



RESEARCH PAPER

**Impact of Inclusive Leadership on Employees' Adaptive Performance:
The Mediating Role of Psychological Capital in Education Sector**

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to investigate the effect of inclusive leadership on employee's adaptive performance as mediated by psychological capital. The emergence of complex business environments and rapid changes in customer's needs have forced the business organizations to respond more innovatively. For this purpose, researchers have theoretically and empirically tested different dimensions of organizational working environment. The study employed structural equation modeling to analyze the impact of inclusive leadership and psychological capital on adaptive performance. In this research, 1000 resamples were generated, and an indirect effect was computed for each of these samples to assess the mediating role of psychological capital in the relationship between inclusive leadership and adaptive performance. Data was examined by using both the descriptive and inferential analysis. The study's findings indicate that inclusive leadership has a substantial and positive influence on individuals' adaptive performance, ultimately leading to increased employee productivity. Moreover, psychological capital was identified as a mediator in the relationship between inclusive leadership and employees' adaptive performance. Inclusive leaders enhance psychological capital by fostering an environment where employees' mistakes are tolerated and by promoting optimism and self-efficacy. Employees with a high level of psychological capital are better equipped to adapt to changes effectively, promote organizational learning, and enhance their ability to cope with evolving job requirements.

KEYWORDS Adaptive Performance, Inclusive Leadership, Psychological Capital

Introduction

The scarcity of economic resources and increasing global competition has forced organizations to be more efficient, flexible, and innovative. To acquire these characteristics, organizations need such human resources that adapt to changes effectively (Kozlowski et al., 2009). AP is an aspect of work performance that replicates such effectiveness. Adaptive performance consists of obtaining increased capabilities to cope with changing job requirements efficiently. Employees' adaptive performance at individual-level enables organizations to manage change, to facilitate organizational learning, and to synchronize with fluctuating customer's expectations. Shoss et al., (2012) have proposed a classification framework for job performance that encompasses four distinct facets. These facets include "task performance," which involves behaviors explicitly outlined in job descriptions, and "contextual performance" (also referred to as "organizational citizenship behavior"), which encompasses behaviors contributing to the development of a positive psychological and social work environment. Additionally, the framework considers "counterproductive work behavior" and "withdrawal behavior" as other dimensions of job performance (Shoss et al., 2012). On the other hand, counterproductive job performance includes all actions that are intentionally done to harm individuals or organizations (Shoss et al., 2012), while withdrawal behavior indicates voluntary turnover, absenteeism, and tardiness (Johns, 2002).

Many researchers have claimed that this categorization demonstrates a static view of the behavior and it is necessary to emphasize on behaviors that indicate the degree of employees' response to changes in both work environments and task requirements (Campbell, 1999; Allworth & Hesketh, 1999; Griffin et al., 2007; Shoss, et al., 2012), considered as adaptive performance. Such behaviors indicate modifying and relating capabilities in response to both predicted and existing change. Different researchers have defined adaptive performance using different terms such as "adaptivity" (Griffin, Parker, & Mason, 2010), "adaptive behavior" (Karaevli & Hall, 2006), "adaptive expertise" (Chen, et al., 2005), and "adaptability" (Smith, et al., 1997). The phenomenon of adaptive performance among employees holds significant relevance within the domain of human resource development (HRD) and has become a key area of scholarly interest. Recognizing its importance, numerous researchers have viewed adaptive performance as an expanded framework that reflects the evolving nature of contemporary work and business environments (Joung et al., 2006; Park & Park, 2019). Consequently, this study places a central focus on predicting employees' adaptive performance and derives insights from previous well-established studies on the determinants of adaptive performance. Previous research has consistently identified several notable relationships, including the positive associations between adaptive performance and learning, adaptive performance and the presence of an innovation-friendly climate (Han & Williams, 2008), as well as adaptive performance and transformational leadership (Charbonnier-Voirin, et al., 2010).

Notably, the idea of inclusive leadership is a relatively recent development in academic literature, and there has been limited exploration of its influence at the institutional level. Therefore, the outcomes of this study carry notable theoretical and practical inferences, as they provide insights into the less-explored realm of how inclusive leadership affects organizations.

Leadership influence on employees' behaviour can also be influenced by psychological capital (Luthans & Youssef, 2007). According to Fang & Wang 2016, psychological capital serves as a mediator for inclusive leadership to envisage employees' behaviour. Inclusive leadership will affect the psychological mechanism of followers and then result in changing the behavior of individuals (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). Consequently, leaders' support and motivation will increase psychological capital (Sahin et al., 2014). If a leader supports and encourages employees, then they will become more optimistic and adaptive to change.

