

To include or not to include – the impact of an inclusive leadership style on turnover intentions

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Abstract

Purpose – This study investigates the impact of an inclusive leadership style on employee turnover intentions, with perceived inclusion and well-being as mediators of the relationship. Given the rise of shortages in skilled labor, employee retention has become especially vital for organizations. We argue that inclusive leadership is one mechanism to reduce turnover intentions by making employees feel valued in their uniqueness and feel like they belong to their respective workgroups. This, in turn, increases well-being and ultimately decreases turnover intentions.

Design/methodology/approach – To test these predictions, a two-wave survey was performed with 282 employees of a large German insurance company. Afterwards hierarchical regression analyses were used to test the proposed model and hypotheses. The instruments' reliability and validity were established.

Findings – Support for the existence of a serial mediation effect of perceived inclusion and well-being on the relationship between inclusive leadership and turnover intentions was found. However, it appears that well-being has a stronger influence on turnover intentions than perceived inclusion.

Originality/value – This research explores the relationship between inclusive leadership and turnover intentions with more detail by considering two mediators of the relationship. It is also successfully integrates inclusive leadership into the relational work design model as a stimulus-organism-response (SOR)-type model.

Keywords Inclusive leadership, Inclusion, Well-being, Turnover intentions

Paper type Research article

Introduction

Inclusive leadership has been defined as a style of management that emphasizes belonging to a group on the one hand and the uniqueness of the individual on the other (Randel *et al.*, 2018). Other definitions add two more behaviors to the leadership style. In addition to the aspects of belonging and uniqueness, supporting organizational efforts for inclusion and showing appreciation for employees' individual contributions and efforts are sometimes included in the definition (Veli Korkmaz *et al.*, 2022). While inclusive leadership shares superficial similarities with other leadership styles, and some have suggested that it serves as an umbrella term for various other relational leadership styles (Veli Korkmaz *et al.*, 2022), it is still distinct from them. Randel *et al.* (2018) provided a comprehensive overview of the differences between inclusive leadership and other leadership styles, stating that inclusive leadership differs from, for example, transformational leadership through its focus on the individual instead of the needs of the organization.

Over the last few years, interest in this area of research has steadily increased (Gürbüz *et al.*, 2024; Kusumawardani *et al.*, 2023). Research has shown that being an inclusive leader not only increases employees' well-being (Choi *et al.*, 2017) but also positively affects innovation (Bao *et al.*, 2024) and performance (Nguyen *et al.*, 2019). Additionally, fostering a climate that accepts diversity has been associated with decreased turnover among employees (Kaur *et al.*, 2022).

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Reducing turnover has become a more pressing concern for organizations. A lot of Western countries experience skilled labor shortages ([Horbach and Rammer, 2020](#); [Horrigan et al., 2022](#)). In Germany, this phenomenon is exacerbated by an aging and shrinking population ([Eissel, 2021](#)). People over 60 years old make up 30% of the population in Germany ([Statistisches Bundesamt, 2025](#)). The resulting lack of working adults has wide-ranging impacts on the economy, for example by impeding innovation ([Horbach and Rammer, 2020](#)). This problem increases and organizations need to retain the skilled workers who are currently employed. Exploring the mechanisms that reduce employees' intention to leave their current position is therefore a pressing issue for researchers. Although turnover intentions have been studied in conjunction with many different variables, they have not frequently been studied as part of a stimulus-organism-response (SOR) model ([Mehrabian and Russel, 1974](#)). Using a model that follows SOR principles has the ability to shed light on the internal process that transforms a leader's actions into a follower's intent to leave the organization.

Inclusive leadership has the potential to be one of the mechanisms to reduce turnover intentions. It moves away from the focus of assimilating employees into their organization and instead focuses on real inclusion: making employees feel like they belong and are valued for their unique attributes ([Randel et al., 2018](#)). This holistic approach to management could be a key factor in reducing employees' desire to leave their positions. As stated above, the internal process that leads to turnover intentions deserves further attention. It is likely that inclusive leadership does not directly influence turnover intentions but influences them indirectly through internal psychological processes. Some effort (both theoretically and empirically) has been made to shed light into the black box between inclusive leadership and turnover intentions.

