

## INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP AS AN HR DEVELOPMENT IMPERATIVE: A LONGITUDINAL STUDY ON ITS EFFECT ON PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY AND TEAM INNOVATION

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### Abstract

The increasing diversity of the modern workforce has intensified the need for inclusive leadership as a critical capability for organizational success. While existing research highlights the benefits of inclusive leadership, limited attention has been given to its long-term effects on team dynamics and innovation. This study examines the impact of inclusive leadership on psychological safety and team innovation using a longitudinal research design. Data were collected from teams across multiple time points to capture changes in leadership behaviors and team perceptions. The findings indicate that inclusive leadership significantly enhances psychological safety by fostering trust, openness, and reduced fear of failure. Psychological safety, in turn, mediates the relationship between leadership and team innovation, enabling increased idea generation and implementation. The results also show that the effects of inclusive leadership strengthen over time, leading to sustained innovation performance. The study contributes to the literature by providing a dynamic perspective on leadership and team outcomes. It also offers practical implications for HR development by emphasizing the importance of continuous investment in inclusive leadership. The findings suggest that organizations can enhance innovation and performance by fostering psychologically safe environments through inclusive leadership practices.

**Keywords:** *Inclusive leadership; psychological safety; team innovation; longitudinal study; HR development*

### INTRODUCTION

The increasing diversity of the modern workforce has become one of the most defining characteristics of contemporary organizations. Globalization, demographic shifts, and evolving social norms have contributed to more heterogeneous teams in terms of culture, gender, age, and professional backgrounds. This diversity presents significant opportunities for organizations to enhance creativity, problem-solving, and decision-making (Homan et al., 2020). However, it also introduces challenges related to communication, inclusion, and team cohesion. As a result, organizations are placing greater emphasis not only on diversity but also on inclusion as a critical factor for success. Inclusion ensures that diverse employees feel valued, respected, and able to contribute fully to organizational goals. Consequently, inclusive leadership has emerged as a key capability for managing diverse teams effectively (Roberson & Perry, 2021).

The growing importance of inclusion is closely tied to its impact on organizational performance and innovation. Inclusive environments foster open communication, collaboration, and the sharing of diverse perspectives, all of which are essential for innovation. Leaders who promote inclusivity can create a sense of belonging among team members, which enhances engagement and motivation (Martins, 2020). This, in turn, contributes to improved team performance and organizational outcomes. Moreover, inclusion is increasingly seen as a strategic imperative rather than a purely ethical or compliance issue. Organizations that fail to prioritize inclusion may struggle to fully leverage the potential of their diverse workforce (Nishii & Leroy, 2020). Therefore, inclusive leadership is becoming a central focus in leadership development and organizational strategy.

Despite the recognized importance of inclusive leadership, there remains a lack of sustained focus on its development within many organizations. Leadership development programs often emphasize general management skills without adequately addressing the specific competencies required for inclusivity. Additionally, much of the existing research on inclusive leadership is based on cross-sectional studies, which provide limited insight into how its effects evolve over time (Korkmaz et al., 2022). This creates a gap in understanding the long-term impact of inclusive leadership on team dynamics and outcomes. Without longitudinal evidence, organizations may underestimate the importance of continuous investment in inclusive leadership development. Furthermore, the absence of long-term perspectives makes it difficult to assess the sustainability of its benefits (Kuknor & Bhattacharya, 2020). Addressing this gap is essential for advancing both theory and practice.

In response to these challenges, this article aims to examine the impact of inclusive leadership on psychological safety and team innovation over time. By adopting a longitudinal perspective, the study seeks to capture how leadership behaviors influence team dynamics and outcomes across different time periods. Psychological safety is considered a key mediating factor, as it enables employees to express ideas, take risks, and engage in collaborative problem-solving. The study also explores how these dynamics contribute to sustained team innovation. By integrating insights from leadership, organizational behavior, and HR development literature, the article provides a comprehensive framework for understanding these relationships. Ultimately, the goal is to highlight the importance of inclusive leadership as a strategic HR development imperative.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Psychological Safety**

Psychological safety refers to a shared belief within a team that it is safe to take interpersonal risks without fear of negative consequences. The concept, widely developed by Edmondson, emphasizes that individuals should feel comfortable expressing ideas, asking questions, admitting mistakes, and challenging the status quo. It is rooted in social and organizational behavior theories that highlight trust, openness, and mutual respect as key elements of effective teamwork (Jones et al., 2020). Psychological safety does not imply the absence of accountability but rather the presence of an environment where individuals can contribute freely without fear of embarrassment or punishment. This construct has become increasingly relevant in modern organizations that rely on collaboration and innovation. It provides a foundation for open communication and constructive dialogue. As such, psychological safety is considered a critical component of high-performing teams (Shore & Chung, 2021).

