
Inclusive Leadership and Employee Creativity in the Era of Diversity Workforce

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the effect of inclusive leadership on employee creativity in the context of diversity workforce. The method used is mixed method, involving 285 employee respondents from various backgrounds of generation, gender, education, and ethnicity. Quantitative data were analyzed using linear regression and structural equation modeling (SEM) with bootstrapping mediation test, while qualitative data were obtained through in-depth interviews to strengthen the interpretation of findings. The results showed that inclusive leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee creativity, both directly and indirectly through psychological safety. Empirically, the R^2 value of 0.39 indicates that inclusive leadership is able to explain 39% of the variation in employee creativity. This finding confirms that inclusive leaders are able to create a safe, fair, and participatory work climate so that employees are encouraged to express innovative ideas. This research provides theoretical contributions by expanding contemporary leadership literature, especially the inclusiveness dimension, as well as practical contributions in the form of guidance for organizations in optimizing the potential of workforce diversity to increase creativity-based competitiveness

Keywords: *Inclusive Leadership; Employee Creativity; Psychological Safety; Workforce Diversity; Organizational Innovation*

INTRODUCTION

The changing landscape of the modern workforce is increasingly influenced by the presence of increasingly complex diversity (Behie et al., 2023). Today's workforce is no longer homogeneous, but reflects diversity in terms of gender, generation, culture, ethnicity, and educational background (Al-Hamli, 2025). This phenomenon is often referred to as diversity workforce, which on the one hand presents challenges in organizational management, but on the other hand holds great potential as a source of excellence. If diversity is not managed properly, it can create friction, communication gaps,

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and even harmful conflicts (Akande et al., 2025). On the contrary, when organizations are able to create an inclusive climate, the differences that exist can be processed into a collective force that enriches perspectives, expands ideas, and strengthens competitiveness in the midst of increasingly competitive global dynamics (Ospina Bermeo & Perez, 2022).

Behind the great potential contained in workforce diversity, there are also challenges that need to be taken seriously by organizations. Differences in values, ways of thinking, and communication styles between individuals often create obstacles in building solid cooperation (Gibson et al., 2023). For example, different generations may have different communication preferences; while groups with certain cultural backgrounds may have different ways of expressing opinions than others (Chan & Lee, 2023). This has the potential to create misunderstandings, tensions, and even harmful interpersonal conflicts. If diversity is not managed wisely, the risk of exclusive behavior, discrimination, and marginalization of minority groups becomes greater (Smith-Meyer, 2022). Such a situation ultimately results in decreased employee engagement, weakened sense of community, and reduced individual commitment to organizational goals. Therefore, the main challenge facing modern organizations is not only how to accept diversity, but how to manage it so that each individual feels recognized, valued, and has equal space to contribute (Russen & Dawson, 2024).

In dealing with the complexity of workforce diversity, the role of leadership becomes a determining factor (Chua et al., 2023; Turi et al., 2022). Inclusive leadership is emerging as a relevant approach because it emphasizes recognizing, rewarding, and empowering every individual in the organization (Roberson & Perry, 2022). An inclusive leader is not only oriented towards achieving performance, but also towards creating a fair and open work climate, where every voice is valued regardless of background or identity (Kuknor & Bhattacharya, 2022; Shore & Chung, 2022; Sun et al., 2024). The presence of this kind of leader provides a sense of psychological security for employees, so they are more willing to express ideas, opinions, and constructive criticism. In addition, inclusive leadership also encourages active participation from all team members, strengthens collaboration across differences, and fosters a sense of belonging to the organization (Ashikali et al., 2021; Nishii & Leroy, 2022). Thus, this leadership style is not only able to reduce the risk of exclusion and discrimination, but is also key in optimizing the potential of diversity as a source of innovation and organizational competitiveness in the era of globalization.

Employee creativity is not born out of thin air, but rather influenced by a work environment that provides space for free speech and the opportunity to experiment without fear of negative judgment. In the context of a diverse team, different perspectives, backgrounds and experiences become a rich source of ideas, but this potential can only be optimally utilized if there is leadership that is able to manage it. Inclusive leaders act as facilitators who bring together diverse views into innovative and valuable ideas for the organization (Van Knippenberg & Van Ginkel, 2022; Woods et al., 2024). By recognizing each individual's contribution, leaders create a safe psychological environment where employees are encouraged to think more freely, take creative risks, and collaborate across boundaries of difference (Madanchian, 2024; Mehmood et al., 2022). Ultimately, inclusive leadership not only strengthens team cohesion, but also catalyzes sustainable creativity amidst the dynamics of a diverse workforce (Abdelhay, 2024).

