

The Effect of Inclusive Leadership on Employee Empowerment and Innovative Work Behavior: An Empirical Study from Turkey

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Abstract

The need for effective and successful leaders in the organizations is increasing drastically due to highly competitive environment in today's business life. To provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, this article draws on social interaction theory to investigate the potential effects of the effect of inclusive leadership on the innovative work behavior within the workplace, and the mediating role of employee empowerment on the link between inclusive leadership and the innovative work behavior. SPSS and AMOS software was applied to survey data obtained from (n=339) employees. Results revealed that inclusive leadership is a strong predictor for employee empowerment and innovative work behavior partially mediates the link between inclusive leadership and innovative work behavior. Implications for theory and practice alongside limitations are discussed.

Keywords: Inclusive leadership, employee empowerment, innovative work behavior.

Introduction

In the current competitive environment, changing consumer demands made it compulsory for enterprises to engage in innovative activities and focus on innovation in management and production processes. Even though the companies engage in sustainable innovation activities due to the facilitating effect of innovation on the enterprises, the fact that innovation is seen as an issue that concerns only R&D departments has reduced the effect of innovation advantage. The long-term success of enterprises in innovation activities is possible with the support of all employees in the organization to innovation (Qi et al., 2019; Javed et al., 2018a).

Considering the importance of the contribution of employees to innovation, it is necessary to identify the factors that encourage employees to innovate. Although existing research assesses the factors that contribute to the innovation activities of employees as information sharing, human resource management practices, and organizational

climate (Damanpour, 1991; Hu et al., 2009; Chang et al., 2011), it is stated that the most important factor affecting creativity and innovation in organizations is leadership (Qi et al., 2019; Carmeli et al., 2010). Some studies indicate that leadership has a significant effect on innovative work behaviors of employees (Gumusluoglu and Ilsev, 2009; Dhar, 2016; Tian and Sanchez, 2017).

Inclusive leadership is a driving as well as a precipitating force both to improve employees' positive perceptions towards their leader and to employees' motivation (Khan et al., 2021). In this content, by building an inclusive work environment, employees are encouraged and supported by their leaders which allow them to generate more creative ideas through innovative work processes (Fang et al., 2019). Hence, innovative work behaviors of employees tend to increase as revealed by some studies (e.g. Mansoor et al., 2021, Bannay et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2019; Javed et al., 2018b; Choi et al., 2015).

Another important factor that affects the innovative work behaviors of employees is employee empowerment (Zhang and Bartol, 2010). Employees' perception of autonomy and being valued, caused by realization of the ideas which they brought forward with meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact, is considered to be an important factor in ensuring the intrinsic motivation necessary for innovation (Seibert et al., 2011; Alge et al., 2006).

Psychological empowerment has a quality that encourages decision making in decision-making processes (Spreitzer, 1995). In this context, inclusive leadership and a participatory and inclusive working environment can be considered as the most appropriate environment for psychological empowerment. As a matter of fact, Javed et al. (2018a) stated that there is a positive relationship between inclusive leadership and psychological empowerment.

In the current study first, we review the pertinent literature on inclusive leadership and the relationship with innovative work behavior and explain why inclusive leadership has an effect on innovative work behavior. Second, we reviewed the literature to cover and clarify the role of employee empowerment on the relationship between the dependent

and independent variables of our study. Then, we formally test the hypotheses concerning relationships among supervisor's inclusive leadership, innovative work behavior and, employee empowerment. Finally, we present the research findings and recommendations in the conclusion section.

The degree of an employee's perception toward being a respected member of the workgroup by experiencing satisfying his/her need for belonging and uniqueness.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Inclusive leadership, first described by Nembhard and Edmondson (2006), is defined as the words and actions of leaders encouraging and appreciating the contributions of followers. Shore et al. (2011, p. 1265) defined inclusivity as "the degree of an employee's perception toward being a respected member of the workgroup by experiencing satisfying his/her need for belonging and uniqueness." The inclusive leadership that, in general, justifies the actions of followers via leadership and accentuates endorsement, recognition, respect, responsiveness, and responsibility (Hollander, 2009), is considered as caring about the thoughts and ideas of the individuals in the organization and ensuring the participation of the members in the decisions from a participatory point of view (Nembhard and Edmondson, 2006).