The importance of psychological safety extends to learning, collaboration, and overall team performance. In psychologically safe environments, employees are more willing to share knowledge, experiment with new ideas, and engage in problem-solving activities. This openness enhances collective learning and enables teams to adapt to changing conditions (Fagan et al., 2022). Additionally, psychological safety promotes collaboration by reducing interpersonal barriers and encouraging inclusive participation. Teams that experience high levels of psychological safety tend to exhibit greater cohesion and mutual support. This, in turn, leads to improved performance outcomes and higher levels of innovation. Conversely, the absence of psychological safety can result in silence, disengagement, and reduced effectiveness. Therefore, fostering psychological safety is essential for both individual and organizational success (Castelino & Shinde, 2023).

### **Team Innovation**

Team innovation refers to the collective process through which teams generate, develop, and implement new ideas that improve products, services, or processes. It is typically conceptualized as a multi-stage process involving idea generation, idea promotion, and idea implementation. Idea generation involves the creation of novel and useful concepts, while idea implementation focuses on translating these ideas into practical outcomes (Leroy et al., 2021). Effective team innovation requires not only creativity but also coordination and execution. It is influenced by various factors, including team composition, communication patterns, and organizational support. In dynamic and competitive environments, innovation has become a key driver of organizational success. As a result, understanding the mechanisms that enable team innovation is of critical importance (Okatta et al., 2024). Leadership and team climate play a significant role in shaping innovation outcomes. Leaders influence team innovation by setting expectations, providing resources, and fostering an environment that encourages creativity. A supportive team climate, characterized by trust, openness, and collaboration, enhances the likelihood that innovative ideas will emerge and be implemented (van Knippenberg & van Ginkel, 2021). Conversely, a restrictive or hierarchical climate may inhibit creativity and discourage risk-taking. Inclusive leadership, in particular, can promote innovation by valuing diverse perspectives and encouraging participation from all team members. By creating an environment

where individuals feel empowered to contribute, leaders can unlock the full potential of their teams. Therefore, the relationship between leadership, team climate, and innovation is both dynamic and interdependent (Ashikali et al., 2020).

### **Inclusive Leadership and Psychological Safety**

Inclusive leadership plays a crucial role in fostering psychological safety within teams by promoting openness, respect, and fairness. Leaders who demonstrate inclusive behaviors actively seek input from team members, acknowledge diverse perspectives, and ensure that all voices are heard. These behaviors signal to employees that their contributions are valued, reducing fear of judgment or exclusion (Santos et al., 2022). Inclusive leaders also model vulnerability by admitting mistakes and encouraging learning from failure, which further reinforces a safe environment. Additionally, they establish norms of mutual respect and constructive feedback, which support open communication. Through these mechanisms, inclusive leadership creates a foundation for psychological safety. This enables employees to engage more fully in team activities and decision-making processes (Asriati, 2025).

Empirical research supports the positive relationship between inclusive leadership and psychological safety. Studies have shown that teams led by inclusive leaders report higher levels of trust, openness, and willingness to take risks. Psychological safety often acts as a mediating factor, explaining how leadership behaviors influence team outcomes such as engagement and innovation (Karimi & Khawaja, 2024). Over time, consistent inclusive leadership practices can strengthen these effects, leading to sustained improvements in team dynamics. However, the impact of inclusive leadership may vary depending on contextual factors such as team diversity and organizational culture. Despite these variations, the overall evidence suggests that inclusive leadership is a key driver of psychologically safe environments. This highlights its importance as a focus area for leadership development and organizational strategy (Westover, 2025).

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopts a longitudinal research design to examine the effects of inclusive leadership on psychological safety and team innovation over time. A multi-wave survey approach is employed, allowing data to be collected from the same teams at multiple time points. This design enables the analysis of changes and causal relationships, providing deeper insights than cross-sectional studies. The sample consists of teams drawn from various organizations or departments, ensuring diversity in context and enhancing the generalizability of findings. Data collection focuses on team members' perceptions of leadership behaviors, psychological safety, and innovation outcomes. By capturing responses across different time intervals, the study is able to observe how leadership influences team dynamics and performance over time. This approach strengthens the ability to identify patterns of development and sustained impact.