In their widely cited paper, [Randel et al. \(2018\)](#) developed the theoretical model of inclusive leadership that describes how inclusive leadership affects outcomes such as turnover intentions through a serial mediation of perceived inclusion and workgroup identification/psychological empowerment.

[Randel \(2025\)](#) additionally created a framework for inclusion in the workplace using the input-mediator-output-input model. According to the framework, leadership variables create a context for inclusion and lead to various mediators and moderators that act as intervening mechanisms once the context of inclusion is established. These intervening variables lead to various outcomes, such as decreased turnover intentions.

Additionally, a recent literature review ([Veli Korkmaz et al., 2022](#)) has identified several outcomes of inclusive leadership, as well as some relevant mediators. However, some potentially relevant mediators are missing from the review. Likewise, a recently published meta-analysis ([Li et al., 2024](#)) also shows that many questions regarding the effects of inclusive leadership remain unanswered. While it found a relationship between inclusive leadership and turnover intentions ([Li et al., 2024](#)), several potentially relevant mediators were not able to be considered, as research on their effects is missing. Similarly, while [Randel et al. \(2018\)](#) and [Randel \(2025\)](#) theoretically identified some mediators of the relationship between inclusive leadership and turnover intentions, important mediators are missing from their models.

In the past, SOR models have often been used to explain consumer behavior ([Mehrabian and Russel, 1974](#)). Using a SOR model as the basis for research on the effects of leadership on various outcomes has not been done as frequently ([Hochreiter et al., 2023](#)). Where it was done, research has often focused on performance as the response, while attitudinal outcomes like turnover intentions have not been considered as often, especially in conjunction with inclusive leadership. Yet, SOR models offer a compelling lens to understand how external stimuli – in this case, inclusive leadership – shape internal psychological processes (e.g. perceived inclusion and well-being), which subsequently influence behavioral intentions, such as the desire to leave the organization.

This study aims to address a theoretical gap in the research by using the relational work-design model (RWDM) ([Grant and Parker, 2009](#)) as a basis for exploring mediating effects of

the relationship between inclusive leadership and turnover intentions. The RWDM can be seen as SOR-type model, with social characteristics representing the stimulus, relational and emotional mechanisms happening inside the organism, and the outcomes representing the response. By positioning the RWDM within an SOR logic, this study contributes to theoretical integration and deepens our understanding of how inclusive leadership translates into employee retention outcomes via internal psychological pathways.

While some research on mediating mechanisms of the inclusive leadership–turnover intentions relationship has already been performed, there is still a gap in our understanding of these mechanisms. In the present research, perceived inclusion and well-being will be investigated as potential serial mediators of the relationship between inclusive leadership and turnover intentions. While perceived inclusion was acknowledged as a potential mediator by [Randel et al. \(2018\)](#) and was also part of the meta-analysis ([Li et al., 2024](#)), other important mediators are missing. In the past, perceived inclusion was considered as a whole, without differentiating between its two facets (belonging and uniqueness). Additionally, well-being has also been recognized as an prominent variable in work-design theory ([Humphrey et al., 2007](#)). It has, however, often been treated as an outcome. Because well-being has been identified as an important predictor of turnover intentions ([Ahmad and Kaleem, 2020](#); [Brunetto et al., 2012](#)), it should be considered as a relevant mediator in the inclusive leadership – turnover intentions relationship. Therefore, belonging, uniqueness and well-being will be investigated as mediators of the relationship between inclusive leadership and turnover intentions. Specifically, a serial mediation of belonging/uniqueness and well-being will be tested, which has not been previously done in the literature.

This research offers three key unique contributions. First, it integrates inclusive leadership and turnover intentions into a SOR-type model by using the RWDM ([Grant and Parker, 2009](#)), thereby shedding light on the internal psychological process involved. Second, it investigates the differentiated impact of the different dimensions of inclusion, belonging and uniqueness, on turnover intentions. Last, it successfully extends the RWDM to account for serial mediation effects and to better represent internal psychological processes.