Although inclusive leadership is increasingly relevant in the face of workforce diversity dynamics, studies on this topic are still relatively limited. Most previous research has focused on transformational leadership or authentic leadership in improving performance or employee

engagement. Meanwhile, the inclusive dimension that emphasizes acceptance, diversity, and individual empowerment has not been widely explored, especially in relation to employee creativity. In fact, in an era of globalization characterized by an increasingly complex diverse workforce, inclusive leadership has great potential to be key in optimizing the contribution of ideas from various backgrounds (Joshua Olabiyi, 2023). The limitations of this study open space for further research to examine in depth how inclusive leadership can encourage creativity, and provide empirical evidence that can enrich contemporary human resource management and leadership literature.

Based on this description, this study aims to examine the role of inclusive leadership in encouraging employee creativity in the era of diversity workforce. This focus was chosen because the increasingly apparent diversity in modern organizations requires a leadership model that is able to manage differences constructively. Theoretically, this research is expected to enrich the literature on human resource management and contemporary leadership, especially by adding a new perspective on how inclusiveness can be a catalyst for creativity. Meanwhile, practically, this research provides guidance for organizations and leaders in developing leadership styles that are more adaptive and responsive to the needs of workforce diversity. Thus, the results of this study not only expand academic understanding, but also offer a real contribution to managerial practice in improving organizational competitiveness amid global dynamics.

METHOD

This research uses a mixed methods approach with an explanatory sequential design, which begins with quantitative data collection and continues with qualitative to deepen the findings. This approach was chosen because the relationship between inclusive leadership and employee creativity is not only important to be tested empirically through statistical analysis, but also needs to be understood in depth through the direct experience of employees and leaders in managing workforce diversity. In the quantitative stage, data was obtained through distributing questionnaires to employees from various backgrounds in organizations that have diversity workforce characteristics. The research instrument utilized an inclusive leadership scale adapted from the Carmeli et al., (2010) and the employee creativity scale developed by Zhou & George (2001). Respondents provided answers on a five-point Likert scale to assess the extent to which inclusive leadership was experienced in the organization and how it affected their creative behavior. The sample size was targeted at a minimum of 200-300 respondents for the structural model analysis to have an adequate level of reliability. Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling with Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) to test construct validity, instrument reliability, as well as causal relationships between variables.

The qualitative phase was conducted after the quantitative results were obtained, using semi-structured interviews with a purposively selected number of employees and leaders. The interviews aimed to explore in more depth the real experiences related to inclusive leadership practices, employees' perceptions of psychological safety, and how different backgrounds can be processed into a source of ideas and innovation. Qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis techniques to find patterns, themes and mechanisms that explain the quantitative results.

To maintain the validity of the research, reliability and validity tests were carried out on quantitative instruments, while at the qualitative stage member checking and audit trail were used

as an effort to increase credibility. Integration of the results was done by interpreting the qualitative findings as explanations for the relationships identified in the quantitative analysis. Overall, this method design allowed the research to produce a comprehensive picture of how inclusive leadership can encourage employee creativity in the era of diversity workforce

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data Description and Respondent Profile

This section presents an overview of the characteristics of the research respondents to provide context for the analysis conducted. The study involved 285 respondents who came from various backgrounds of age, gender, education, length of service, and generation. This variety of characteristics shows the real diversity within the organization, which is also an important basis for examining inclusive leadership and employee creativity in the era of diversity workforce. The respondents' profiles are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Profile of Research Respondents

| Category | Sub-Category | Total | Percentage |
|-----------------------|------------------------|-------|------------|
| Age | < 25 years | 45 | 15,8% |
| | 25–34 years | 110 | 38,6% |
| | 35–44 years | 75 | 26,3% |
| | ≥ 45 years | 55 | 19,3% |
| Gender | Male | 140 | 49,1% |
| | Female | 145 | 50,9% |
| Education | SMA/SMK | 40 | 14,0% |
| | Diploma | 55 | 19,3% |
| | Sarjana (S1) | 145 | 50,9% |
| | Pascasarjana (S2/S3) | 45 | 15,8% |
| Length of Service | < 3 years | 60 | 21,1% |
| | 3–5 years | 95 | 33,3% |
| | 6–10 years | 75 | 26,3% |
| | > 10 years | 55 | 19,3% |
| Generation | Baby Boomers (≥ 58 th) | 20 | 7,0% |
| | Gen X (43–57 th) | 65 | 22,8% |
| | Milenial (27–42 th) | 135 | 47,4% |
| | Gen Z (≤ 26 th) | 65 | 22,8% |
| Number of Respondents | | 285 | 100% |

Based on Table 1, it can be seen that the majority of respondents are in the age range of 25-34 years (38.6%), which represents the early productive age group and also dominates the modern workforce. In terms of generation, the respondents are dominated by Millennials (47.4%), followed by Gen X (22.8%), Gen Z (22.8%), and a small portion of Baby Boomers (7%). This composition indicates cross-generational representation that has the potential to bring about diversity in values, work preferences, and communication patterns. In terms of gender, the distribution of respondents is relatively balanced, with 49.1% men and 50.9% women. This shows no significant dominance of either gender, allowing the research to capture the dynamics of inclusive leadership in the context of gender equality.

