

EMPOWERING MINDS, ELEVATING WORK: THE CATALYTIC ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT IN LINKING LEADERSHIP INCLUSION TO EXTRA-ROLE PERFORMANCE**¹Dr. Inakshi Kapur, ²Dr. Palak Verma and ³Dr. Niharika Singh**¹Assistant Professor, Lloyd Business School, Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India²Assistant Professor, Jagannath International Management School, Kalkaji, New Delhi, India³Assistant Professor, IPEM, Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh, India**ABSTRACT**

In today's dynamic organisational landscape, leadership practices that embrace inclusivity are critical to nurturing proactive and committed employees. This study investigates how psychologically empowering leadership environments serve as a bridge between inclusive leadership and employee's willingness to engage in extra-role behaviours, specifically Organisational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB). The research conceptualises psychological empowerment: not merely as an outcome of leadership influence, but as a transformative psychological mechanism through which inclusive leadership translates into heightened discretionary contributions by employees.

Results of the study establishes that inclusive leadership: characterised by openness, accessibility, and active appreciation of diverse perspectives, fosters a deeper sense of purpose, autonomy self-efficacy and perceived impact among employees. These dimensions of psychological empowerment significantly stimulate OCB, manifested in voluntary actions that go beyond formal job requirements to support colleagues and organisational goals. Furthermore, psychological empowerment emerges as a mediator in the inclusive leadership-OCB relationship signifying its pivotal role in unlocking employee potential for value-added behaviours.

The findings offer practical implications for organisational leadership and HR practitioners by highlighting the strategic importance of cultivating inclusive practices that do more than acknowledge diversity, than empower it. By embedding empowerment-oriented processes into leadership development, organisations can strengthen citizenship behaviours that are crucial for innovation, collaboration and sustained organisational performance. This study contributes to leadership and behavioural science literature by articulating psychological empowerment as a crucial element for converting inclusive leadership intent into measurable workplace contributions.

Keywords: Inclusive Leadership, Organisational Citizenship Behaviour, Psychological Empowerment, IT Sector, India.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary business operations face complex external environments, leading to growing uncertainties and volatility (Chandratreya, 2024; Vecchiato, 2011). In addition to these complexities, the internal business environment is evolving to keep pace with the changing workforce demographics and their expectations. As traditional business operations turn redundant, it has become vital for organisations to promote innovations by redesigning and reimagining work methods, products, and services (Nour & Arbussa, 2024). In this context, leaders are responsible for empowering and inspiring their employees to continuously contribute towards innovative outcomes (Mohammed & Al-Abrow, 2023). The benefits of innovation can be achieved only when the employees voluntarily identify and engage in discretionary behaviours (Nawaz et al., 2023). Organisations increasingly rely on employee's discretionary behaviours, as known as organisational citizen behaviours (OCB), that go beyond formal job duties (Organ, 1988). OCBs, such as helping coworkers and initiative-taking, support innovation and performance in competitive environments. In India's dynamic IT sector, fostering extra-role behaviours is critical for organisational agility. Leadership style is a key antecedent of OCB, as positive leader behaviours create a climate of support and reciprocity (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Recent studies suggest that inclusive leadership (IL), a style characterised by openness, accessibility, and respect for all team members, may be especially effective in promoting OCB (Siswadi et al., 2023; Siyal et al., 2023; Tran & Choi, 2019). In this mode of leadership, leaders actively listen and engage in open communication to encourage the perspectives and opinions of their followers. Followers, in turn, acknowledge this accessibility. In this way, IL is regarded as an effective approach for developing and maintaining change-oriented OCB by providing opportunities to employees in the decision-making process (Carmeli et al., 2010; Randel et al., 2017). In line with Social Exchange Theory, employees who perceive fairness and support from inclusive leaders should exhibit more OCB (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

Empowerment theory posits that when leaders grant autonomy and support to employees in form of involving them in decision making and valuing their contributions, they feel more meaningfulness, competence, and control at work (Conger et al., 1997; Spreitzer, 1995). Inclusive leader's emphasis on openness and participation is likely to make employees more empowered. In turn, empowered employees tend to take more initiative and ownership, which translates into higher OCB (Xu et al., 2024). Therefore, it can be posited that inclusive leadership may indirectly promote OCB through the mediating effect of psychological empowerment (PE).