Theory and hypotheses

Inclusive leadership and turnover intentions

In the present study, inclusive leadership is understood in terms of the definition proposed by [Shore et al. \(2011\)](#), who identified inclusive leadership as “the degree to which an employee perceives that he or she is an esteemed member of the work group through experiencing treatment that satisfies his or her needs for belongingness and uniqueness” ([Shore et al., 2011](#)). These two broader concepts have been further refined ([Randel et al., 2018](#)). Fostering belongingness involves supporting individuals as group members, ensuring justice and equity within the group, and sharing decision-making ([Randel et al., 2018](#)). Valuing uniqueness consists of encouraging diverse contributions and helping group members fully contribute ([Randel et al., 2018](#)). A recent literature review by [Veli Korkmaz et al. \(2022\)](#) showed that inclusive leadership has an effect on a wide range of different outcomes, including employee well-being and different types of performance. Another review with a specific focus on inclusion in the workplace was conducted by [Randel \(2025\)](#), who created a framework for understanding the context required for inclusion.

As stated above, the increase in the prevalence of skilled labor shortages makes employee retention ever more important for organizations. Therefore, the impact of inclusive leadership on turnover intentions will be the focus of this study. Turnover intentions have been a longstanding subject of research, with early models focusing on why and how employees decide to leave organizations. [Mobley \(1977\)](#) conceptualized turnover as a withdrawal process triggered by dissatisfaction, evaluation of alternatives and the eventual intention to leave. Building on this, [Price and Mueller’s \(1981\)](#) causal model identified additional antecedents, such as routinization, distributive justice and pay, and framed turnover as the voluntary intent

to leave one's organization. Subsequent research expanded this perspective by integrating factors like team composition, group cohesion and more recently, employee well-being (Holtom *et al.*, 2008). For the purposes of this study, turnover intentions are defined as the desire and manifestation of the plan to leave one's present organization (Meyer *et al.*, 1993).

The mediating effect of perceived inclusion

The concept of perceived inclusion, i.e. the feeling of being part of a group both in terms of belonging and in terms of being unique, is closely tied to inclusive leadership (Randel *et al.*, 2018). In previous studies, perceived inclusion was often only viewed in the context of specific types of diversity (e.g. minorities or people with disabilities (Fujimoto *et al.*, 2014; Priola *et al.*, 2014);). However, the definition applied in this study moves away from the requirement that the included person must belong to a certain diversity group and instead focuses on inclusion in the work context. This has already been partially done by Shore and Chung (2022); however, the focus in their research was again on marginalized social groups. Furthermore, it has been shown that perceived inclusion positively affects various employee outcomes, like employee well-being (Jaiswal and Dyaram, 2020). Similarly, perceived inclusion has been found to increase when leaders are inclusive (Yousaf *et al.*, 2022).

The mediating effect of well-being

The well-being of employees is an important influence on turnover intentions. Warr (1990) applied two axes to well-being at work: the dimension of anxiety/contentment as well as the dimension of depression/enthusiasm. Any emotions an employee might have about their work can fall along these two axes (Warr, 1990). Well-being is understood in Warr's (1990) work to be the accumulation of positive or negative emotions that arise from the completion of certain tasks at work. The present research follows this understanding.

While perceived inclusion and well-being are empirically related, they represent distinct constructs. Perceived inclusion refers to the experience of belonging while simultaneously being valued for one's uniqueness (Shore and Chung, 2022). Well-being, in contrast, captures broader affective states related to work, reflected along the anxiety–contentment and depression–enthusiasm dimensions (Warr, 1990). Although inclusion can enhance well-being, the constructs differ in their conceptual scope, underlying mechanisms and measurement. Differentiating them is essential to understand the distinct psychological pathways through which inclusive leadership influences outcomes such as turnover intentions.

As mentioned previously, well-being is a central variable in the work design research (Humphrey *et al.*, 2007) and can be used to model internal psychological processes. It is also a central variable for turnover intentions (Holtom *et al.*, 2008).

Serial mediation of perceived inclusion and well-being

The RWDM (Grant and Parker, 2009) offers a theoretically grounded framework to explain the psychological mechanisms through which leadership behaviors influence employee outcomes. It posits that social characteristics of work – such as support and interpersonal interaction – trigger internal relational and emotional processes within employees, which ultimately shape outcomes such as turnover intentions.

Within this framework, inclusive leadership can be conceptualized as a key social characteristic that stimulates a psychological process. Specifically, it fosters employees' perceptions of inclusion, comprising a sense of belonging and uniqueness (Shore and Chung, 2022). These perceptions correspond to relational mechanisms within the RWDM, as they reflect how valued individuals feel within their group. Enhanced inclusion, in turn, fosters well-being, an emotional mechanism aligned with the RWDM's affective pathway (Warr, 1990).