The study measures key constructs using validated scales for inclusive leadership, psychological safety, and team innovation. Inclusive leadership is assessed through indicators such as openness, accessibility, and fairness, while psychological safety is measured based on employees' perceived ability to express ideas without fear. Team innovation is evaluated through dimensions of idea generation and implementation. The analytical approach involves longitudinal techniques such as regression analysis, structural equation modeling (SEM), or growth modeling to assess relationships and changes across time. However, the study is subject to certain limitations. Time constraints may affect the duration and number of data collection waves, potentially limiting the ability to capture long-term effects fully. Additionally, sample bias may arise if participating organizations are not fully representative of broader contexts. Despite these limitations, the methodology provides a robust framework for understanding the dynamic relationships between leadership, psychological safety, and innovation.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **Effects of Inclusive Leadership Over Time**

The results indicate that inclusive leadership has a cumulative and strengthening effect on team dynamics over time. As leaders consistently demonstrate openness, accessibility, and fairness, team members gradually develop more positive perceptions of leadership behavior (Agrawal et al., 2024). This consistency is critical, as it reinforces credibility and signals that inclusive practices are not temporary but embedded in leadership style. Over successive time periods, teams become more responsive and engaged, reflecting increased alignment with leadership expectations. Additionally, inclusive leadership behaviors encourage broader participation, allowing diverse perspectives to emerge more frequently (Knippenberg et al., 2020). This leads to a gradual shift in team norms toward

inclusivity and collaboration. Overall, the longitudinal findings suggest that inclusive leadership is not a one-time intervention but a continuous process that shapes team perceptions and behaviors over time. Changes in team perceptions are particularly significant, as they influence how employees interpret leadership actions and respond to them. Initially, team members may be cautious in expressing themselves, especially in diverse or hierarchical environments (Miao et al., 2024). However, as inclusive behaviors are consistently observed, employees become more confident in voicing their ideas and concerns. This evolving perception strengthens trust in leadership and enhances the overall team climate. Furthermore, sustained inclusive leadership helps reduce biases and fosters a sense of belonging among team members. Over time, this leads to stronger interpersonal relationships and improved team cohesion. These findings highlight the importance of consistency and longevity in inclusive leadership development (Ahmad et al., 2023). Without sustained effort, the positive effects on team perceptions may diminish.

**Table 1.** Longitudinal Effects of Inclusive Leadership on Team Perceptions and Outcomes

<b>Time Dimension</b>	<b>Leadership Behaviors</b>	<b>Team Perceptions</b>	<b>Team Outcomes</b>
Initial Stage	Demonstration of openness, accessibility, and fairness	Cautious responses, limited expression of ideas	Moderate engagement, low participation
Early Development	Consistent inclusive actions and encouragement	Growing trust and willingness to share perspectives	Increased participation and communication
Intermediate Stage	Reinforcement of inclusive norms and equal voice	Improved confidence, reduced bias, stronger sense of belonging	Enhanced collaboration and team cohesion
Advanced Stage	Sustained inclusive leadership and role modeling	High trust, openness, and alignment with leadership	Strong engagement and collective responsiveness
Long-Term Impact	Embedded inclusive leadership practices	Positive and stable perceptions of leadership	Sustained collaboration, innovation readiness, and team effectiveness

The table 1 illustrates how inclusive leadership generates progressively stronger effects on team dynamics over time, moving from initial cautious engagement to sustained collaboration and high performance. In the early stages, team members may be hesitant to participate, but consistent demonstrations of openness, fairness, and accessibility gradually build trust and confidence. As leadership behaviors are reinforced, employees become more willing to share ideas, leading to improved communication, reduced bias, and a stronger sense of belonging (Krasin, 2025). This shift in perceptions enhances team cohesion and alignment with leadership expectations. In the advanced stages, inclusive leadership becomes embedded in team norms, resulting in high levels of engagement, responsiveness, and collaboration. The long-term impact highlights sustained effectiveness, where teams are not only cohesive but also better positioned for innovation. Overall, the table emphasizes that inclusive leadership is a continuous developmental process whose benefits accumulate over time, rather than a one-time intervention (Ma, 2024).

