452	17.12	55.63
4	Budget utilization (BU)	5	.818–.855	4.343	16.70	72.34
5	Timely implementation of priorities (TI)	5	.815–.863	4.340	16.69	89.03

Note: KMO = .945; Bartlett's $\chi^2(325) = 9{,}378.54$, $p < .001$. Total variance explained = 89.03%.

3.6 Data analysis

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 26. First, data were screened for completeness, outliers and distributional properties, with normality assessed using skewness and kurtosis thresholds of |2| and |7|, respectively (West et al., 1995). Second, descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and Pearson correlation coefficients were computed. Third, OLS regression assumptions, including residual normality, linearity, homoscedasticity and multicollinearity, were examined using diagnostic plots, standardized residuals, tolerance and VIF statistics (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019; Field, 2018; Hair et al., 2019).

Finally, hierarchical moderated multiple regression was used to test the hypotheses following Baron and Kenny (1986). Four nested models were estimated:

Model 1 (control model). The control variables were entered first to establish a baseline:

$$SP_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 OA_i + \beta_2 OS_i + \varepsilon_i \quad (1)$$

Model 2 (direct-effect model). Perceived ethnic diversity was added to test H_{01}. H_{01} was rejected if β_3 was statistically

significant and Model 2 explained significantly more variance than Model 1:

$$SP_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 OA_i + \beta_2 OS_i + \beta_3 ED_i + \varepsilon_i \quad (2)$$

Model 3 (moderator main-effect model). Inclusive leadership was added to estimate its first-order association with the outcome and to provide the comparison model for the interaction test:

$$SP_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 OA_i + \beta_2 OS_i + \beta_3 ED_i + \beta_4 IL_i + \varepsilon_i \quad (3)$$

Model 4 (interaction model). The product of perceived ethnic diversity and inclusive leadership was added to test H_{02}:

$$SP_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 OA_i + \beta_2 OS_i + \beta_3 ED_i + \beta_4 IL_i + \beta_5 (ED_i \times IL_i) + \varepsilon_i \quad (4)$$

where SP_i is the perceived strategic performance reported by respondent i; OA_i and OS_i are organizational age and organizational size, entered as numeric scores (1–5); ED_i is perceived ethnic diversity; IL_i is inclusive leadership; $ED_i \times IL_i$ is the interaction term; β_0 is the intercept; β_1–β_5 are unstandardized regression coefficients; and ε_i is the random error term, assumed to be independently and normally distributed with constant variance.

H_{02} was rejected if β_5 was statistically significant, its 95% confidence interval excluded zero, and Model 4 explained significantly more variance than Model 3. In Baron and Kenny's (1986) terms, moderation is present when the interaction between the predictor and the moderator is significant after both have been controlled for, irrespective of the significance of their first-order effects. Differentiating Equation 4 with respect to ED shows that the slope of SP on ED is not a single constant but a linear function of the moderator:

$$\frac{\partial SP}{\partial ED} = \beta_3 + \beta_5 IL \quad (5)$$

Equation 5 was used to probe the significant interaction through simple-slope analysis (Aiken & West, 1991; Dawson, 2014). Simple slopes of ED on SP were computed from the Model 4 coefficients at low (one standard deviation below the mean; IL = 1.82), mean (IL = 3.01) and high (one standard deviation above the mean; IL = 4.21) levels of inclusive leadership. Predicted values of SP were then plotted at one standard deviation below and above the mean of ED, holding the control variables at their means. Effect size for the interaction was expressed as Cohen's $f^2 = \Delta R^2 / (1 - R^2)$, where R^2 is that of Model 4, interpreted against benchmarks of .02 (small), .15 (medium) and .35 (large) (Cohen, 1988). Inference was based on two-tailed tests at $\alpha = .05$.