While the RWDM does not explicitly model serial mediation, its integrative and process-oriented structure allows for theorizing about sequential mechanisms. To strengthen the conceptual link between perceived inclusion and well-being, we draw on optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 1991), which posits that well-being is maximized when individuals simultaneously satisfy their needs for belonging and uniqueness. A lack of either dimension may result in psychological strain. Thus, perceived inclusion – defined by both facets – can be expected to influence well-being.

Although previous research has demonstrated individual links among the focal variables, the full serial mediation pathway remains untested. For example, inclusive leadership has been shown to reduce turnover intentions indirectly via perceived inclusion (Li *et al.*, 2024; Ali *et al.*, 2025), and some studies link inclusive leadership to well-being (Choi *et al.*, 2017), and well-being to turnover intentions (Ahmad and Kaleem, 2020; Belkin *et al.*, 2020). However, empirical tests of a sequential mechanism involving both mediators are lacking. Moreover, prior studies have often treated perceived inclusion as a unidimensional construct, neglecting its dual structure. Chung *et al.* (2020) explicitly called for separate examination of belonging and uniqueness.

Addressing these gaps, we propose the following hypotheses:

- H1a.* The relationship between inclusive leadership and turnover intentions is serially mediated by a sense of belonging and well-being.
- H1b.* The relationship between inclusive leadership and turnover intentions is serially mediated by a sense of uniqueness and well-being.

The full research model can be seen in Figure 1.

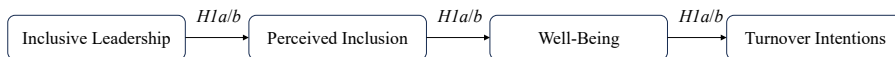


Figure 1. Conceptual model. Source: Authors’ own work

Methods

Research design

This research is part of a larger project. The research was conducted via a two-wave survey. The first round of questionnaires was collected during April 2023. The questionnaires covered the variables of inclusive leadership and perceived inclusion as well as other variables that were not relevant for the present project but were useful for future studies in the larger project. The second round of questionnaires was conducted in June 2023. During this round, the variables of well-being and turnover intentions were measured. The participants were matched across rounds using a code that each participant generated for themselves. The codes were chosen in such a way as to ensure the anonymity of all participants.

Sample

Participants in this sample were employed at large German insurance company. Prior to conducting the study, the questions were reviewed and approved by the workers’ council. Furthermore, informed consent was obtained from all participants and their anonymity was preserved. Participants were provided with the link to part one of the study through the organizations’ internal information network. The survey was open for three weeks, during which four reminders were posted on the interweb. After five weeks, the second part of the survey was distributed through the same channels. It also ran for three weeks, and four reminders were sent out during this time.

An examination of the demographics of the sample in comparison to the general demographic of people working in the insurance industry in Germany reveals that the sample is representative of an aging population of people working in this sector (Wenig, 2022). After viewing the data sets for both waves, 303 participants were matched. This amounted to 51.92% of participants from the first wave. Afterwards, 21 participants were excluded based on the short amount of time it took for them to complete the questionnaire, as well as inconsistent or implausible answers to demographic variables, which pointed to a lack of effort. This brought the final sample to 282 participants (151 male, mean age span 43–47 years). A mean age span was used to respect the company's wish that participants' concrete ages be removed in favor of five-year age spans.

Measurements

Inclusive leadership: Inclusive leadership was measured with the 25-item scale by Al-Atwi and Al-Hassani (2021) ($\alpha = 0.94$) in wave one. The scale follows the definitions of inclusive leadership by Shore *et al.* (2011) and focuses on the two dimensions of uniqueness and belonging. The five subdimensions mentioned above are present within these dimensions. A sample item was "My leader values my personal competence." The scale was translated into German and then retranslated into English by two independent researchers to ensure that the original meaning of each item stayed the same.

Sense of belonging: Sense of belonging (one of the subscales of perceived inclusion) was measured with five items from a ten-item scale by Chung *et al.* (2020) ($\alpha = 0.90$) in wave one (sample item: "I feel that people really care about me in my work group."). The same translation and backtranslation method outlined above was used.