**Impact on Psychological Safety**

The study finds that inclusive leadership significantly enhances psychological safety within teams over time. Leaders who actively encourage participation and respect diverse viewpoints create an environment where employees feel safe to express themselves. This sense of safety develops gradually as team members observe consistent inclusive behaviors. (Ma, 2024) Over time, employees become more willing to share ideas, ask questions, and admit mistakes without fear of negative consequences. This increased openness fosters a culture of learning and continuous improvement. As psychological safety strengthens, teams become more resilient and adaptable. The findings confirm that inclusive leadership is a key driver of psychologically safe environments (Au et al., 2023). A notable outcome of increased psychological safety is the reduction of fear of failure among team members. In traditional work environments, fear of making mistakes can hinder creativity and limit participation. However,

inclusive leaders normalize learning from failure and encourage experimentation. This reduces anxiety and empowers employees to take calculated risks (Aldowaiish et al., 2022). As a result, team members are more likely to engage in innovative thinking and problem-solving. Over time, this shift in mindset contributes to a more proactive and confident workforce. The reduction of fear also strengthens trust and collaboration within the team. These findings highlight the critical role of psychological safety in enabling effective team functioning (Siddhartha, 2024).



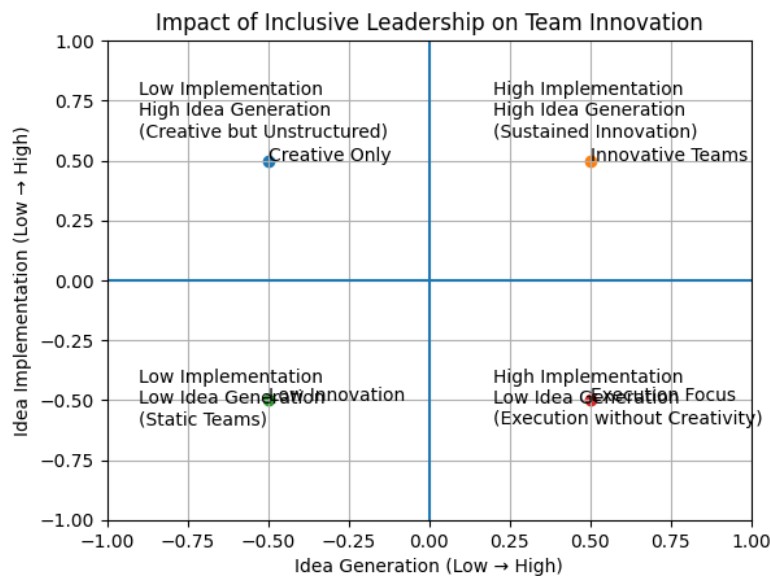
**Figure 1.** Double Radar Chart of the Impact of Inclusive Leadership on Psychological Safety: Safety Climate and Fear Reduction

The figure 1 illustrates how inclusive leadership simultaneously enhances a positive psychological safety climate and reduces fear-based barriers within teams. The safety climate dimension shows strong contributions in areas such as open expression, idea sharing, and learning culture, indicating that inclusive leaders create environments where employees feel encouraged to participate and collaborate (Homan et al., 2020). In contrast, the fear reduction dimension highlights improvements in admitting mistakes and risk-taking, reflecting a decrease in anxiety and hesitation among team members. The overlap across dimensions, particularly in trust building and team resilience, suggests that fostering safety and reducing fear are interconnected processes. As inclusive leadership behaviors are consistently demonstrated, employees become more confident and willing to engage in open dialogue and experimentation. This dual impact reinforces a culture of trust, learning, and adaptability. Overall, the figure emphasizes that psychological safety is both about enabling positive behaviors and removing barriers that inhibit employee participation and innovation (Roberson & Perry, 2021).