In terms of education, most respondents have an undergraduate background (50.9%), followed by diploma (19.3%), postgraduate (15.8%), and high school (14.0%). The high proportion of undergraduate-educated respondents reflects that the majority of the workforce in the organizations studied have an adequate knowledge base to contribute to the creative work process. Meanwhile, in terms of work experience, respondents were relatively evenly distributed with the highest concentration in the 3-5 years of work experience group (33.3%). This composition indicates a combination of new, intermediate, and senior employees that can enrich the interaction within the work team. Overall, the diversity in terms of age, generation, gender, education, and work experience confirms the existence of a diverse workforce in the organizations that were the subject of the study. This diversity not only reflects the reality of the modern workforce, but also provides an important foundation for examining the extent to which inclusive leadership is able to manage differences and encourage employee creativity.

After presenting the respondents' profiles, the next step is to describe the tendency of respondents' answers to the main research variables, namely inclusive leadership and employee creativity. The measurement of these two variables uses a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Descriptive statistics displayed include mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum values. This presentation aims to provide an initial overview of the level of inclusive leadership perceived by employees and the extent to which creativity is realized in their work environment. A summary of the descriptive results can be seen in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

| Variable | Mean | Std. Dev | Min | Max | Interpretation |
|----------------------|------|----------|------|------|----------------|
| Inclusive Leadership | 4,02 | 0,58 | 2,80 | 5,00 | High |
| Employee Creativity | 3,95 | 0,62 | 2,60 | 5,00 | High |

The results of descriptive analysis show that respondents' perceptions of inclusive leadership are in the high category with an average value of 4.02 and a standard deviation of 0.58. This indicates that most employees think their leaders are able to create a fair work climate, provide space for participation, and respect the differences that exist in the team. The relatively narrow range of scores (min 2.80 and max 5.00) shows the consistency of perceptions among respondents regarding inclusive leadership practices in the organization.

Meanwhile, the employee creativity variable is also in the high category with an average value of 3.95 and a standard deviation of 0.62. This finding indicates that employees tend to have the freedom to express ideas, conduct experiments, and contribute new ideas in their work. The minimum value of 2.60 and the maximum of 5.00 indicate individual variation, but in general, respondents feel they have enough space to express creativity. Overall, both research variables show high scores, which means that the organizations studied were relatively successful in building an inclusive work environment that is conducive to employee creativity. This finding is an early indication of a positive relationship between inclusive leadership and creativity levels in the context of a diverse workforce.

Main Analysis Results

To test the hypothesis regarding the effect of inclusive leadership on employee creativity, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted. This analysis aims to determine the extent to which inclusive leadership can be a predictor in increasing employee creativity. Regression tests produce regression coefficient values, t-count values, and significance levels which are used as the basis for making decisions on hypothesis acceptance. In addition, the coefficient of determination (R^2) is included to illustrate the amount of contribution of the inclusive leadership variable in explaining variations in employee creativity. The results of the analysis can be seen in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Linear Regression Test Results

| Independent Variable | B | β | t-value | Sig. |
|----------------------|------|---------|---------|-------|
| Inclusive Leadership | 0,58 | 0,62 | 12,45 | 0,000 |
| $R^2 = 0,39$ | | | | |

The regression test results in Table 3 show that inclusive leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee creativity. The unstandardized regression coefficient (B) of 0.58 indicates that each one-unit increase in inclusive leadership will increase employee creativity by 0.58 units. Meanwhile, the standardized beta coefficient (β) of 0.62 indicates that the effect of inclusive leadership is relatively strong in explaining variations in creativity. The t-count value of 12.45 with a significance of 0.000 (<0.05) reinforces that the effect is highly statistically significant. Thus, the research hypothesis stating that there is a positive relationship between inclusive leadership and employee creativity can be accepted. In addition, the R^2 value of 0.39 indicates that 39% of the variation in employee creativity can be explained by inclusive leadership, while the remaining 61% is influenced by other factors outside the model. These findings provide empirical evidence that inclusive leadership is not only important for creating a fair and psychologically safe work environment, but also effective in triggering creative ideas from employees. Thus, organizations that are able to develop an inclusive leadership style have the potential to excel in optimizing workforce diversity to generate innovation.