Sense of uniqueness: Sense of uniqueness (the second subscale of perceived inclusion) was measured with five items from the ten-item scale by (Chung *et al.*, 2020) ($\alpha = 0.86$) in wave one (sample item: "While at work, I am comfortable expressing opinions that diverge from my group."). The same translation and backtranslation method outlined above was used.

Well-being: Well-being was measured in wave two using six items developed by Warr (1990) ($\alpha = 0.873$). The items asked participants to rate the frequency with which they felt certain emotions because of their work. Sample emotions included "depressed," "anxious," etc. Again, the translation and backtranslation method described above was used.

Turnover intentions: Turnover intentions were measured using three items adapted from Meyer *et al.* (1993) ($\alpha = 0.838$) in wave two (sample item: "How frequently do you think about leaving your organization?"). Again, the translation and backtranslation method outlined above was used.

Control variables: Age, gender, tenure and whether or not a participant worked in a leadership position were included as control variables and were measured in both waves. Age and tenure were measured in five-year spans to comply with the company's privacy protection policy. Gender was determined through the options "male" and "female." Whether or not participants were in a position of leadership was assessed using a yes/no question. The control variables were chosen for their possible connections to the other variables. Age and tenure have previously been linked to turnover intentions (Sibiya *et al.*, 2014). Similarly, Lee and Rwigema (2005) argued that older employees and those with more tenure were less likely to leave an organization, as they had more difficulty adapting to new working conditions. Age has also been linked to inclusion (Li *et al.*, 2022) – it has been suggested that older employees place more value on positive social interactions and therefore benefit more from inclusion. Finally, it has been shown that well-being tends to increase with age (Lee *et al.*, 2022). Gender has also been determined to be linked to turnover intentions (Lee *et al.*, 2017), and it has been argued that due to stereotypes of women being perceived as likelier to leave an organization, they are also less integrated in the organization, thus creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. This explanation also highlights the importance of age in the inclusion context, as there might be differences in the inclusion of women in the work context. Whether or not participants were

also in a position of leadership was included to account for the ways in which this might change their perception of the company. People in leadership positions might also be more ambitious in terms of their career and therefore more prone to leave. Additionally, being a leader themselves might affect how employees judge their superiors' leadership behavior.

Analytic strategy

To test the hypotheses laid out previously, hierarchical linear regression and the PROCESS macro in SPSS (Hayes, 2013) were used.

Results

Correlation and descriptive statistics

Correlations and descriptive statistics are listed in Table 1, which shows that inclusive leadership, sense of belonging and well-being are significantly correlated with turnover intentions. However, sense of uniqueness was not correlated with turnover intentions. It did, however, share a high correlation with sense of belonging. Therefore, when testing the regression models, only one dimension was included at a time, as to not suppress any effects due to shared variance.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 IL	3.68	0.80	–								
2 BE	3.96	0.83	0.44***	–							
3 UN	3.99	0.70	0.38***	0.75***	–						
4 WB	3.59	0.83	0.24**	0.25**	0.24**	–					
5 TI	2.21	1.08	–0.17**	–0.20**	–0.07	–0.37**	–				
6 Age	6.77	2.14	–0.13*	0.05	0.04	0.01	–0.33**	–			
7 Tenure	5.42	2.49	–0.12*	–0.02	–0.07	–0.02	–0.32**	0.72**	–		
8 Sex	1.46	0.50	0.04	–0.03	–0.10	–0.09	–0.15*	–0.05	0.10	–	
9 LP	1.85	0.36	–0.05	–0.15**	–0.21**	–0.03	0.01	–0.07	0.01	0.09	–

Note(s): Estimates are Pearson correlation coefficients. IL = inclusive leadership; BE = belonging; UN = uniqueness; WB = well-being; TI = turnover intentions; LP = leadership position