This paper examines the causal association between inclusive leadership, psychological empowerment, and organisational citizen behaviour. In achieving this research objectives, the present study makes several theoretical contributions to enrich the existing scholarly literature. First, the present study delves into the direct influence of inclusive leadership on employee's OCB, studies on which are scarce, especially in the context of Indian high-tech organisations. Moreover, the mediating mechanism of psychological empowerment on IL and OCB remains largely unexplored. Second, research on inclusive leadership is still in its infancy (Mitchell et al., 2015). Therefore, the present research extends the existing literature by examining the role of inclusive leadership in increasing psychological empowerment and OCB. Therefore, the mediated mechanism of psychological empowerment in the relationship between inclusive leadership and OCB is explored. Hypothesis for the proposed model of this study are grounded in Social Exchange theory (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), Leader-Member Exchange Theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), and Empowerment Theory (Spreitzer, 1995).

The paper opens with an introduction about the various constructs under examination in the current study and their relationship. The literature review lays the theoretical foundations on which the hypotheses have been constructed and the theories which support them. The sections after that, presents the results and discussions of the study. The final section outlines the implications, limitations, and conclusion of the research.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Inclusive Leadership

Inclusive leadership emphasises valuing employee differences, seeking inputs from all team members and demonstrating openness and availability (Carmeli et al., 2010; Shore et al., 2010). Such leaders make sure that all members in a team are treated equally and encourage a sense of belonging (Ashikali & Groeneveld, 2013). By recognising diverse perspectives and showing respect, inclusive leaders build high quality leader-member exchange relationships (Scandura & Lankau, 1996). Inclusive leadership has been linked to positive employee outcomes including creativity, voice, and innovative work behaviour (Javed et al., 2016; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). Previous studies show that inclusive leaders set a supportive tone that encourages employees to exceed role expectations (Jia et al., 2021). These findings suggest that when leader treat employees inclusively, promoting fairness and equal participation, employees reciprocate with helpful extra role behaviour (Carmeli et al., 2010; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Social exchange theory predicts that positive treatment by leaders will be repaid by employees through discretionary contributions (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Therefore, we hypothesise;

H1: Inclusive leadership has a positive effect on employee's OCB

Inclusive Leadership and Psychological Empowerment

Psychological environment refers to an intrinsic motivation state characterized by a sense of meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact (Spreitzer, 1995). When leaders delegate authority, share information, and show confidence in employee's abilities, employees feel more empowered (Coleman, 1996). Inclusive leaders create conditions for empowerment by involving employees in decision making and valuing their input (Alang et al., 2022). Carmeli et al. (2010) argue that inclusive leaders convey support to employees and encourage participation, which builds high quality exchanges. These supportive leader behaviours could enhance employees feeling of autonomy and competence (Hocine & Zhang, 2014). Hence, by fostering trust and granting employees freedom to contribute, inclusive leadership is likely to increase psychological empowerment. Therefore, we hypothesise;

H2: Inclusive leadership positively affects employee's psychological empowerment.

Psychological Empowerment and OCB

Empowered employees experience greater intrinsic motivation and ownership of their work, which can translate into higher OCB. When individuals feel that their work is meaningful and they can influence outcomes, they are more willing to go beyond formal role requirements (Barrick et al., 2012; Lysova et al., 2018). Social exchange theory perspectives also imply that feeling empowered by the organization or leader creates a norm of reciprocity, motivating employees to reciprocate through helpful behaviours (Cropanzano et al., 2017; Settoon

et al., 1996). Empowered employees tend to exhibit organizational citizenship by displaying dedication and helpfulness (Luo et al., 2025). Therefore, we hypothesise:

H3: Psychological empowerment had a positive effect on employee's OCB.

Mediating Role of Psychological Empowerment

Inclusive leaders treat employees respectfully and involve them in work processes, which directly encourages citizenship. Simultaneously, these leaders enable empowerment, which then encourage extra role behaviours. This reflects a dual path mechanism grounded in both exchange and empowerment theories. Few existing studies hints at such mediation, for example, A. Javed et al. (2025) Show that psychologically empowerment mediates the effect of inclusive leadership on project citizenship behaviour. Drawing on social exchange theory, we argue that employees reciprocate inclusive treatment by feeling empowered and therefore more willing to contribute beyond their duties. Therefore, we hypothesise;

H4: Psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between inclusive leadership and OCB.