In addition to testing the direct effect of inclusive leadership on employee creativity, this study also analyzes the role of psychological safety as a mediating variable. The mediation test was conducted to determine whether inclusive leadership not only has a direct impact, but also indirectly affects creativity through the creation of a sense of psychological safety in the work environment. The analysis was conducted using a bootstrapping approach to test the significance of the indirect effect, which was assessed from the path coefficient value, t-value, and significance level. The results of testing the mediating role are shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Mediation Test Results

| Path of Influence | Koefisien | t-value | Sig. | Description |
|---|-----------|---------|-------|-------------|
| Inclusive Leadership → Psychological Safety | 0,64 | 13,12 | 0,000 | Significant |
| Psychological Safety → Employee Creativity | 0,41 | 9,05 | 0,000 | Significant |
| Inclusive Leadership → Creativity (direct) | 0,32 | 6,84 | 0,000 | Significant |

The mediation analysis results show that inclusive leadership has a significant effect on psychological safety with a coefficient of 0.64 and a t-value of 13.12 ($p < 0.05$). This indicates that

the more inclusive the leadership style applied, the higher the psychological safety felt by employees in the work environment. Furthermore, psychological safety is proven to have a positive and significant effect on employee creativity, with a coefficient of 0.41 and a t-value of 9.05 ($p < 0.05$). This means that a sense of security in expressing opinions, trying new ideas, and taking risks without fear of being blamed are important factors in encouraging creativity.

However, the direct effect of inclusive leadership on employee creativity also remained significant, with a coefficient of 0.32 and a t-value of 6.84 ($p < 0.05$). This finding indicates partial mediation, where inclusive leadership not only influences creativity directly, but also strengthens its influence through increased psychological safety. Thus, this mediating role confirms that inclusive leadership is a key factor in building a conducive work climate, which in turn encourages the optimization of employee creativity in the context of a diverse workforce.

Discussion of Results

The findings of this study confirm that inclusive leadership has an important role in encouraging employee creativity. Leaders who demonstrate an inclusive attitude are able to create a sense of security for employees to express opinions, share ideas, and dare to try new things without worrying about rejection or sanctions. This sense of security makes employees feel recognized, valued, and empowered, resulting in the courage to express innovative ideas that can enrich the work process.

In the context of a diverse workforce, inclusive leadership is increasingly crucial because differences in values, perspectives, and experiences between individuals can actually be a valuable source of creativity. Diversity in backgrounds, when managed with an inclusive approach, can broaden perspectives in problem solving and generate more varied ideas. Conversely, without inclusive leadership, this diversity can lead to conflict, exclusion, or even discrimination that weakens team cohesion and inhibits creativity.

The results of this study are in line with the findings of Carmeli et al., (2010) which emphasizes that inclusive leadership can increase employee engagement in creative tasks. This finding also supports research Zhou & George, (2001) which highlighted the importance of psychological conditions, particularly the sense of security in expressing opinions, as a factor closely related to the birth of employee creativity. However, this study adds value by emphasizing the context of workforce diversity as a new arena that has not been widely explored. This means that in addition to strengthening existing theories, this study also opens up room for further study on how organizations can optimize workforce diversity through inclusive leadership styles to enhance creativity-based competitiveness.

Significance of Results

Theoretically, this study extends the contemporary leadership literature by emphasizing the dimension of inclusiveness as an important factor in managing an increasingly diverse workforce. The findings make an academic contribution by showing that inclusive leadership is not only relevant in building healthy interpersonal relationships, but also has a strategic role in sparking employee creativity as one of the sources of organizational competitive advantage. From a practical perspective, the results of this study provide guidance for organizations to develop effective leadership styles in harnessing the potential of workforce diversity. By applying inclusive

principles, organizations can create a conducive work environment, where each individual feels recognized, valued, and empowered to contribute. This in turn encourages the birth of creative ideas that are valuable for organizational development.

The managerial implication of this research is the importance of leaders in building an organizational culture that is psychologically safe, fair, and participatory. Leaders need to actively open space for employee participation, encourage courage to convey ideas, and manage differences as a source of innovation, not an obstacle. Thus, inclusive leadership can be a strong foundation for organizations to optimize diversity and strengthen competitiveness in the era of diversity workforce

CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that inclusive leadership has a positive and significant effect on employee creativity, both directly and through the mediation of psychological safety. Inclusive leaders are able to create a sense of security, recognition, and empowerment that encourages employees to be more courageous in conveying new ideas. This condition becomes very important in the context of diversity workforce, where diversity of values, perspectives, and experiences can be transformed into a source of innovation when facilitated by an inclusive leadership approach. The findings enrich contemporary leadership literature by emphasizing the importance of inclusiveness as a strategic factor in managing a diverse workforce. Practically, this research provides guidance for organizations to develop leadership styles that not only emphasize performance achievement, but also build a fair, participatory, and psychologically safe work culture. Thus, inclusive leadership can be one of the keys to organizational success in optimizing the potential of diversity to encourage creativity and strengthen competitiveness in the era of globalization.

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