The principal aim of this paper was to emphasize the influence of inclusive leadership on employees' adaptive performance. We hypothesized that adaptive performance could be assessed by establishing a mediation model that explores the relationship between inclusive leadership and adaptive performance, with psychological capital acting as a mediating factor. This paper makes two significant contributions to the existing literature. Firstly, this study conducts a thorough and in-depth examination of the complete mechanism through which inclusive leadership influences adaptive performance, considering the mediating function of psychological capital. Secondly, it adds to the expanding body of research on inclusive leadership, which represents an emerging theory within the domain of leadership studies.

Literature Review

Inclusive Leadership and Adaptive Performance

Edmondson and Nembhard (2006) introduced the novel concept of inclusive leadership, which remains relatively unexplored in academic literature. Limited research has examined the organizational-level impacts of inclusive leadership. In today's complex and rapidly changing work environment, success hinges on the presence of exceptional skills and talent. Consequently, organizations increasingly prioritize the adaptability of their

workforce to environmental shifts. Swift responsiveness to change has emerged as a critical competitive advantage for organizations aiming to thrive in dynamic conditions. Fang (2019) investigated the influence of inclusive leadership on team performance, specifically within the context of China. Her study revealed that inclusive leaders place significant emphasis on nurturing strong leader-follower relationships. Inclusive leadership, as identified, comprises a blend of transformational, communal, transactional, and authentic leadership styles. Furthermore, Qi & Liu (2017) have provided empirical evidence supporting the positive influence of inclusive leadership on team performance and employee voice behaviors. Additionally, Ye et al., (2019) explored the favorable association between inclusive leadership and both team performance and innovation.

In the domain of inclusive leadership and its impact on adaptive performance (AP), prior research consistently underscores a positive correlation between transformational leadership and AP, learning, as well as the cultivation of an innovation-friendly work environment (Han & Williams, 2008; Charbonnier-Voirin et al., 2010). However, the concept of Inclusive Leadership (IL) is still in its emerging stages, resulting in a limited body of literature focusing on IL, its antecedents, and its consequences. Nevertheless, some studies have affirmed IL as a predictor of favorable work behaviors. For example, Jundt et al., (2015) identified a positive relationship between transformational leadership and AP. Carmeli et al., (2010) revealed a significant impact of IL on enhancing employee engagement and fostering creativity in the workplace. Javed et al., (2017) established a positive correlation between IL and innovative work behaviors. Choi et al., (2017) provided evidence of IL's positive influence on employee well-being. Randel et al., (2018) study further elucidated the constructive outcomes associated with inclusive leadership. Drawing upon these previous research findings, we have also posited a positive association between inclusive leadership and adaptive performance, extending the existing body of research in this area.

Inclusive Leadership and Psychological Capital

Psychological capital is widely acknowledged as a valuable psychological asset that cultivates positive attitudes and outlooks in both work and life (Ke& Sun, 2018; Sahin et al., 2014). Luthans& Youssef (2007) have articulated that psychological capital is built upon four core components: resilience, hope, optimism, and self-efficacy. It serves as a catalyst for individuals to attain sustainable competitive advantages, career success, and overall life satisfaction in the future (Ke& Sun, 2018; Ren et al., 2013). Moreover, it plays a pivotal role as an indicator of employees' job satisfaction, innovation capacity, and individual job performance (Walumbwa et al., 2010; Baluku et al., 2018; Luthans& Youssef, 2007; Jiang & Zhao, 2007).

Numerous research studies have contended that psychological capital emerges as a consequence of the integrated influence of leadership, organizational factors, and individual attributes (Ke& Sun, 2018). It can also act as a mediating factor in the relationship between leadership and various outcomes such as job performance, innovation, and individual behavior (Mao, 2008; Luthans et al., 2004). Similarly, Fang & Wang (2016) and Fang et al. (2019) have established that inclusive leadership exerts a substantial positive influence on an individual's psychological capital.

Based on the principles of social exchange theory, it is posited that collaborative interactions between leaders and followers lead to the development of favorable psychological states conducive to effective work performance. Hence, when leaders adopt a positive and inclusive approach in their interactions with employees, it is more likely to have a positive impact on the psychological capital of those employees. Positive interaction can be described in terms of motivation and encouragement, positive attitude towards followers, giving them fair treatment and tolerance of their wrongdoings. Such sort of support is essential for building reciprocal relationships with followers (Fang & Chen, 2017; Nembhard& Edmondson, 2006). Indeed, with this kind of mental support, followers are

more likely to cultivate qualities such as optimism and resilience, consequently increasing their psychological capital (Fang & Chen, 2017). Additionally, inclusive leadership fosters a workplace environment where employees feel comfortable sharing innovative ideas and adapting to organizational changes (Carmeli et al., 2010). Consequently, employees can be expected to maintain positive attitudes towards their work, effectively navigate change, and enhance their sense of self-efficacy (Snyder et al., 2005).