Innovative business behavior can be defined as the behavior of an individual that aims to initiate and intentionally introduce novel and useful ideas, processes, products or procedures in the organization (De Jong and Den Hartog, 2008). Put it differently, innovative work behavior includes recognizing problems, generating, developing or adopting ideas or solutions (Scott & Bruce, 1994) as well as it is considered as the search for new resources and the application of new methods for developing new technologies and techniques to achieve organizational goals (Çalışkan and Urtekin, 2019; Eroğlu et al., 2018).

Inclusive leadership, being accepted as a relational leadership model, has three strengths: openness, conformity and accessibility (Hollander, 2009; Carmeli et al., 2010). The fundamental skills of inclusive leadership

are based on the relationship and support between leaders and their subordinates (Zhao et al., 2020). Akgunduz et al. (2018) state that, the complex structure of the work and the support that the employees receive from the managers and the organization increase the creativity of the employees. According to Diliello et al. (2011), employees who feel limited in the organization and feel that their creativity is not supported cannot reveal their creative potential. Bu açıdan kapsayıcı liderliğin çalışanların yenilikçi iş süreçlerine katılımını kolaylaştıracağını düşünmekteyiz. Inclusive leaders provide support to their employees (Hollander, 2009). Within the framework of the leader-member exchange theory inclusive leaders always support their followers in meeting their expectations, needs, and wishes and realizing their ideas through openness, availability, and accessibility (Carmeli et al., 2010; Hollander, 2009). According to Choi et al. (2017), followers feel themselves more free to share information about their job and express their real thoughts due to perceiving the supportive climate created by the inclusive leader. Inclusive leaders recognize the contribution of their subordinates to the solution processes in an inclusive work environment (Aslan et al., 2020).

In addition, Hollander (2012) argued that inclusive leaders strongly support their followers by taking full responsibility for possible negative consequences, and they protect their subordinates by taking responsibility for failure if some ideas generated by the subordinates can not achieve the desired results. Hence, while generating new ideas to contribute work processes, employees feel themselves safe without being frightened from the negative consequences of these ideas as result of safety and trust provided of their leaders (Choi et al., 2017). In this regard, by freely expressing their ideas and being supported by their leaders, employees tend to increase their innovative work behavior (Mansoor et al., 2021). As a matter of fact, some of the previous studies, in parallel to the grounds mentioned above, found that there is a positive relationship between inclusive leadership and innovative work behavior (Mansoor vd., 2021, Bannay vd., 2020; Wang vd., 2019; Javed vd., 2018b; Choi vd., 2015).

Inclusive Leadership and Psychological Empowerment

According to Spreitzer (1995), in order to be successful in empowerment activities in the organization, psychological empowerment, defined as a psychological condition, refers to a cognitive process that constitutes the intrinsic motivation of the employee (meaning, competence, self-determination and impact). Psychological empowerment has a structure that allows employees to play an active role in decision-making and encourages decentralized decision-making (Spreitzer, 1995). In this context, inclusive leadership and participatory and inclusive working environment can be considered as the most appropriate environment for psychological empowerment. In such work environments, different voices are respected, various and different ideas and perspectives are realized, and employees are encouraged to make useful contributions to their organizations (Pless and Maak, 2004). Javed et al. (2018a) stated that there is a positive relationship between inclusive leadership and psychological empowerment. Therefore, we hypothesize as follows;

H2: Inclusive leadership has a significant positive effect on employee empowerment.

