# A Pilot Empirical Study on the Effectiveness of Inclusive Leadership and Inclusion Climate

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# INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to examine the impact of inclusive leadership and the mediating effect of inclusion climate on creative behavior in the workplace.

The ideas of inclusive leadership and inclusion climate have emerged from researches on human resource diversity (hereafter referred to as diversity). Diversity has been attracting attention as one of the means to achieve the current corporate requirements for creative performance through knowledge-seeking behavior (March, 1991).

The studies that have conducted a meta-analysis on diversity are Joshi and Roh (2009) and Horwitz and Horwitz (2007). These two studies show that there is no consistent relationship between diversity and organizational performance. The reason for the lack of agreement is that diversity is not divided into demographic diversity based on gender and race and task diversity based on job performance and values. According to Williams and O'Reilly (1998), as demographic diversity increases, categorization increases and cognitive bias arises in the organization. As a result, organizational performance will decline. This is based on the concept of social categorization theory. On the other hand, when task-based diversity increases, there is an abundance of useful and diverse information, which leads to the refinement of information and superior decision-making, and as a result, organizational performance increases. This is based on the concept of information/decision making theory.

van Knippenberg et al. (2004) proposed a categorization-elaboration model that integrates two groups of theories: social categorization theory and information/decision making theory. According to this model, demographic diversity has a negative or no significant effect on performance, whereas task diversity has a positive effect on performance, but task diversity is also moderated by the social categorization created by demographic diversity. This categorizationelaboration model shows that it is important to reduce the cognitive bias caused by the categorization created by demographic diversity. This model has led to the importance of clarifying the existence of cognitive bias and the process from diversity to performance.

Inclusion climate and inclusive leadership, which are examined in this study, have come to be considered essential factors for reducing cognitive bias in diversity management. However, they are only measured independently or treated in parallel, and the causal relationship between them and their influence on organizational performance remains unexamined. This study focuses on these points and examines the mechanisms of influence of inclusion climate and inclusive leadership on the workplace based on the results of a questionnaire survey.

# CONCEPTS AND ANALYTICAL MODEL

### **Inclusion Climate**

Most of the early diversity research focused on the problems that diversity brings, such as discrimination, bias, affirmative action, and tokenism. However, as research in this area has developed, it has become clear that diversity has a positive impact on work processes and organizational mechanisms. The focus has now shifted to ways to promote the potential value of diversity (Shore et al., 2009).

Shore et al. (2011) pointed out that inclusion is an important factor in promoting the potential value of diversity and they define inclusion using Brewer and Gardner's (1996) optimal discrimination theory. Brewer and Gardner (1996) defines inclusion using the optimal discrimination theory, which states that individuals in a group try to achieve an optimal balance between belongingness and uniqueness. Based on this theory, Shore et al. divide group states into four categories based on the two axes of belongingness and uniqueness. The description of the four states below is taken from Figure 1 in Shore et al. (2011: 1266).

Exclusion (low belongingness/low value in uniqueness) : "Individual is not treated as an organizational insider with unique value in the workgroup but there are other employees or groups who are insiders."

Differentiation (low belongingness/high value in uniqueness): "Individual is not treated as an organizational insider in the workgroup but their unique characteristics are seen as valuable and required for group/organizational success."

Assimilation (high belongingness/low value in uniqueness): "Individual is treated as an insider in the workgroup when they conform to organizational/dominant culture norms and downplay uniqueness."

Inclusion (high belongingness/high value in uniqueness): "Individual is treated as an insider and also allowed/encouraged to retain uniqueness within the workgroup."

Based on this definition of inclusion, inclusion climate is the psychological attitude of group members toward the state of inclusion. Nishii (2013), based on Brewer and Gardner's definition of inclusion, defined inclusion climate as the degree of perception that the workplace (1) treats employees fairly, (2) respects individual differences, and (3) involves employees in workplace decision-making. Ely and Thomas (2001) also found that "learning and integration" are achieved in workplaces with high inclusion climates. This means that in an inclusion climate, organizational learning is promoted because various ideas are taken into account, and group integration is achieved by balancing between group identification (belongingness) and self-identity (uniqueness) because people are treated fairly and differences are respected.