Psychological Capital as a Mediator

Psychological capital is considered as a positive psychological and emotional state by many previous researchers (Fang & Chen, 2017; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). Different aspects of leadership can have considerable influence on employees' psychological state, thereby enabling them to contribute positively in managing change and innovation in the organization. Employees with positive psychological capital are more energetic, innovative and self-efficacious which is ultimately important for increasing the adaptive performance of employees. Enhanced adaptive performance results from a strong organizational commitment to bolstering psychological capital. Inclusive leaders excel at cultivating high psychological capital through collaborative support, thereby igniting internal motivation among employees (Zeng & Zhao, 2007). Employees driven by such motivation tend to exhibit greater innovation, efficiency, and adaptability to change, making more substantial contributions to organizational objectives. Inclusive leaders' respectful and equitable treatment of employees further solidifies their sense of belonging within the organization (Duan & Tang, 2016). This, in turn, elevates expectations regarding the organization's capacity to adapt effectively. A heightened sense of belonging empowers employees to effectively navigate changes and embrace innovation within the organization. Moreover, inclusive leadership demonstrates support by tolerating mistakes, a practice that boosts employees' psychological capital. This, in turn, instills confidence in employees, affirming their competence to accomplish innovative organizational tasks and goals without reservation. Thus, in view of the above, the following hypothesis are developed for this study:

Hypotheses

- H1: Inclusive leadership is positively correlated with adaptive performance.
- H2: Inclusive leadership has a positive correlation with psychological capital.
- H3: Psychological capital acts as a mediator between inclusive leadership and employees' adaptive performance.

Material and Methods

Participants

In the current study, the sample was selected randomly from specific higher secondary schools of Azad Jammu & Kashmir. Data was gathered from a total of 279 teachers and their corresponding principals over a three- month period, out of a total 700 questionnaire distributed.

Measures

The measurement instruments employed in this study were adapted from prior research to assess the various constructs being investigated. Inclusive leadership was measured using a 9-item instrument originally developed by Carmeli et al., (2010). For evaluating adaptive performance and employees' psychological state, instruments from Pulakos et al., (2000) and Luthans, F., & Youssef, C. M. (2007) were employed respectively.

Responses to the items in these instruments were collected using a five-point Likert scale, with response options ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Data Analysis

The study employed structural equation modeling to assess the impact of inclusive leadership and psychological capital on adaptive performance. Specifically, 1000 resamples were generated, and an indirect effect was computed for each of these samples to investigate the mediating role of psychological capital between inclusive leadership and adaptive performance. Data was examined through comprehensive analysis, encompassing both descriptive and inferential approaches.

Results and Discussion

The research model's quality was assessed by computing discriminant and divergent validities. The results, as presented in Table 1, demonstrated excellent values for discriminant and divergent validities. Specifically, the composite reliability (CR) exceeded 0.60, the average variance extracted (AVE) exceeded 0.50, and the maximum shared variance (MSV) was found to be less than the AVE. These findings align with the criteria set forth by Bagozzi and Yi (1988), Fornell and Larcker (1981), and Chenini et al. (2020).

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics, Reliability, Validity, and Correlation Analysis

	Variables	Mean	SD	CR	AVE	MSV	1	2	3
1.	IL	3.64	.88	0.91	0.54	0.26	0.732		
2.	PC	3.42	.89	0.95	0.80	0.26	0.468***	0.892	
3.	AP	3.48	.87	0.97	0.77	0.22	0.342***	0.457***	0.877

Significance of Correlations: p < 0.100; * p < 0.050; ** p < 0.010; *** p < 0.001

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

The assessment of model fit, an essential step in hypothesis testing, was conducted through confirmatory factor analysis (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). The most common fit indices are calculated to assess the model fitness such as Chi-square $\chi^2/df = 1.94$, Root Mean Square Error of Variables Approximation (RMSEA) = .06, Incremental fit index (IFI) = .95, Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) = .95, and Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .95 as shown in table-2.

Table 2
Measurement Model

Measurement Model	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	RMSEA	IFI	TLI	CFI
	775.752	399	1.94	.06	.95	.95	.95

Test of Hypotheses

All the hypothesized relationships are tested through structural equation modelling using AMOS-24. Results in table 3 revealed significant direct impact of IL on AP ($\beta = .337, P < .001$), IL on PC ($\beta = .476, P < .001$) and PC on AP ($\beta = .443, P < .001$).