METHODOLOGY

Sample and Procedure

We collected data via a self-administrative questionnaire from 435 employees in the Indian IT sector, including entry, middle and senior level staff. Participants were recruited through convenient sampling from various software and services organizations in major cities. The sample included a mix of roles (developer, managers) and demographics (65% male, 35% female). All respondents provided informed consent and responses were anonymous.

Measures

Survey items were adapted from standardised scales, using a 5- point Likert format (1- strongly disagree to 5- strongly agree). Inclusive leadership was measured with a 9-item scale (Carmeli et al., 2010), capturing leader openness, accessibility, and availability (example "My supervisor makes sure each team member's ideas are heard"). Psychological empowerment was measured using Spreitzer (1995) 12- item scale covering four dimensions; meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. Questions like "I have significant autonomy I determining how I do my job", were asked. OCB was measured with a 6-item scale adapted from Podsakoff et al. (1990), focusing on altruism and conscientiousness (example, "I help others who have heavy workloads"). Cronbach's alpha for each scale in our sample was high (α_{IL} - 0.89, α_{PE} - 0.84, α_{OCB} - 0.88), indicating good internal consistency.

Data analysis

SmartPLS (v3.2) was used to test the measurement and structural models. PLS-SEM is appropriate for complex models and does not assume normality (Hair et al., 2018). We first assessed the measurement model for reliability and validity, and then estimated the structural model with bootstrapping (5000 subsamples) to obtain path coefficients and significance Hair et al. (2014). Key indicators included factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), R^2 , predictive relevance (Q^2 via blindfolding) and model fit (SRMR).

RESULTS

Measurement Model

All outer loadings exceeded the 0.70 threshold, ranging from 0.70 to 0.90. Scale reliabilities were strong (Cronbach's α - 0.089 for IL, 0.84 for PE, 0.88 for OCB) and composite reliability (CR) ranged from 0.83 to 0.91. Convergent validity was confirmed; AVE values were 0.68 (IL), 0.55 (PE), and 0.68 (OCB), all above the recommended value of 0.50. discriminant validity was established via the Fornell-Larcher criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratios, which were all above 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2014).

Structural Model

The model explains a substantial portion of variance: R^2 (0.62 for OCB and 0.49 for psychological empowerment). All hypothesised paths were significant ($p < 0.01$). The standardised path coefficients were: Inclusive leadership \rightarrow OCB (β - 0.26, t - 3.45, $p < .001$); Inclusive leadership \rightarrow psychological empowerment (β - 0.71, t - 12.10, $p < .001$); psychological empowerment \rightarrow OCB (β - 0.51, t - 10.79, $p < .001$). The indirect effect of inclusive leadership on OCB via psychological empowerment was also significant (β - 0.37, $p < .001$), with about 61% of the total effect mediated, indicating partial mediation. Blindfolding indicated Q^2 values above 0 for both endogenous constructs (Q^2 - 0.34 for OCB, 0.27 for PE), suggesting good predictive relevance. The model fit was acceptable, with SRMR (0.07), below the 0.08 threshold.

DISCUSSION

The study found strong support for all four hypotheses. Inclusive leadership had a direct positive effect on OCB (H1), which aligns with social exchange theory and prior findings that leaders who treat employees fairly and involve them in decision making inspire reciprocal extra role behaviours, citation. Our results confirm previous findings that inclusive leadership boost OCB and that there is a direct positive impact of inclusive leadership on employee extra role behaviours (Chen et al., 2020; Tran & Choi, 2019). In practical terms when Indian managers demonstrate openness and equal respect employees respond by exceeding formal job requirements to help the organization. Inclusive leadership also strongly predicted psychological empowerment (H2). This is consistent with empowerment theory, which says that participative and supportive leadership practices enhance employees' sense of autonomy, competence, and impact (Conger et al., 1997; Spreitzer, 1995). As inclusive leaders consult employees and value their input, employees report greater meaning and control over their work. Previous research argues that when inclusive leaders convey support and respect diversity, they build high quality exchanges (Carmeli et al., 2010). In our study, this supportive environment translated into higher empowerment scores, indicating that Indian IT workers felt more capable and self-directed under inclusive bosses. Psychological Empowerment had a significant positive effect on OCB (H3). Empowered employees who believe that the work is meaningful and that they have influence, are more likely to invest extra effort and exhibit discretionary behaviours. Our findings Are supported with recent research by Xu et al. (2024), who found that empowerment significantly increases change-oriented OCB. Social exchange theory also implies that feeling in power creates a sense of obligation to give back to the organization, thus motivating OCB. Psychological empowerment mediated the relationship between inclusive leadership and OCB (H4). This significant indirect path suggest that inclusive leadership not only influences OCB Directly but does so in part by empowering employees. Our results indicate that inclusive practices foster OCB through the mechanism of enhanced empowerment. This implies a dual process: Inclusive leaders directly encourage citizenship through fair treatment and trust (LMX processes), and cultivate an import mindset that independently drives extra role behaviour. Since the direct effect remains significant, empowerment is a partial mediator, meaning that other mechanisms (example perceived organisational support or employee commitment) may also play a role.