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < 0.001$

Source(s): Authors' own work

Measurement model

All measurement instruments had satisfactory Cronbach's alpha (all above 0.8), composite reliability (CR) (all above 0.7) and average variance extracted (AVE) values (all above 0.5) (see Table 2). Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to assess the validity of the measurement instruments. Inclusive leadership was deemed to have a good fit as a second-order construct built out of the five subdimensions "supporting individuals as group members," "ensuring justice and equity," "sharing decision-making," "encouraging diverse contributions" and "helping group members fully contribute" ($\chi^2/\text{df} = 3.22$, RMSEA = 0.09, SRMR = 0.02, CFI = 0.98, TLI = 0.97) (see also Randel *et al.*, 2018). Perceived inclusion showed the best fit when viewed as two separate but correlated dimensions (belonging and uniqueness) ($\chi^2/\text{df} = 3.17$, RMSEA = 0.09, SRMR = 0.05, CFI = 0.92, TLI = 0.90). This further supports our approach of investigating both dimensions separately. Well-being ($\chi^2/\text{df} = 2.49$, RMSEA = 0.07, SRMR = 0.04, CFI = 0.98, TLI = 0.96) and turnover intentions also showed satisfactory fit and good factor loadings. Because turnover intentions were

measured using only three items, a model fit could not be calculated for this variable. Discriminant validity was also assessed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The overall measurement model with five different variables also showed the best fit compared to models with less factors, establishing discriminant validity further (see Table 3). Furthermore, HTMT values of the variables were all below 0.5, apart from belonging to uniqueness, which was just on the threshold of 0.85.

Table 2. Reliability and validity of measurement instruments

Construct	α	CR	AVE
Inclusive leadership	0.944	0.912	0.800
Belonging	0.899	0.853	0.643
Uniqueness	0.857	0.838	0.623
Well-being	0.873	0.888	0.542
Turnover intentions	0.838	0.769	0.636

Note(s): CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted

Source(s): Authors’ own work

Table 3. Comparison of measurement models

Model	χ^2/df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
5-factor	1.78	0.941	0.933	0.053	0.058
4-factor	1.98	0.925	0.916	0.059	0.062
3-factor	4.21	0.752	0.725	0.107	0.132
2-factor	7.49	0.493	0.433	0.152	0.191
1-factor	8.31	0.428	0.373	0.161	0.197

Note(s): Df = degrees of freedom; CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; SRMR = standardized root mean square residual

Source(s): Authors’ own work

Common method bias

To control for common method bias, a common method factor was created. The fit of the model ($\chi^2/\text{df} = 1.78$, RMSEA = 0.053, SRMR = 0.058, CFI = 0.941, TLI = 0.933) did not change from the hypothesized five-factor model (see also Table 3).

Hypothesis testing

Entering the control variables as the first step, an R^2 of 0.15 could be observed (see also Model one in Table 4). Age and gender showed a significant negative relationship with turnover intentions: older employees and female employees had lower turnover intentions. Tenure and leadership position showed no significant relationship with turnover intentions. Hypothesis 1a proposed a serial mediation, with belonging and well-being serving as mediators. The results of the regression analysis (see Model two in Table 4) show that both the effect of inclusive leadership ($\beta = -0.09$, $p = 0.11$) and belonging ($\beta = -0.07$, $p = 0.22$) were nonsignificant, while well-being itself showed a significant relationship with turnover intentions ($\beta = -0.35$, $p < 0.001$). The serial mediation effect was also significant at the 0.05 level (indirect effect = -0.03 , SE = 0.01, 95% CI [-0.06;-0.01]). Additionally, the added variables explained 17% more variance of turnover intentions, representing an improvement over the control variables. Therefore, Hypothesis 1a was supported.

Hypothesis 1b proposes the serial mediation between inclusive leadership and turnover intentions, with sense of uniqueness and well-being as mediators. The results of the analysis are presented in Model 3 in [Table 4](#). Uniqueness did not exhibit a significant impact on turnover intentions ($\beta = 0.05$, $p = 0.942$). Here, inclusive leadership was a significant predictor of turnover intentions ($\beta = -0.14$, $p < 0.05$). Well-being was also still a significant predictor ($\beta = -0.37$, $p < 0.001$). The serial mediation effect was also significant (indirect effect = -0.02 , $SE = 0.01$, 95% CI $[-0.05; -0.01]$). The added variables were able to explain 16% more variance within turnover intentions, again improving on just the control variables. Therefore, **Hypothesis 1b** was supported.