Psychological Empowerment and IWB

Seibert et al. (2011) suggested that ideas in the workplace, which lay the groundwork for the realization of ideas, making useful proposals for change, and ultimately creating an innovative work environment, were influenced by some intrinsic motivation factors such as meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. Uzunbacak (2015) stated that employees are encouraged to behave innovatively if they are authorized to make decisions and asked to generate new ideas in the work processes. Also, building an organizational culture that facilitates employees' innovative work processes make sense. In such an environment, the employees feel empowered and can generate novel ideas. In addition, the sense of empowerment prepares the ground for employees to contribute positively to the work environment (Block, 1987; Randolph, 1995). In the literature, psychological empowerment was observed to have a positive relationship

with innovative work behavior in studies conducted to determine the relationship between psychological empowerment and innovative work behavior (Zhang and Bartol, 2010; Seibert et al., 2011; Singh and Sarkar, 2012). Therefore, we hypothesize as follows;

H3: Employee empowerment has a significant positive effect on innovative work behavior.

Mediating Role of Psychological Empowerment

Inclusive leaders who provide a supportive climate, with absolute neutrality to all of their followers ensure the creation of a working environment in which the personalities of the team members are respected, where there is an atmosphere of trust and loyalty, and honest communication (Hollander, 2009). Thus, higher expressions of different voices in an embracing and inclusive environment (Nembhard and Edmondson, 2006) increase the inner motivation of the followers and lead to a sense of psychological empowerment (Dewettinck and van Amejide, 2011). This may be due to the increased willingness of the followers to develop creative ideas via meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact (Sinha et al., 2016). For this reason, we suggest that followers who are intrinsically motivated by inclusive leadership and who work in a participatory and inclusive environment necessary for meaning, competence, self-determination, impact, and psychological empowerment will be more willing to contribute to innovative work processes. Therefore, we hypothesize as follows;

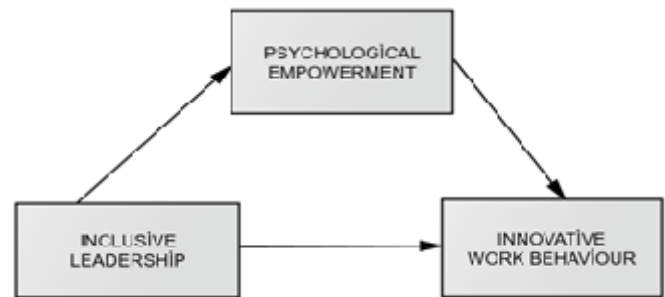
H4: Employee empowerment has a mediating role in the effect of inclusive leadership on innovative work behavior.

Method

In this research, which intends to evaluate the mediating role of employee empowerment in the influence of inclusive leadership on innovative work behavior, first, information regarding the population and sample of the research, as well as the scales used in the research, is provided in this study. After that, analyses were performed for the research model, which was built using the data from the research sample. Confirmatory factor analysis of the

scales was conducted in this context, and correlations between research variables were determined. The structural equation model established within the framework of the research model and the goodness-of-fit tests of the research model were conducted and the results of the regression analysis between variables and the bootstrap mediation test were also presented.

Within the scope of the research, the model shown in Figure 1 was created to reveal the relationships between variables.



Study Universe and Sample

The universe of this research is manufacturing companies. The sample consists of manufacturing companies selected by convenience sampling method in the Mediterranean region of Turkey. Due to time and cost limitations, 400 people working in the production departments of 10 randomly selected plastic, machinery, and textile factories with an R&D department were selected to take surveys. Of the surveys, 40 questionnaires were not answered and 21 questionnaires were incomplete. Therefore, the sample of the study was determined as 339. Of the participants, 43 were female and 296 were male. 110 of the participants were between 18-30 years old, 170 were between 31-40 years old, and 59 were aged 41 and over. 237 of the participants were workers, 49 were chiefs-foremen, 29 were engineers, and 24 were mid-level managers.

Research Scales

Inclusive Leadership Scale: In the study, the scale consisting of three subscales and 9 items, namely openness (3 items), availability (4 items), and accessibility (2 items), developed by Carmeli et al. (2010), was used. Cronbach's

Alpha reliability of the scale was calculated as 0.92.

Psychological Empowerment Scale: The scale consisting of four subscales and 12 items, meaning (3 items), competence (3 items), self-determination (3 items), and impact (3 items), developed by Spreitzer (1995), was used. Cronbach's Alpha reliability of the scale was calculated as 0.93.