ED and IL were entered in their original 1–5 metric rather than mean-centred. Centring does not alter the interaction coefficient, its significance test or overall model fit (Aiken & West, 1991; Dawson, 2014). In the uncentred model, however, the lower-order coefficients β_3 and β_4 in Model 4 represent the effect of each variable when the other equals zero, a value outside the observed range. They are therefore not interpreted as main effects. The substantively meaningful effect of ED at the mean of IL (3.01) can be recovered from Equation 5 as −0.387 + 0.223 × 3.01 = 0.285, which is the simple slope at the mean of inclusive leadership reported in Table 7.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive statistics

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics. Mean scores clustered around the scale midpoint, ranging from 2.96 (*SD* = 1.00) for perceived strategic performance to 3.03 (*SD* = 1.21) for organizational age, indicating moderate

ratings with reasonable variability across all constructs. Skewness ranged from −0.017 to 0.199, so the distributions were approximately symmetric. Kurtosis ranged from −1.111 to −0.792, indicating slightly flatter-than-normal (platykurtic) distributions, which is typical of Likert-type composites. All values fell well within the thresholds of ±2 for skewness and ±7 for kurtosis (West et al., 1995), so the variables were judged suitable for parametric analysis.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for the Study Variables (N = 264)

Variable	*M*	*SD*	Skewness	Kurtosis
Perceived strategic performance	2.96	1.00	0.199	−0.792
Organizational age	3.03	1.21	−0.017	−1.104
Organizational size	3.00	1.24	0.014	−1.111
Perceived ethnic diversity	2.99	1.21	0.097	−1.041
Inclusive leadership	3.01	1.20	−0.002	−1.017

4.2 Correlation analysis

Table 4 reports the Pearson correlations. Perceived ethnic diversity had a moderate positive correlation with perceived strategic performance (r = .435, p < .01): employees who perceived their work environment as more ethnically representative and fair also rated the county government's performance more favourably. Inclusive leadership was also positively correlated with perceived strategic performance (r = .324, p < .01). Both control variables were positively correlated with the outcome (organizational age, r = .217; organizational size, r = .286; both p < .01), which justified their inclusion as controls.

The correlation between perceived ethnic diversity and inclusive leadership was positive but weak (r = .165, p < .01), indicating that the two constructs are related but distinct. Perceived ethnic diversity was weakly correlated with organizational age (r = .133, p < .05) and organizational size (r = .146, p < .05), and inclusive leadership was weakly correlated with organizational size (r = .140, p < .05) but not with organizational age (r = .047, p > .05). No correlation among the predictors exceeded .17, so multicollinearity was not a concern.

Table 4. Pearson Correlation Matrix (N = 264)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Perceived strategic performance	1				
2. Organizational age	.217**	1			
3. Organizational size	.286**	.106	1		
4. Perceived ethnic diversity	.435**	.133*	.146*	1	
5. Inclusive leadership	.324**	.047	.140*	.165**	1

Note. * p < .05. ** p < .01 (two-tailed).

4.3 Regression diagnostics

Regression diagnostics indicated that the data met the main OLS assumptions. The histogram and P–P plot showed approximately normal residuals, with no standardized residual exceeding ±3.29 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). The residual scatterplot showed no systematic pattern, supporting linearity and homoscedasticity (Field, 2018; Hair et

al., 2019). Tolerance values ranged from .945 to .974, while VIF values ranged from 1.026 to 1.059, indicating no multicollinearity concerns (Hair et al., 2019). Although the interaction term may correlate with its components in an uncentred model, this does not affect the interaction coefficient's significance test (Aiken & West, 1991; Dawson, 2014). Overall, the results confirmed the suitability of the data for hierarchical OLS regression.

4.4 Regression analysis

Table 6 summarizes the four hierarchical models. In Model 1, the control variables explained 11.7% of the variance in perceived strategic performance, R^2 = .117, $F(2, 261) = 17.31$, $p < .001$; both organizational age (B = 0.156, p = .001) and organizational size (B = 0.216, $p < .001$) were positively associated with the outcome.