### Impact on Team Innovation

The results demonstrate that inclusive leadership has a positive and sustained impact on team innovation. Teams led by inclusive leaders show higher levels of idea generation, as members feel encouraged to contribute diverse perspectives. This openness leads to a broader range of ideas and more creative solutions to complex problems. Additionally, inclusive leadership supports the implementation phase of innovation by fostering collaboration and shared ownership of ideas (Martins, 2020). Team members are more likely to support and refine each other's contributions, increasing the likelihood of successful outcomes. Over time, this dynamic leads to a continuous cycle of innovation within the team. The findings suggest that inclusive leadership is a key enabler of both creativity and execution (Nishii & Leroy, 2020). Sustained innovation performance is particularly evident in teams where inclusive leadership practices are consistently applied. Rather than producing sporadic bursts of creativity, these teams demonstrate ongoing innovation capabilities. This is because inclusive environments encourage continuous idea exchange and learning. Furthermore, the combination of psychological safety and inclusive leadership creates a stable foundation for innovation (Nishii & Leroy, 2020). Teams become more confident in experimenting and adapting to new challenges. Over time, this leads to improved performance and

competitive advantage for the organization. These results highlight the long-term value of investing in inclusive leadership development. Innovation, in this context, is not a one-time outcome but an evolving capability (Korkmaz et al., 2022).



**Figure 2.** 2×2 Matrix of Inclusive Leadership Impact on Team Innovation: Idea Generation and Implementation

The figure as shown in Figure 2 illustrates how inclusive leadership influences team innovation by positioning teams across four quadrants based on their levels of idea generation and implementation. The top-right quadrant represents sustained innovation, where teams effectively generate diverse ideas and successfully implement them, reflecting the ideal outcome of inclusive leadership (Kuknor & Bhattacharya, 2020). In contrast, the top-left quadrant shows teams that are creative but lack structure, indicating strong idea generation without effective execution. The bottom-right quadrant highlights teams that focus on execution but lack creativity, leading to limited innovation potential. The bottom-left quadrant represents static teams with low performance in both dimensions. The matrix demonstrates that inclusive leadership helps teams move toward the optimal quadrant by fostering openness, collaboration, and shared ownership of ideas. Overall, the figure emphasizes that true innovation requires a balance between creativity and execution, both of which are strengthened through inclusive leadership practices (Jones et al., 2020).

**Mediating Role of Psychological Safety**

The findings reveal that psychological safety plays a critical mediating role in the relationship between inclusive leadership and team innovation. Inclusive leadership behaviors, such as openness and fairness, create an environment of trust and respect. This environment fosters psychological safety, which in turn enables employees to express ideas and take risks (Shore & Chung, 2021). Without psychological safety, the positive effects of inclusive leadership on innovation would be significantly reduced. The mediation analysis shows that psychological safety explains how leadership behaviors translate into innovative outcomes. It acts as the mechanism through which inclusive leadership influences team performance. This highlights the importance of focusing on both leadership behaviors and team climate (Fagan et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the mediating role of psychological safety becomes more pronounced over time. As teams experience sustained inclusive leadership, psychological safety strengthens and its impact on innovation increases. This suggests that the relationship between leadership and innovation is dynamic and evolves with continued interaction. Teams that develop high levels of psychological safety are better equipped to sustain innovation in the long term (Castelino & Shinde, 2023). Additionally, this mediation effect underscores the need for organizations to prioritize psychological safety as a strategic objective. By doing so, they can maximize the benefits of inclusive leadership. Overall, the findings demonstrate that psychological safety is a critical link connecting leadership practices to innovation outcomes (Leroy et al., 2021)

## CONCLUSION

This study highlights the critical role of inclusive leadership as a strategic HR development imperative in fostering psychologically safe and innovative teams. The findings demonstrate that inclusive leadership behaviors, when consistently applied over time, significantly enhance team dynamics by promoting trust, openness, and collaboration. Psychological safety emerges as a key mechanism through which these leadership practices translate into improved team innovation. By reducing fear of failure and encouraging the expression of diverse perspectives, inclusive leadership enables teams to generate and implement ideas more effectively. The longitudinal perspective further emphasizes that these effects are not immediate but develop progressively, requiring sustained commitment. As organizations continue to operate in increasingly diverse and complex environments, the importance of inclusive leadership becomes even more pronounced. Ultimately, investing in inclusive leadership development is essential for achieving long-term organizational performance and innovation.

From a theoretical and practical standpoint, this study contributes by providing a dynamic understanding of how leadership influences team outcomes over time. It underscores the importance of integrating inclusive leadership into HR development programs and organizational strategies. Managers should focus on building leadership capabilities that promote psychological safety and support continuous learning. However, the study is limited by factors such as time constraints and potential sample bias, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Future research should explore cross-cultural contexts and examine additional moderating variables that influence the relationship between leadership and innovation. Additionally, further longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into the sustainability of these effects. Overall, the study reinforces the need for organizations to prioritize inclusive leadership as a driver of innovation and employee well-being.

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