These results confirmed the acceptance of all the hypothesized direct relationships. Similarly, the results in table 4 revealed the indirect effect of inclusive leadership on adaptive performance through psychological capital. These results confirmed the significant indirect impact of IL on AP in the presence of psychological capital ($\beta = .178, P < .001$), thus, H3 is also accepted.

Table 3
Hypotheses Direct Effect

Relationships	Path coefficients	P-Value
Inclusive Leadership→ Adaptive Performance	0.337	***
Inclusive Leadership→ Psychological Capital	0.476	***
Psychological Capital → Adaptive Performance	0.443	***

Note: *p <.05, **p <.01***p <.001

Table 4
Hypothesis Mediation Effect

Relationships	Indirect effect	P-Value	LLCI	ULCI
Inclusive Leadership→ Psychological Capital→ Adaptive performance (Direct effect 0.161** & Total effect 0.337***)	0.718	***	0.102	0.262

Note: *p <.05, **p <.01***p <.001

Conclusion

Meeting the demands of globalization requires organizations to have a workforce capable of rapidly transitioning from newcomers to fully integrated members. In this regard, inclusive leadership plays a pivotal role in managing and embracing organizational change. To sustain and survive in increasing global competition with the scarcity of economic resources it becomes necessary for the organizations to be even more flexible, innovative, and efficient (Ployhart & Bliese, 2006) and this require such human resources that competently become accustomed to the change (Kozlowski et al., 2009), so as to accelerate the adaptive performance of the employees. The concept of inclusiveness is deeply ingrained in all facets of management, reflecting a culture of respect and motivation for every member of the organization. This, in turn, enhances the psychological capital of organizational members (Fang & Wang, 2016), empowering them to actively engage in teamwork without the fear of reprisals for any mistakes. More specifically, inclusive leadership has the potential to significantly enhance employees' adaptive performance by treating them fairly and respectfully, inspiring and supporting them in managing organizational changes, and accepting their failures as part of the learning process. Inclusive leaders possess the ability to instill a sense of respect in employees, facilitating effective adaptation to changes within the organization (Duan & Tang, 2016). They also demonstrate tolerance for employees' mistakes, thereby bolstering their psychological capital and fostering belief in their own capabilities. More elaborately, inclusive leadership is emerging as a crucial factor in enhancing employees' psychological capital and subsequently boosting individual adaptive performance in today's era of dynamic and diverse workplace. This relationship can be effectively understood through the lens of the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory.

Inclusive Leadership and Psychological Capital

Inclusive leaders foster an environment where every team member feels valued, respected, and included. They actively promote diversity, equity, and inclusion, which in turn nurtures employees' psychological capital. Psychological capital comprises four key elements: hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism. Inclusive leadership practices, such as open communication, empathy, and active support for personal and professional development, contribute to developing and enhancing these elements.

Psychological Capital and Adaptive Performance

Psychological capital acts as a psychological resource reservoir for employees. It provides them with the mental and emotional tools needed to cope with challenges, adapt to change, and perform effectively in demanding situations. Employees with higher

psychological capital are more likely to exhibit increased resilience, problem-solving abilities, and a positive attitude when facing obstacles or uncertainties.

COR Theory and the Resource Investment Process

The Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, proposed by Hobfoll, asserts that individuals strive to acquire, retain, and protect resources. When individuals perceive a resource gain or an increase in resource availability, they are more likely to invest those resources in achieving positive outcomes. In this context, inclusive leadership acts as a resource gain, enhancing employees' psychological capital. As employees perceive an increase in their psychological capital, they are more inclined to invest these psychological resources in adaptive performance behaviors.

Thus, Inclusive leadership aligns with the principles of the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory by nurturing employees' psychological capital. It creates a resource-rich environment where employees are better equipped to adapt and excel in their roles. In this virtuous cycle, inclusive leadership practices contribute to resource gains, enhancing psychological capital, and ultimately fostering individual adaptive performance in the workplace. Organizations that recognize and cultivate this relationship can expect to see improved employee well-being, resilience, and performance in an ever-evolving professional landscape.

Moreover, the results of the study indicated a positive association between inclusive leadership and employees' achievement of adaptive performance. The adoption of inclusive leadership model results in increasing adaptive performance of employees thereby improving their level of productivity and innovation in the organization. Thus, it is quite beneficial for organizations to choose the best model of inclusive leadership in order to optimize the efficacy of adaptive performance within the organization.

Recommendations

Organizations should actively promote the adoption of inclusive leadership traits among their leaders. By doing so, leaders can develop the essential skills required to confront the challenges brought about by globalization. Inclusive leadership not only enhances the adaptive performance of employees but also strengthens their psychological capital. This is particularly crucial in assisting individuals in effectively navigating the entire process of organizational change.

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