Innovative Work Behavior Scale: The scale consisting of

three subscales and 9 items, idea generation (3 items), idea promotion (3 items), and idea realization (3 items), developed by Janssen (2003), was used. Cronbach's Alpha reliability of the scale was calculated as 0.93.

Findings : The data obtained was analyzed in SPSS and AMOS software. The confirmatory factor analysis was performed to examine the structural validity of the model given in Table 1.

Table-1. Goodness of Fit Statistics of Scales and Research Model

| Goodness of Fit Values | χ^2 | df | CMIN/DF | SRMR | IFI | CFI | TLI | RMSEA |
|-----------------------------|----------|-----|---------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| Inclusive Leadership | 28.46 | 24 | 2.136 | .024 | .991 | .991 | .986 | .058 |
| Employee Empowerment | 83.95 | 48 | 1.749 | .016 | .991 | .991 | .987 | .047 |
| Innovative Behavior | 60.40 | 24 | 2.517 | .020 | .990 | .990 | .985 | .067 |
| Measurement Model | 746.72 | 392 | 1.905 | .039 | .967 | .967 | .964 | .052 |

According to the goodness of fit values of the scales and measurement model used in the research, it is seen that the CMIN/DF, AGFI, IFI, CFI, TLI, RMSEA values are within the limits of good fit (Kline, 2016). Table 2 shows the mean-

variance (AVE) values for the structural variables as explained by the structure, the combined reliability (CR) values, the Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficients, and the correlations between the variables.

Table-2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Coefficients of Variables

| | Mean | SD | CR | AVE | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|--------|--------|-------|
| 1.Inclusive Leadership | 3.70 | .090 | .096 | .079 | (.94) | | |
| 2.Employee Empowerment | 3.55 | .091 | .097 | .078 | .557** | (.94) | |
| 3. Innovative Work Behavior | 3.92 | .093 | .097 | .085 | .443** | .525** | (.95) |

**p<.001, n= 342, Cronbach's Alpha reliability values are presented in parentheses.

When Table 2 is examined, positive and significant relationships were observed among the research variables. To ensure convergent validity in a CFA model, the CR value must be greater than 0.70 and the AVE value must be greater than 0.50 (Hair et al., 2014). It is seen that the CR values of the research variables are between 0.96 and 0.97, the AVE values are between 0.78 and 0.85, and CR>AVE, providing

the component validity of the scales (Hair et al., 2014). In the next part of the research, the structural equation model in Figure 2 was established to test the research hypotheses. To examine the significance of the indirect effects for the test of the mediation role, the Monte Carlo parametric bootstrap option and the highest likelihood method with a 95% confidence interval consisting of 5000 samples were used. The lower and upper values of the confidence intervals are presented in Table 3.

Table-3. Mediation Analysis

| Tested Path | | | β | SE | BC 95% CI | |
|------------------------------|------|----------------------|----------|------|-----------|-----|
| | | | | | LB | UB |
| Employee Empowerment | <--- | Inclusive Leadership | 0.540*** | 0.58 | .41 | .65 |
| Innovative Work Behavior | <--- | Employee Empowerment | 0.452*** | 0.69 | .30 | .60 |
| Innovative Work Behavior | <--- | Inclusive Leadership | | | | |
| Total Effect (c) | | | 0.487 | 0.56 | .44 | .76 |
| Direct Effect (c') | | | 0.243*** | - | .10 | .40 |
| Indirect Effect (axb) | | | 0.244*** | - | .14 | .36 |

Notes: n=339 (5.000 Bootstrap Sample), BC %95 CI = Bias -corrected 95% Confidence Interval, X=Inclusive Leadership, Y=Innovative Work Behavior, M=Employee Empowerment, a=Effect of variable X on variable M, b=Effect of variable M on variable Y, c=Total effect of variable X on variable Y, c'=Effect of variable X on variable Y. ***p<.001