One of the leading empirical studies on inclusion climate is Nishii (2013), who analyzed the results of a questionnaire survey obtained from 1,324 people working in 100 departments of an American biomedical company. She found that an inclusion climate moderated the relationship between variables such as gender diversity, conflicts (relationships and tasks), workplace satisfaction, and turnover. Specifically, she found that in workplaces with high inclusion climates, neither relational nor task conflicts increased even when gender diversity increased and that the negative relationship between relational conflicts and workplace satisfaction was weakened. In addition, Brimhall and Mor Barak (2018) conducted a questionnaire survey of 213 people in 21 departments of the healthcare business and found that an inclusion climate promotes an innovative climate and job satisfaction, which in turn improves the quality of healthcare. In Japan, Hayashi et al. (2019) analyzed the results of two rounds of questionnaires obtained from 1100 and 687 respondents. The results showed that the more inclusive the workplace, the greater the organizational identification of workplace members. The study also found that the understanding and involvement of top management toward inclusion is very important.

#### Inclusive Leadership

Shore et al. (2011) define inclusive leadership as leadership that

gives followers a sense of belonging to a group and a sense that their uniqueness is realized and respected. This idea for inclusive leadership can be considered as one of the LMX (Leader-Member Exchange) theories, which states that a high-quality exchange relationship between leaders and followers is important, and it consists of the openness, approachability, and openness of leaders to followers.

Fang et al. (2019) found that there are only a few studies on the relationship between inclusive leadership and employees' innovative behaviors. Then, they developed an analytical model with psychological capital (Hope, Efficacy, Resilience, Optimism) as the mediating variable between inclusive leadership and innovative behavior, and analyzed the results of a questionnaire survey obtained from 372 employees of a company in Zhejiang Province, China. The results showed that, among inclusive leadership, encouragement by leaders to employees positively influenced employees' innovative behavior, and more importantly, encouragement by leaders to employees positively influenced employees' innovative behavior through the mediation of their psychological capital. In addition, Ashikali et al. (2021) developed an analytical model in which leadership moderates the relationship between diversity and inclusion climate and analyzed the results of a questionnaire survey from 293 employees in 45 public departments. The results showed that the negative relationship between ethnic diversity of team members and inclusion climate was positively adjusted (moderated) by inclusive leadership and that inclusive leadership positively influenced inclusion climate.

Research on inclusive leadership is just beginning, and there are few examples of empirical studies. The results of the above studies indicate that rather than inclusive leadership directly influencing innovative behavior, it indirectly influences innovative behavior through the mediation of individual psychology and group atmosphere.

#### Analytical Model

From the above studies, we can see that inclusion climate and inclusive leadership have a positive impact on organizational performance. However. the measurement of organizational performance has tended to bias towards job satisfaction. organizational commitment, and organizational integration. This would be similar to measuring the sense of belonging in a group.

On the other hand, measures related to uniqueness, such as the generation of unique ideas, creativity, innovation, and knowledge exploration behavior, are not often used. Therefore, in this study, we will use "creativity in the workplace" as a workplace performance measurement.

Then, we develop an analytical model with inclusive climate as a mediating variable to measure the influence relationship. Since this is an exploratory study, we will analyze the relationship between workplace creativity, inclusion climate, and inclusion leadership without formulating detailed hypotheses.

# DATA AND METHODOLOGY

#### Data

The analyzed data is a web-based questionnaire survey of 1,596 employees of Company A, a non-life insurance company. The survey was conducted over a period of approximately two weeks, from July 15 to July 31, 2021. The questionnaire was designed by Microsoft Forms. The URL where the questionnaire was stored was sent to the survey targets via e-mail from the HR department of the insurance company.

#### Analysis Tools

IBM SPSS Statistics Version 22.0, IBM SPSS Amos Version 22.0,

and HAD were used for the analysis in this study. HAD is an individually developed multivariate analysis Japanese tool that runs on Excel. It is widely used, easy to use, and many manuals have been published in Japan, and its accuracy is reported to be comparable to SPSS and SAS. In this study, SPSS 22.0 was used to calculate descriptive statistics, exploratory factor analysis, inter-factor correlations, and reliability coefficients. Amos 22.0 was used for confirmatory factor analysis. HAD was used for mediation analysis.

### Validity and Reliability of the Measurement Scales

In this study, two types of validity of measurement scales will be examined: content validity and construct validity. First, the scales used in this study, except for workplace creativity, have been used in previous empirical studies and thus can be said to have high content validity. However, since these scales are all in English and were translated into Japanese, there is a possibility that the respondents may interpret the scales differently from the original intention of the questions. Therefore, exploratory factor analysis will be conducted to confirm the measurement scales. To minimize the number of items, the analysis will be repeated by Promax rotation until the factor loadings become greater than 0.5. We extract factors with eigenvalues of 1 or higher.