Table 6. Hierarchical Regression Results for the Moderating Effect of Inclusive Leadership on the Relationship between Perceived Ethnic Diversity and Perceived Strategic Performance (N = 264*)*

Variable	Model 1 *B* (*p*)	Model 2 *B* (*p*)	Model 3 *B* (*p*)	Model 4 *B* (*p*)
(Constant)	1.834 (< .001)	1.120 (< .001)	0.689 (.003)	2.572 (< .001)
Control variables				
Organizational age	0.156 (.001)	0.118 (.009)	0.115 (.008)	0.148 (< .001)
Organizational size	0.216 (< .001)	0.174 (< .001)	0.152 (< .001)	0.157 (< .001)
Predictor				
Perceived ethnic diversity (ED)		0.319 (< .001)	0.291 (< .001)	−0.387 (< .001)
Moderator				
Inclusive leadership (IL)			0.196 (< .001)	−0.479 (< .001)
Interaction				
ED × IL				0.223 (< .001)
Model summary				
R	.342	.510	.559	.649
R^2	.117	.260	.312	.422
Adjusted R^2	.110	.251	.302	.410
ΔR^2	.117	.143	.052	.109
F change	17.314**	50.185**	19.716**	48.741**
df (*F* change)	2, 261	1, 260	1, 259	1, 258
F (model)	17.314**	30.446**	29.407**	37.611**
SE of the estimate	.947	.868	.839	.771

Adding perceived ethnic diversity in Model 2 increased the explained variance to 26.0%, ΔR^2 = .143, $F_{change}(1, 260) = 50.19$, $p < .001$. Perceived ethnic diversity was positively associated with perceived strategic performance (B = 0.319, $p < .001$): holding the controls constant, a one-point increase in perceived ethnic diversity was associated with a 0.32-point increase in perceived strategic performance. H_{01} was therefore rejected.

Adding inclusive leadership in Model 3 explained a further 5.2% of the variance, ΔR^2 = .052, $F_{change}(1, 259)$ = 19.72, p < .001, R^2 = .312. Inclusive leadership was positively associated with the outcome (B = 0.196, p < .001), and the coefficient for perceived ethnic diversity remained positive and significant (B = 0.291, p < .001), indicating that the two predictors make distinct contributions.

The interaction term entered in Model 4 was positive and significant, B = 0.223, 95% CI [0.160, 0.286], p < .001, and increased the explained variance from 31.2% to 42.2%, ΔR^2 = .109, $F_{change}(1, 258)$ = 48.74, p < .001. The final model was significant, R^2 = .422, adjusted R^2 = .410, $F(5, 258)$ = 37.61, p < .001. The effect size of the interaction was f^2 = .19, a medium effect (Cohen, 1988). H_{02} was therefore rejected. As explained in Section 3.6, the negative lower-order coefficients of ED and IL in Model 4 refer to the effect of each variable when the other equals zero, outside the observed range, and are not interpreted as main effects

4.5 Probing the interaction

Following Aiken and West (1991), the significant interaction was probed by computing simple slopes of perceived ethnic diversity from the Model 4 coefficients at low (−1 *SD*) and high (+1 *SD*) inclusive leadership, and by plotting predicted strategic performance at low and high ethnic diversity (Table 7; Figure 1).

At low inclusive leadership, the line is essentially flat. The simple slope of perceived ethnic diversity was close to zero (B = 0.018), and predicted performance barely changed between low and high ethnic diversity (2.65 vs. 2.70). Where supervisors were seen as non-inclusive, ethnic diversity made virtually no difference to perceived performance.

At high inclusive leadership, the line rises steeply. The simple slope was strongly positive (B = 0.552), and predicted performance rose from 2.46 at low ethnic diversity to 3.80 at high ethnic diversity. At the mean of inclusive leadership, the slope fell in between (B = 0.285).

The interaction is therefore enhancing in direction: inclusive leadership strengthens the positive relationship between perceived ethnic diversity and perceived strategic performance. In form it is disordinal (crossover), because the two lines intersect within the observed range of ethnic diversity (at approximately ED = 2.15). At low ethnic diversity, respondents reporting highly inclusive supervisors rated performance slightly lower than those reporting less inclusive supervisors (2.46 vs. 2.65). At high ethnic diversity, the order reverses and the gap widens substantially (3.80 vs. 2.70). In short, perceived ethnic diversity is associated with higher perceived performance only when it is accompanied by inclusive leadership.