Table 4. Regression results for turnover intentions

	Model 1 β	Model 2 β	Model 3 β
Age	-0.27***	-0.26***	-0.28***
Tenure	-0.11	-0.13	-0.12
Sex	-0.15**	-0.18***	-0.17***
LP	-0.01	-0.02	-0.01
IL	–	-0.09	-0.14*
BE	–	-0.07	–
UN	–	–	0.05
WB	–	-0.35***	-0.37***
R^2	0.15	0.32	0.31

Note(s): IL = inclusive leadership; BE = belonging; UN = uniqueness; WB = well-being; TI = turnover intentions; LP = leadership position

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < 0.001$

Source(s): Authors' own work

Discussion

This study focuses on how the relationship between inclusive leadership and turnover intentions is serially mediated by perceived inclusion and well-being. Data from 286 participants in a large German insurance company were gathered in a two-wave survey, and the conducted regression analyses supported the predictions of a serial mediation. Support was found for a serial mediation of both facets of perceived inclusion and well-being on the relationship between inclusive leadership and turnover intentions.

Theoretical implications

This study makes several theoretical contributions. First, it investigates inclusive leadership and turnover intentions in the context of a SOR-type model, specifically the RWDM ([Grant and Parker, 2009](#)). This sheds light on the internal psychological process that occurs between inclusive leadership and turnover intentions and extends current knowledge on mediating mechanisms. It shows that the SOR chain can be applied to inclusive leadership and turnover intentions. It shows that inclusive leadership is also a work design feature, more specifically a social characteristic, making the RWDM ([Grant and Parker, 2009](#)) a suitable basis for inclusive leadership research.

Second, the present work extends the RWDM to also include serial mediation. While not originally part of the RWDM ([Grant and Parker, 2009](#)), this research shows that supplementing the model with optimal distinctiveness theory ([Brewer, 1991](#)) can explain more complex mediation processes.

Third, following the suggestion by [Chung et al. \(2020\)](#) to test the separate effects of perceived inclusion (namely, sense of belonging and uniqueness), this study shows that the two

facets both play a mediating role in the inclusive leadership – turnover intentions relationship. However, individually, neither variable has a direct effect on turnover intentions. This seems to support the notion that both belonging and uniqueness are more indirect ways to reduce turnover intentions. While they may represent part of the internal psychological process that leads to turnover intentions, they are not the only determining factor in the process. Instead, only through their effect on well-being can these variables impact employee retention. It appears that belonging and uniqueness are more a distal factor in turnover intentions, with well-being representing a proximal factor.

Practical implications

This study not only offers insights that are of interest to researchers but also provides crucial findings for those working in the field. In these times of skilled labor shortages, reducing turnover intentions is crucial. While turnover intentions do not necessarily need to lead to actual turnover (Cohen *et al.*, 2016), they are linked to job performance (Saeed *et al.*, 2014) and increased absenteeism (Gyensare *et al.*, 2015). It is therefore advantageous for organizations to keep the turnover intentions of all their employees as low as possible. This study points to inclusive leadership as an indirect way of reducing turnover intentions. Too often inclusion is only understood in terms of assimilation, forcing employees to adapt to their environment while losing their individuality. Leaders should be coached on the importance of valuing employees' uniqueness and belonging to the group as well. By leading in a truly inclusive way, employees' well-being increases their turnover intentions decrease. This shift in leaders' understanding of inclusive leadership could be achieved through, for example, leadership development workshops.

Additionally, organizations might want rethink their approach to inclusion as a whole, to move away from only focusing on increased diversity, and fostering an inclusive climate in line with the understanding of Shore *et al.* (2011). A change in policy could be an important step in increasing employee retention.

It can be seen from the regression results that both age and gender have a significant relationship with turnover intentions, even when other variables are included in the model. The results show that younger and male employees have higher turnover intentions. This seems logical, as younger employees might want to further their career by moving on to a different company. However, contrary to previous findings, male employees showed higher turnover intentions. It might be that these employees are more career-focused compared to female employees. These two groups, young and male, should therefore be the focus of employee retention efforts, by making the current company more attractive.

However, simply being an inclusive leader and increasing perceptions of inclusion may not be enough to retain employees within the organization. In particular, the connection between well-being and perceived inclusion needs to be considered as a mechanism of reducing turnover intentions. Therefore, while inclusive leadership plays a role in reducing turnover intentions, secondary transmission mechanisms, namely perceived inclusion on well-being, must be considered when looking to retain employees.