Next, confirmatory factor analysis is conducted on the items selected by exploratory factor analysis. For the goodness-of-fit indices of the model, GFI, AGFI, CFI, RMSEA, and SRMR will be adopted; referring to Hu and BentIrer (1999), the following criterion values will be set for each goodness-of-fit index: GFI > 0.8, AGFI > 0.7, CFI  $\ge$  0.90; RMSEA  $\le$  0.06; SRMR  $\le$  0.08.

Among the construct validity, convergent validity and discriminant validity will be examined according to Fornell and Larcker (1981). Convergent validity was confirmed by AVE (Average Variance Extracted) and CR (Composite Reliability), where AVE  $\geq$  0.5 and CR  $\geq$ 

0.7 were used as criteria. For discriminant validity, AVE and interfactor correlation coefficient were used, and the criterion was higher AVE than square of the inter-factor correlation coefficient. Cronbach's alpha coefficient will be calculated for the reliability of each measurement scale.

#### Inclusion Climate Scale

For inclusion climate, we used a 15-item measurement scale developed by Nishii (2013), partially combined and reduced them to six items. These consisted of three sub-concepts: fair employment practices, integration of differences, and involvement in decisionmaking, with two items each.

First, exploratory factor analysis was conducted (the iterated principal factor method, Promax rotation). As a result, one factor with an eigenvalue of 1 or higher was extracted, and since the factor loadings of all six items were 0.5 or higher, which is sufficiently high, all items were adopted as factor components.

Next, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted on the six items of one factor extracted by the exploratory factor analysis. The goodnessof-fit indices of the model were GFI = 0.937, AGFI = 0.852, CFI = 0.938, RMSEA = 0.142, and SRMR = 0.038. Factor loadings ( $\lambda$ ) were all above 0.5. The items are as follows.

"Promotion, advancement, and performance appraisal are fair." ( $\lambda$  = 0.576), "A workplace is a place where I can freely express my grievances and complaints." ( $\lambda$  = 0.767), "It is an open working environment where everyone can express themselves as they are." ( $\lambda$  = 0.0.837), "It is a workplace that places importance on work-life balance." ( $\lambda$  = 0.676), "Members of the workplace have the idea that diversity and individual differences are important." ( $\lambda$  = 0.760), "The workplace has an atmosphere that is open to ideas from all levels, jobs, and roles to better solve problems." ( $\lambda$  = 0.799). These were defined as "inclusive climate".

value (total score range: 6-30). The higher the score, the more inclusive the climate is.

For convergent validity, AVE = 0.549 and CR = 0.878, which were all above the standard values. It can be said that there is convergent validity. As for discriminant validity, it is not applicable because only one factor was extracted. The reliability coefficients were  $\alpha$  = 0.875 and  $\omega$  = 0.877, which met the criteria.

#### Inclusive Leadership Scale

For the Inclusive Leadership Scale, six items were selected from a measurement scale developed by Cameli et al. (2010). These consisted of three times concepts, such as openness, accessibility, and availability, with two items each.

First, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted (repeated principal factor method, Promax rotation). As a result, one factor with an eigenvalue of 1 or higher was extracted; the factor loadings of all six items were 0.5 or higher, which is high enough to adopt all items as factor constructs.

Next, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted on the six items of one factor extracted by exploratory factor analysis. The indices indicating the goodness of fit of the model were GFI = 0.938, AGFI = 0.855, CFI = 0.938, RMSEA = 0.144, and SRMR = 0.029, which can be said to be a good fit. Factor loadings ( $\lambda$ ) were all above 0.5. The items are as follows.

"My supervisor is open-minded and willing to listen to new idea." ( $\lambda$  = 0.850), "My supervisor is attentive and gives me opportunities to improve the work of my colleagues and myself." ( $\lambda$  = 0.895), "My supervisor gives me advice that is useful for solving problems." ( $\lambda$  = 0.904), "I can talk to my supervisor about professional issues." ( $\lambda$  = 0.762), "My supervisor encourages members to work on new issues." ( $\lambda$  = 0.718), "My supervisor is comfortable discussing new problems that arise." ( $\lambda$  = 0.829). The total score was used as the representative

value (total score range: 6-30). The higher the score, the more inclusive the leadership is.

For convergent validity, AVE = 0.687 and CR = 0.929, which are all above the standard values. It can be said that there is convergent validity. As for discriminant validity, it is not applicable because only one factor was extracted. The reliability coefficients were  $\alpha$  = 0.928 and  $\omega$  = 0.930, which met the criteria.

#### Creativity in the Workplace Scale

Although individual creativity scales exist, there is no measurement scale for creativity in the workplace, so we developed our scale, referring to Zhou and George (2001). In developing the questions, we obtained advice from three experts. Therefore, we believe that there is no problem with the content validity.

First, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis (the iterated principal factor method, Promax rotation). As a result, one factor with an eigenvalue of 1 or higher was extracted, and the factor loadings of all three items were 0.5 or higher, which is sufficiently high, so all items were adopted as factor constructs.

Next, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted on the three items of one factor extracted by exploratory factor analysis. The factor loadings ( $\lambda$ ) were all above 0.5. The items were as follows.

"Creative perspectives, ideas, products, services, and businesses are often generated as a result of discussions among workplace members." ( $\lambda = 0.906$ ), "Workers share ideas and support each other to realize them." ( $\lambda = 0.783$ ), "The workplace is full of creative people who bring new perspectives and ideas that can lead to innovation. " ( $\lambda$ = 0.757). The total score was used as the representative value (total score range:3-15). The higher the score, the more creative the workplace is.

For convergent validity, AVE = 0.668 and CR = 0.857, which were all above the standard values. It can be said that there is convergent

validity. As for discriminant validity, it is not applicable because only one factor was extracted. The reliability coefficients were  $\alpha = 0.855$ and  $\omega = 0.858$ , which met the criteria.

#### **Common Method Bias**

Since the analysis in this study is about human cognitive processes, it is susceptible to common method bias. A typical method to eliminate bias is to conduct separate surveys at different times for the same sample. However, when this method is difficult, there is Harman's single-factor analysis test (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986). In this study, a single factor test was attempted for the questionnaire items. As a result, the contribution rate of the first factor was 49.874%, and the percentage of the variance of all observed variables was barely less than 50%, so it can be concluded that common method bias rarely occurs.

The single factor analysis also revealed that the questionnaire items extracted three factors: inclusive climate, inclusive leadership, and creativity in the workplace. It can be said that the questionnaire items accurately reflect the intent of the questions.

### RESULTS

A mediation analysis was conducted with "creativity in the workplace" as the objective variable, "inclusive leadership" as the explanatory variable, and "inclusion climate" as the mediating variable. In this section, we examine the following: ①whether the explanatory variable predicts the objective variable (single regression analysis with inclusive leadership on creativity), ②whether the explanatory variable predicts the mediating variable (single regression analysis with inclusive leadership on creativity), ③whether the explanatory variable predicts the mediating variable (single regression analysis with inclusive leadership on inclusion climate), ③whether the mediating

variable predicts the objective variable, and 4 whether the explanatory variable predicts the objective variable when there is a mediating variable (for 3 and 4, multiple regression analysis by inclusive leadership and inclusion climate on creativity).

Tables 1 and 2 summarize the results of the mediation analysis. First, a regression analysis was conducted with creative behavior in the workplace as the objective variable and inclusive leadership as the explanatory variable. The results showed that inclusive leadership had a significant positive impact on creative behavior in the workplace (see 1) in Table 1. b = 0.199,  $\beta$  = 0.426, SE = 0.011, t (1502) = 18.253, p < 0.001).

Next, we added inclusion climate as a mediating variable and conducted a single regression analysis with inclusive leadership on inclusion climate. As a result, inclusive leadership had a significant positive impact on inclusion climate (see (2) in Table 1. b = 0.669,  $\beta$  = 0.618, SE = 0.022, t (1502) = 30.481, p < 0.001).

Finally, the results of multiple regression analysis showed that inclusion climate had a significant positive impact on creativity (see ③ in Table 1. b = 0.187,  $\beta$  = 0.432, SE = 0.012, t (1502) = 15.695, p < 0.001). And inclusive leadership had a significantly positive effect on creativity (see ④ in Table 1, b = 0.074,  $\beta$  = 0.159, SE = 0.013, t (1502) = 5.772, p < 0.001). However, the standardized coefficient of the single regression analysis of ① in the absence of the mediating variable, inclusion climate, was  $\beta$  = 0.426, while the standardized coefficient of the multiple regression analysis of ④ was  $\beta$  = 0.159, a drop of 0.227 points. This indicates that there was an effect of the mediating variable, inclusion climate.

