Research Statement

Growing up in Pakistan, I witnessed incredible amounts of inequality, marginalization, and abuse suffered by socially and economically disenfranchised individuals. I gained first-hand experience of living and participating in a society that experienced extreme forms of several grand challenges that the world faces today: poverty, climate change, slavery, gender discrimination, ethnic and religious tensions, terrorism, and never-ending natural disasters. This experience has had a lasting impact on me and fuels my desire to become a scholar whose **research, teaching, service, and community engagement aims to make the world a better place** for the large segment of the world's population **most vulnerable to these grand challenges**.

Organizational research typically studies people who are relatively affluent and based in Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) contexts. This ignores the realities of hundreds of millions of people in the world who are poor and who are at a higher risk of several unique challenges, often not even knowing where their next meal is coming from. In my work, I focus on novel research sites and data collection opportunities in order to understand the lives of people who are otherwise not accessible to management researchers using **multiple methodologies** including **quantitative, qualitative, experimental, and archival**. Through my work, **I aim to understand, dignify, and give voice to the experience of those who are traditionally overlooked, forsaken, and often forgotten**. This theme is prevalent in most of the research that I do. In the sections below, I provide a detailed description of my main research areas: alleviating suffering for those who are the most vulnerable and understanding the impact of climate change patterns on people's work lives.

Alleviating Hardship for the Most Vulnerable

In my primary stream of research, I focus on understanding the life and challenges faced by people who are the most vulnerable to some of the most pressing grand challenges in the world. Grand challenges are "Specific critical barrier(s) that, if removed, would help solve an important societal problem with a high likelihood of global impact through widespread implementation" (George et al, 2016). Within this stream, **I focus especially on the role of interpersonal relationships in either alleviating or exacerbating hardship**. Through this stream of research, I explore the role of organizations in alleviating people's suffering and humanizing their experience.

Dissertation: My dissertation began from the premise that, despite economic theory which indicates that microfinance should be a powerful intervention for improving lives of poor individuals, the most rigorous evidence to date indicates that microfinance has not been the silver bullet that everyone hoped it would be. I seek to understand why that's the case. For this research, I focus on *Akhuwat*, Pakistan's largest microfinance organization. **In Study 1, I conducted 42 interviews** with *Akhuwat* borrowers and key stakeholders. I also observed *Akhuwat's* employees' interactions with the borrowers in their branch offices and during the loan disbursement ceremonies. Moreover, I visited borrowers' places of work to better situate myself in the sociocultural realities in which they are embedded. Finally, I was able to extensively draw

on archival data from *Akhuwat* including internal company documents and video documentaries. Drawing on this rich data, I built a theoretical model describing **the role of dignity, selflessness, and sanctity in forming relationships between *Akhuwat* and its borrowers, which enable these borrowers to make progress out of poverty**. **In Study 2, I am currently conducting a field experiment** with a sample of 300 *Akhuwat* borrowers. In this experiment, I randomly assigned borrowers to either a baseline control condition or the treatment condition. In the treatment condition, borrowers received the loan in a place of religious sanctity (mosque). In addition, *Akhuwat's* staff members will have monthly interactions with borrowers, with these interactions characterized by dignity and selflessness. I have completed the baseline data collection and will conduct as second and third waves of data collections in October 2022 and March 2023, respectively. **In Study 3, I am collecting survey data** from a sample of 500 *Akhuwat* borrowers, and plan to complete the data collection by end of August 2022.

Working with *Akhuwat* on this ambitious project has been a tremendous learning experience for me. Combining qualitative data with an experimental and field survey design has allowed me to develop a multifaceted perspective on the research process and has enabled me to appreciate the role of multiple methodologies to study complex phenomenon. In addition, partnering with *Akhuwat* has enabled me to see the impact that management research can have in changing practice in the field and in the life of millions of people who depend for survival on organizations such as *Akhuwat*. I am especially excited about the interventions that we are piloting as part of the field experiment as *Akhuwat* **has agreed to roll out these interventions across all branches throughout Pakistan (800 branches affecting more than 1 million people)** if the results show that they are effective in creating positive outcomes for *Akhuwat's* borrowers. This research has the potential to change the landscape of the microfinance industry in Pakistan and other developing countries and has important implications for how organizations conceptualize helping the poor. For this work, **I won the inaugural RRBM Dare to Care Dissertation Scholarship award ($10,000)**.

In a series of other projects within this stream of research, I seek to understand the role of interpersonal relationships in humanizing the workplace, especially in contexts where employees experience and observe suffering such as poverty and adversity. In one paper which is under first round **Revise and Resubmit** at the ***Journal of Applied Psychology***, my coauthors and I *(**Khan, Fehr, Awtrey, and Basit)*** examine gratitude in the team context and find that **high levels of received gratitude expression disparity—wherein a small number of people receive most gratitude expressions within the team—are associated with low psychological safety climate, which ultimately hurts team performance**. We further find that these effects are strongest when friendship disparity in the team is also high. We tested our model in a sample of teams from a large microfinance organization in Pakistan, employing a cross-lagged design. This was an extremely intensive data collection, as we collected social networks data using paper surveys across more than 4000 employees spread over 700 teams all across Pakistan. Employees in this organization not only themselves came from a very low socioeconomic background, but they also served people who experience poverty, hardship, and trauma. In this context, evenly expressed gratitude serves as a critical ingredient for allowing such teams to feel safe and work more effectively towards reducing poverty.