Well-being is shown to have an especially strong relationship with turnover intentions. Organizations should therefore pay special attention to maintaining their employees' well-being at work and keeping severely negative emotions, such as depression or anxiety, to a minimum. Obviously, other factors besides leadership can influence well-being, for example autonomy (Fotiadis *et al.*, 2019) or workload (Pace *et al.*, 2021), and should not be overlooked.

In this light, inclusive leadership is not construed to be an all-out cure for turnover intentions. Even if leaders show the maximum level of inclusive leadership, some level of turnover intentions is inevitable. Since the effect of well-being on turnover intentions is stronger than the effect of inclusive leadership on turnover intentions, it is worth investigating where employees' potential lack of well-being stems from. If it stems from a lack of inclusion, investing in more inclusive leadership practices will have the desired effect of reducing

turnover intentions. If this lack of well-being stems from something outside of the control of leadership, then inclusive leadership practices will not help keep employees in the company. Nevertheless, inclusive leadership is one mechanism to reduce turnover intentions.

Limitations and future research directions

Inclusive leadership has been successfully integrated as a social characteristic with the RWDM (Grant and Parker, 2009). While this finding is novel and allows us to draw theoretical connections to various mediators, the specific mechanism in which inclusive leadership affects various other variables might be explained in an even more differentiated manner using the job-demands resources theory (Tummers and Bakker, 2021). Tummers and Bakker (2021) showed that leadership can impact both job demands and resources as well as job crafting, therefore allowing for greater differentiation between the motivation and health-impairment processes that inclusive leadership could affect. Future research could delve deeper into this angle and consider the entire framework laid out by Tummers and Bakker (2021).

An issue of note with regards to the study design is the amount of time points of the survey, specifically its two waves. This decision allowed for some temporal separation between the variables. The independent variable and the first mediator were gathered before the second mediator and dependent variable, thus allowing for some time to have passed between the variables. Of course, ideally, there would be a separate wave for every variable to obtain the highest degree of temporal separation. This limits the study's ability to draw causal conclusions about the role of inclusive leadership on turnover intentions. Additionally, reversed causality cannot fully be excluded. However, as an initial indicator of the effects of inclusive leadership, perceived inclusion and well-being on turnover intentions, the study still offers worthwhile contributions. Future research could incorporate more waves (ideally four with reference to this study) to truly achieve temporal separation and to enable more foundational explorations of causal mechanisms.

The sample for this study comes from a single insurance organization. While the sample is representative of the insurance industry in Germany (Wenig, 2022) and also demonstrates the industry-spanning problem of an aging workforce, additional studies with different samples are needed to assess the robustness of the observed effects.

This research used the conceptualization of inclusive leadership developed by Al-Atwi and Al-Hassani (2021). The scale follows the understanding of Randel *et al.* (2018), including their five subdimensions of inclusive leadership. However, other measurement scales of inclusive leadership exist and use different dimensions (e.g. Merlini *et al.*, 2024). In order to validate the robustness of the findings in this study, the results should be replicated using one or more of these different scales.

Lastly, this study focuses on the positive effects of inclusive leadership on various variables. However, inclusive leadership could also have negative effects. For example, inclusive leadership has previously been shown to fall under the too-much-of-a-good-thing effect (Pierce and Aguinis, 2013). This points to the fact that too much inclusive leadership can negatively affect various outcomes like performance or innovative behavior (Ma and Tang, 2023; Xiaotao *et al.*, 2018). As of yet, no such effects have been found for turnover intentions. Nevertheless, it would be worthwhile to investigate whether such a relationship also exists with turnover intentions. Furthermore, it should be investigated whether there are any variables on which inclusive leadership has a purely negative effect.

Conclusion

This study highlights the important influence of inclusive leadership on turnover intentions. It also identifies the role that perceived inclusion and well-being play in this relationship. The paper's results show that the relationship between inclusive leadership and turnover intentions is fully serially mediated by a sense of belonging and well-being, as well as partially

mediated by a sense of uniqueness and well-being. Furthermore, the study offers interesting avenues for future research, as the RWDM was successfully extended to account for serial mediation effects. These serial mediations can now be investigated further.

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