To confirm this statistically, we conducted a test of indirect effects. Table 2 shows the results. Table 2 shows that the results are the same and significant for all three test methods. The Bootstrap method, which is the most accurate test method (Table 3), showed that the 95% confidence interval ([0.107, 0.144]) did not include zero. This indicates

## a significant mediation effect of inclusion climate.

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Mediating	Influence Relations of Variable	b	β	SE	t-	<i>p</i> -	
Variable		D D	Ρ	5	value	value	
No	$$ Creativity $\leftarrow$ Inclusive Leadership	0.199	.426	0.011	18.253	.000	
Inclusion Climate	②Inclusion climate ←Inclusive leadership	0.669	.618	0.022	30.481	.000	
	③Creativity ← Inclusion Climate	0.187	.432	0.012	15.695	.000	
	④Creativity ← Inclusive Leadership	0.074	.159	0.013	5.772	.000	

Table 1: Results of Mediation Analysis

Note: Degrees of freedom = 1502

Table 2: Tests of Indirect Effects

Statistical Test	Ь	β	SE	Z value	p-value
Sobel	0.125	.267	0.009	13.954	.000
Aroian	0.125	.267	0.009	13.948	.000
Bootstrap	0.125	.267	0.009	13.140	.000

Table 3: Bootstrap Confidence Intervals

99% lower	95% lower	90% lower	Estimated	90% upper	95% upper	99% upper
limit	limit	limit	Value	limit	limit	limit
0.101	0.107	0.110	0.125	0.141	0.144	0.149

Note: Bootstrap resampling time = 2000, Sample generation method = Nonparametric, Confidence interval estimation method = Bias correction method.

# **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

In this study, the influence of inclusive leadership on creative behavior in the workplace and the mediating effect of inclusion climate were analyzed. The figure illustrates the influence relationship. Several things can be concluded from this. The first is that when comparing inclusive leadership and inclusion climate, inclusive leadership is not the most effective predictor on creative behavior in the workplace, but inclusion climate is the largest. The standardized regression coefficient for inclusive leadership is  $\beta = 0.159$  (p<0.001), whereas the standardized regression coefficient for inclusion climate is  $\beta$  = 0.432 (p<0.001), with inclusion climate being greater. The second is that inclusive leadership explained inclusion climate better than innovative behavior in the workplace. The standardized regression coefficient of inclusive leadership on innovative behavior in the workplace was  $\beta$  = 0.159, as mentioned above, while it was  $\beta$  = 0.618 (p<0.001) for inclusion climate. The third is the usefulness of the mediating effect of inclusive climate. When measuring the mediating effect of inclusion climate, the combined standardized coefficient  $\beta$  = 0.267 (0.62 x 0.43). This value is larger than the standardized coefficient of inclusive leadership on creative behavior  $\beta$ = 0.159, discussed above.

These results imply that it is better to examine the inclusion climate that enhances innovative behavior and to consider the leadership that enhances such inclusion climate, rather than directly seeking the relationship between creative behavior and inclusive leadership.

Next, the research and practical implications of this study can be summarized in the following points.

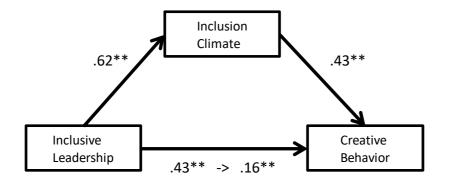
The implication of the research is to clarify the influence relationship between creative behavior, inclusion climate, and inclusive leadership in the workplace. The study found that the influence relationship of inclusive leadership  $\rightarrow$  inclusion climate  $\rightarrow$  creative behavior was larger than the influence relationship of inclusive leadership  $\rightarrow$ creative behavior. This indicates that instead of examining the relationship between inclusive leadership and creative behavior, we should examine the relationship between inclusive leadership and creative behavior mediated by inclusion climate.

The practical implication is that the formation of the inclusion climate

is important for creative behavior in the workplace. Inclusion climate has been examined with many organizational performances, such as job crafting, work engagement, motivation, and commitment, which are different from innovation and creative behavior. The results of this study can help as a reason to promote an Inclusion climate.

Finally, the problems and future tasks of this study are described. The first is that the study did not consider other factors that influence creative behavior in the workplace. The concept of inclusion has been created from diversity research. Therefore, there is a need to examine the variables and their mechanisms that link the relationship between diversity and creativity. Second, there is a need to incorporate the subconcepts of inclusive leadership and inclusion climate into the analysis. In the present study, these variables were treated as single scales as a result of factor analysis. However, each variable is composed of some sub-concepts, and by attempting an analysis that takes these into account, a more detailed examination of causal relationships will be possible. Third, there is a need for multilevel analysis. For the sample of this study, data from 31 sections in one non-life insurance company were analyzed. Since there is a hierarchy in the data, we can attempt a more detailed analysis by conducting multilevel analysis. In the overall data, there was a positive relationship between inclusive leadership, inclusion climate and creative behavior in the workplace, but this was determined by the characteristics of each department (existence of individual-specific effects), and there may not be a significant relationship by the department.

#### Figure: Results of Mediation Analysis



Note: All coefficients are standardized coefficients.

\*\*p<.01, \*p<.05

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