Table 7. *Simple Slopes of Perceived Ethnic Diversity on Perceived Strategic Performance at Levels of Inclusive Leadership*

Level of inclusive leadership	IL value	Simple slope (*B*)	Predicted SP at low ED	Predicted SP at high ED
Low (−1 *SD*)	1.82	0.018	2.65	2.70
Mean	3.01	0.285	2.56	3.25
High (+1 *SD*)	4.21	0.552	2.46	3.80

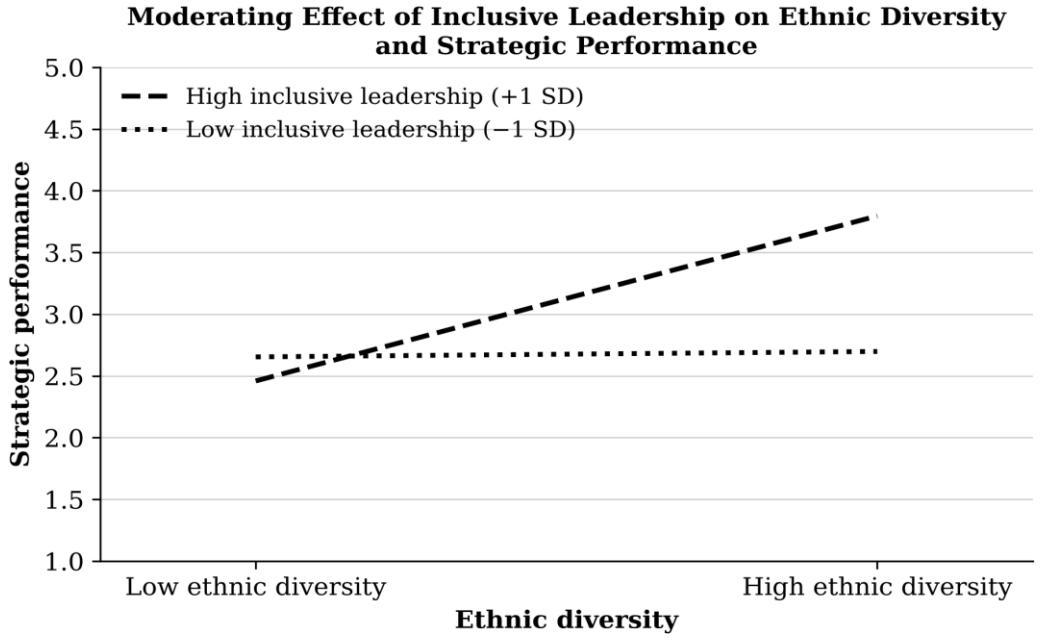


Figure 1. Moderating Effect of Inclusive Leadership on the Relationship between Ethnic Diversity and Strategic Performance

5. Discussion

5.1 Perceived ethnic diversity and perceived strategic performance

The rejection of H_{01} shows that employees who experienced their workplace as ethnically representative, respectful and fair rated the county government as more effective, with perceived ethnic diversity explaining 14.3% of the variance in perceived strategic performance beyond the controls. This is consistent with Kenyan survey evidence (Kalei & Matelong, 2021; Lemunen et al., 2020; Mande et al., 2020; Nguta & Omuya, 2024; Ochieng & Kamau, 2024) and with public-sector research linking perceived diversity management and inclusion to perceived organizational performance (Choi & Rainey, 2010; Sabharwal, 2014). Studies of actual ethnic composition in Kenya report less favourable effects (Hjort, 2014; Marx et al., 2021). The difference is plausibly one of construct: the measure used here captures inclusion, namely fair treatment and voice across groups, rather than demographic heterogeneity (Shore et al., 2011). What appears to matter is not only whether different communities are present but whether they are respected and able to contribute.