From a theoretical perspective these results integrate multiple theories. Social exchange theory (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) and Leader-Member Exchange theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) explain the direct IL-OCB link. Inclusive leadership behaviour creates high quality exchanges and obligations, triggering OCB. Empowerment Theory explain the IL-PE-OCB; inclusive leaders enhance the motivational state of empowerment, which in turn boosts employee's willingness to go above and beyond. Thus, our findings empirically tie inclusive leadership, psychological empowerment, and OCB in a coherent model. Our study extends the literature by assessing these relationships in the Indian IT context by highlighting empowerment as a key mechanism.

IMPLICATIONS**Theoretical Implications**

The study advances knowledge on inclusive leadership by linking it to OCB and identifying empowerment as a mediator. It confirms that inclusive leadership though conceptually related to other styles like empowering and transformational leadership has unique predictive power for employee citizenship behaviours. By grounding hypothesis in Social Exchange and Empowerment theories this study bridges leadership and organizational behaviour literatures. It also contributes to empowerment theory by showing one antecedent (inclusive leadership) that enhances empowerment. Finally, it adds context by testing these effects in the Indian IT sector, supporting the generalisability of inclusive leadership and empowerment theories beyond Western studies.

Practical Implications

For practitioners, the findings suggest that fostering inclusive leadership can yield tangible benefits in employee performance and discretionary behaviour. IT firm managers should cultivate inclusiveness, for example, by encouraging input from all team members, showing openness to diverse ideas, to encourage OCB. Such behaviours build trust and empower employees, which in turn leads to more helping, initiative, and dedication on the job. Human resource policies should train leaders in inclusive practices and measure empowerment levels. Moreover, creating an empowering work climate through delegation and participative decision making can be an effective way to encourage higher employee engagement and citizenship. In India's knowledge driven economy, where innovative and extra role efforts are crucial, developing inclusive leaders could improve organizational effectiveness in employee well meaning.

LIMITATIONS

Despite its contributions, the study has limitations. First, the cross-sectional design prevents strong causal inferences; longitudinal or experimental studies are needed to confirm the directional effects. Second, the use of convenience sampling and self-reported data may introduce bias. Although we use established scales to mitigate common method variance, future research could incorporate multi source data and more rigorous sampling. Third, the sample was limited to the Indian IT industry, which may restrict generalisability. Organizational cultures and leadership norms vary across sectors and countries, so future study should test the model in other contexts. Fourth, we focused on one mediator (psychological empowerment); other variables such as trust, psychological safety or job satisfaction could also help explain the inclusive leadership- OCB link. Addressing these limitations will strengthen understanding of inclusive leadership's impact.

CONCLUSION

In some, this research provides robust evidence that inclusive leadership enhances employee's and organizational citizenship behaviour, both directly and indirectly through increased psychological empowerment. Using survey data of 435 Indian IT professionals and PLS-SEM analysis, we found that leaders who are open, accessible, and respectful of all employees elicit more voluntary, helpful actions from their workforce. Moreover, part of this effect occurs because inclusive leaders empower employees, making them capable and in control, which then leads to greater discretionary efforts. These findings highlight the value of inclusive practices in leadership development. Theoretically, the study integrates social exchange, LMX, and empowerment perspectives. Practically, it suggests that Indian IT firms can boost employee engagement by training managers to adopt inclusive behaviours. Future research should continue to explore these dynamics in different settings. Ultimately, as workplaces become more diverse and collaborative, inclusive leadership appears to be a powerful lever for motivating employees to go above and beyond for their organisation.

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