In another paper, which is **under review** at the ***Journal of Applied Psychology***, my coauthors and I (*Heng, **Khan**, and Hafenbrack*) explore the role of a simple compassion intervention that could nudge employees toward better work and personal outcomes. Akin to observing others' compassionate acts in the media or within our social circles, we predicted and found that **observing coworkers' compassion would increase employees' moral elevation and other-orientation, which would in turn facilitate more prosocial behaviors at work**. We found support for these predictions in an experimental ESM study with a sample of 91 schoolteachers as well as in a separate study of employees in a between-person experimental study.

In one paper, my coauthors and I (***Khan**, Barnes, Heng, Wu, and Wu- in progress*) examined whether being resilient in the face of adversity can have an effect on others. Most work on resilience at work has looked at the role of resilience in facilitating better outcomes for those exercising resilience. However, we explore the role of resilience by employees in making others- in this case leaders- more humble. In a series of experiments and a large-scale field ESM study (11,469 daily-subordinate observations nested within 2,240 daily-leader observations across 10 working days), we find the critical role of awe in facilitating this relationship. Specifically, we find that **when followers are resilient, their leaders feel awe which makes them engage in greater humble and less authoritarian leadership**. Thus, this paper finds that resilience by followers can have a positive crossover effect on leaders which makes the impact of resilience more widespread than has been thought to date.

In addition to studying how adversity impacts people, I also wanted to study how constrained individuals can make a difference in the world. To explore this topic, Kira Schabram and I explore the challenges faced by called employees in promoting creative ideas at work. This paper examines **the impact of employees' sense of calling on their creativity through the lens of regulatory focus theory**. Building on arguments that called employees experience of a strong drive for action, are inclined to pursue idealized aspirations, and frame the workplace as the important domain in which to make a positive difference, we argue that callings should be positively related to creativity via high promotion- and low prevention-focus. We test these predictions across three complimentary designs: A sample of matched subordinate-supervisor surveys across six diverse organizations, a 2x2 manipulation to verify the model's causal order, and a yoked experimental design to link calling to creativity. Results provide evidence for an indirect effect of calling on creativity– through promotion- but not prevention-focus. This paper is close to submission to the *Academy of Management Journal*.

Beyond these advanced-stage projects, I am also working on **early-stage projects** that are consistent with my overall focus of research. In one qualitative project, I am beginning to **explore the phenomenon of slavery experienced by brick kiln workers in Pakistan**. These people are forced to work under bonded labor, are often traded like objects, and experience physical, sexual, and emotional harassment and violence. I have partnered with an NGO that works to emancipate such workers and am at the beginning stages of data collection. For preliminary data collection, I met with the management of this NGO as well as people emancipated from slavery in Pakistan. I plan to conduct more interviews and visit brick kilns

during my next visit to Pakistan. In another project, I explore the role of voluntary hardship I people's work life. Specifically, I am **studying how professional Muslim athletes play at the highest level of sports while fasting from food and water from dawn to sunset (sometimes more than 18 hours a day) during the month of Ramadan**. This qualitative project is also in its early stages of data collection. I have interviewed a retired NFL athlete and have more interviews lined up in the near future.

Experience of Climate Change on Work Phenomena

In a second stream of research, I explore the impact of climate change on the lives of people who are at the most vulnerable to forces such as heat waves and severe air pollution. Through this stream of research, I aim to understand more deeply how changes in weather and environmental forces due to climate change affect people's lives.

In one of these projects which is under **third round review** at the ***Journal of Applied Psychology***, my coauthors and I (***Khan**, Patel, & Barnes*) take a crossover perspective to the topic of employee experiences of air pollution in a sample of employees in India. India consistently has the highest levels of air pollution concentration in the world where hundreds of millions of people experience its debilitating effects on a daily basis. We recruited a sample of participants in which leaders and followers are based in different cities. In this sample, we find that leader experiences of air pollution influence their abusive supervision and laissez faire leadership in a dynamic effect which plays out on a daily basis. In other words, **on days in which leaders experience heavy air pollution, their followers experience high abusive supervision and laissez faire leadership**. We also uncover the mediating role of somatic complaints and negative affect in this relationship. This study suggests that the effects of air pollution are more widespread than originally thought as the strain experienced by leaders in one part of the world can crossover to strain experienced by their followers in another part of the world.

Also related to the phenomenon of air pollution, my coauthors and I (***Khan**, Barnes & Basit- in progress*) find in another paper that factory workers in Pakistan (who are forced to work in extremely hazardous levels of air pollution e.g., AQI exceeding 300) **experience greater work-family conflict on days when both objective and subjective air pollution is high through the mechanisms of physical depletion and hostility.** In Study 2, we find that an experimental manipulation of air pollution appraisals during the day leads to more experienced work family conflict. In Study 3 of this paper, we analyzed a large dataset consisting of thousands of tweets and found evidence that on days with higher air pollution, people reported greater negative sentiment with their partners.

In another paper, my coauthors and I (***Khan**, Barnes & Qiu- in progress*) study the effect of heat (ambient temperature) on abusive supervision. In Study 1, we study street vendors in Lahore who do not have air conditioning and work under the sun for several hours each day. In Study 2, we used an experimental design in which we manipulated the heat in a laboratory and measured the actual behavior of abusive supervision via an online multiplayer task that we developed specifically for this study. In Study 3, we created a large dataset comprising of over

200,000 tweets from all of continental US across 5 years. Taken together, these studies provide **evidence of a relationship between temperature and abusive supervision.**

Future Directions and Professional Goals

I entered graduate school because I wanted to understand how to make the world a better place for people who are the most vulnerable to the grand challenges that the world faces today. My time at UW has provided me with the methodological tools and theoretical background to delve into such research questions and connected me with an esteemed network of collaborators both at UW and at other institutions. Moving forward, I aim to continue my areas of research through collaboration with faculty members and PhD students. I will pursue the biggest research ideas I can, publish my findings in the best journals I can, and share my results widely.