The research hypotheses were tested on the structural model with latent variables. The research model provides goodness of fit values. ($\chi^2 / df = 1.90$; SRMR = 0.39; IFI = 0.96; TLI = 0.96; CFI = 0.96; RMSEA = 0.05). As a result of the analysis, inclusive leadership was observed to have a positive total ($\beta = .48, p < .001, 95\% CI [.44, .76]$) and direct ($\beta = .24, p < .001, 95\% CI [.10, .40]$) effect on innovative work behavior. Thus, the H1 hypothesis was supported. In addition, inclusive leadership had a positive effect on employee empowerment ($\beta = .54, p < .001, 95\% CI [.41, .65]$). Thus, the H2 hypothesis was supported. Employee empowerment, which is a mediating variable, had a positive effect on innovative work behavior ($\beta = .45, p < .001, 95\% CI [.30, .60]$). Thus, the H3 hypothesis was supported. Inclusive leadership was found to have a significant indirect effect ($\beta = .24, p < .001, 95\% CI [.14, .36]$) on innovative work behavior. Thus, the H4 hypothesis was supported. According to these findings, employee empowerment has a partial mediating role in the effect of inclusive leadership on innovative work behavior. Because the obtained Bootstrap confidence interval values do not include 0 (zero) value.

Results

The primary motivation for this study comes from the need to explore the potential effects of inclusive leadership on innovative work behavior, and the mediating role of employee empowerment on the link between inclusive

leadership and innovative work behavior. For this purpose, the data collected from 339 people through questionnaires were analyzed.

Our findings revealed that inclusive leadership has a positive and significant effect on innovative work behavior, implying that inclusive leadership increases innovative work behavior. These findings are consistent with the results of studies examining the relationship between inclusive leadership and innovative work behavior (Mansoor et al., 2021, Bannay et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2019; Javed et al., 2018b; Choi et al., 2015). This finding express that within the framework of leader-member exchange theory, employees' innovative work behaviors tend to increase if they are supported by their leaders and they can freely express their ideas in the innovation processes (Mansoor et al., 2021).

Furthermore, inclusive leadership was found to positively affect employee empowerment, in the analysis conducted to determine the relationship between inclusive leadership and employee empowerment. This finding is consistent with the results of the study examining the relationship between inclusive leadership and employee empowerment (Javed et al., 2018a). This finding shows that inclusive leadership increases employees' intrinsic motivation and employee empowerment. According to Hollander (2012), the supporting structure and inclusive qualifications of inclusive leaders contribute to the employees. Therefore, it

can be stated that the internal motivation of the employees, who are supported by the leaders in terms of individual value, increases and that they feel psychologically empowered.

Furthermore, employee empowerment was found to positively affect innovative work behavior. This finding is consistent with some research results (Zhang and Bartol, 2010, Seibert et al., 2011; Singh and Sarkar, 2012). This finding of the study shows that employees' sense of autonomy and appreciation felt in their work is an important factor in providing intrinsic motivation for innovative work behavior. As Alge et al. (2006) stated, psychological empowerment increases the participation of employees in innovative work behavior processes by having more freedom in producing unique ideas and making sure that their ideas will be valuable in the organization.

In the analysis made according to the main purpose of the research was found to have a partial mediating role in the effect of inclusive leadership on innovative work behavior. This finding shows that employee empowerment has both direct and indirect effects on the effect of inclusive leadership on innovative work behavior. In this content, it can be evaluated that to be able to benefit effectively from the ideas of the employees in innovative work processes, the employees need to be empowered by the inclusive leaders by trying to increase the internal motivation of their employees.

The results of the research were limited to the employees of the manufacturing companies in a single region of Turkey. Also, since the research was conducted in a certain period (June 2019-August 2019), and attitudes and perceptions may change over time, this study is limited to the process. Therefore, it may be recommended for researchers to conduct similar researches for different sectors and employees. In addition, it is suggested that examination of inclusive leadership with variables such as psychological capital and job satisfaction will contribute to the field. In addition, because of the inclusive and supportive nature of inclusive leadership, it is suggested to carry out studies that treat researchers as mediators or moderators.

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