5.2 The moderating role of inclusive leadership

The rejection of H_{02} is the study's central finding. The interaction explained a further 10.9% of variance (f^2 = .19). Under low inclusive leadership, perceived ethnic diversity had no association with perceived performance; under high inclusive leadership, the association was strong and positive. This supports the Social Identity Theory argument that diversity has no fixed consequence and that interaction norms decide whether it divides or enriches a workforce (van Knippenberg et al., 2004). Inclusive supervisors supply those norms by inviting contributions, sharing information fairly and allocating opportunities equitably (Randel et al., 2018). The result agrees with evidence

that inclusive leadership, inclusive management and diversity climate strengthen diversity–outcome relationships in public organizations (Ashikali et al., 2021; Moon, 2018; Moon & Christensen, 2020), and with Kenyan field evidence that supervision and incentives condition the consequences of ethnic diversity (Hjort, 2014; Marx et al., 2021). It differs from studies reporting no moderation (Jerónimo et al., 2021; Turi et al., 2022), which examined different moderators and outcomes in settings where ethnicity is less salient.

The crossover pattern suggests that inclusive leadership and perceived diversity act as complements. Inclusive behaviour yields returns when there is a diverse and fairly treated pool of perspectives to draw on. Where employees see little representation or fairness, it may be experienced as procedurally costly or as rhetoric. This interpretation remains tentative because few respondents fall at the lowest levels of perceived diversity.

5.3 Control variables

Organizational age and size were positively associated with perceived strategic performance in all models, possibly reflecting more established systems and resources in older and larger units. Because both were measured as respondent-reported categories within one county, they are treated as controls rather than substantive findings.

5.4 Theoretical implications

The findings extend Social Identity Theory by identifying inclusive leadership as a boundary condition that determines whether ethnic diversity is associated with better or merely unchanged performance. They show that this moderating role, documented mainly in Western bureaucracies, also holds in an African devolved government where ethnicity is politically salient. By defining performance through Balanced Scorecard dimensions, they also connect workplace diversity processes to the organizational outcomes for which county governments are accountable.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

Employees of the County Government of Kajiado who perceive their workplace as ethnically representative and fair also perceive stronger strategic performance, but only where supervisors are seen as inclusive. Perceived ethnic diversity is therefore associated with better performance perceptions when leadership enables employees from different communities to contribute. Given the cross-sectional, self-reported data, these are associations rather than causal effects.

6.2 Recommendations

First, the County Public Service Board should pair compliance with statutory ethnic-composition rules with deliberate attention to inclusion after appointment, particularly respect, voice and fair access to opportunities. Second, inclusive supervisory competencies should be built into leadership development, performance contracts and staff appraisal. Third, leadership development should be prioritized in units where employees report low inclusive leadership, guided by periodic anonymous staff surveys. Fourth, the National Cohesion and Integration Commission could extend its diversity audits to include indicators of inclusion and supervisory practice. Finally, leadership development should complement, not replace, efforts to correct structural inequities in county recruitment and promotion.

7. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The cross-sectional design precludes causal inference, and well-performing units may foster favourable perceptions rather than the reverse; longitudinal and intervention studies are needed. All measures came from a single self-report survey, so common method bias may have inflated the direct association (Podsakoff et al., 2012, 2024), although such bias tends to deflate rather than create interaction effects (Siemsen et al., 2010).

Strategic performance was measured perceptually; future work should link perceptions to objective indicators such as development-budget absorption and project completion rates. The new ethnic-diversity scale overlaps conceptually with inclusive-leadership items on fairness, so confirmatory factor analysis and heterotrait–monotrait tests are recommended, alongside objective composition measures such as Blau's index. The single-county sample limits generalizability, and the nesting of employees within departments was not modelled; multi-county, multilevel designs would address both. Finally, the mechanisms behind the moderation, such as psychological safety and cross-group information sharing, were not measured and should be tested in moderated-mediation models (Edmondson & Bransby, 2023; Hayes, 2022), using the Johnson–Neyman technique to map the full region of significance.

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