

Needs before deeds: psychological need satisfaction as a mechanism linking inclusive leadership to organizational citizenship behavior

Needs before
deeds

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Abstract

Purpose – Drawing upon self-determination theory (SDT) and the proactive motivation model, this study examined how inclusive leadership is related to organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) through psychological need satisfaction (PNS).

Design/methodology/approach – Data were collected from a large Dutch private company in the financial sector (N = 264) and analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM).

Findings – Inclusive leadership positively influenced all three PNS dimensions (autonomy, competence and relatedness). Both autonomy and relatedness fully mediated the relationship between inclusive leadership and OCB. However, this was not the case for competence, although additional analyses revealed the serial mediation of all three PNS dimensions.

Originality/value – By highlighting the mediating role of PNS, this study contributes to the inclusive leadership literature by helping unravel the underlying process through which leaders influence team outcomes. The findings emphasize the importance of inclusive leaders in satisfying employees' individual psychological needs, so that they can redirect their attention toward prosocial behaviors.

Keywords Inclusive leadership, Self-determination theory, Psychological need-satisfaction, Organizational citizenship behavior

Paper type Research paper

In our increasingly globalized world, diversity and inclusion are not just moral imperatives but also create strategic advantages (Veli Korkmaz *et al.*, 2022). Diverse talent pools bring unique qualities to the organization, such as enhanced creativity, problem solving (Roberge and van Dick, 2010), and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB; Mamman *et al.*, 2012). Examples of OCB include helping a colleague or going an extra mile for a client. These are forms of proactive behavior that contribute to organizational effectiveness, but no rewards or training are provided for employees who perform them (Organ and Ryan, 1995). Such behaviors are crucial because they lower turnover intentions and unit-level costs, ultimately



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benefitting organizational efficiency and effectiveness (Nielsen *et al.*, 2009; Podsakoff *et al.*, 2009). However, when diversity is not handled effectively, counterproductive work behaviors and lower group cohesiveness ensue (Roberge and van Dick, 2010). Therefore, to capitalize on the benefits of a diverse talent pool, organizations increasingly invest in inclusion, which is a diversity management approach that deals with diversity in a constructive way, ensuring that all employees are shown acceptance and treated as insiders (Shore and Chung, 2022; Veli Korkmaz *et al.*, 2022).

This is where inclusive leaders come into play (De Boom and De Meulenaere, 2022; Nishii and Leroy, 2022; Sürücü *et al.*, 2023). Inclusive leaders are open, accessible, and available to communicate with their employees (Carmeli *et al.*, 2010). As these leaders stimulate, appreciate, and recognize employees' contributions (Nishii and Leroy, 2022; Randel *et al.*, 2018), inclusive leadership has been linked to various prosocial organizational behaviors, including OCB (Panicker *et al.*, 2018; Tran and Choi, 2019). However, despite emerging empirical support, thus far, research has remained elusive on the *mechanism* linking inclusive leadership to prosocial behaviors such as OCB (Shore and Chung, 2022; Younas *et al.*, 2021). Thus, there is a knowledge gap in terms of examining inclusive leadership from the employee-leader relationship perspective, and addressing this caveat is the next important step (Veli Korkmaz *et al.*, 2022; Shore and Chung, 2022). To address this issue, initial progress has been made, with studies mostly examining mechanisms related to the organization or team climate, such as psychological safety (Carmeli *et al.*, 2010; Javed *et al.*, 2019), ethical climate (Qi and Liu, 2017), and organizational justice (Tran and Choi, 2019), and mechanisms related to the leaders themselves, such as leaders' trustworthiness and integrity (Younas *et al.*, 2021). However, significantly less attention has been paid to individual employees' psychological mechanisms (Randel *et al.*, 2018; Shore and Chung, 2022; Sürücü *et al.*, 2023). This is problematic as leadership researchers often disregard the extent to which employees actually require leadership to engage in desired behaviors (Hunter *et al.*, 2007).

To address this research gap, this study evaluated psychological need satisfaction (PNS) as a mechanism to explain the relationship between inclusive leadership and OCB. We built on self-determination theory (SDT; Ryan and Deci, 2000), which argues that employees possess three universal psychological needs (i.e. autonomy, relatedness, and competence) and Parker *et al.*'s (2010) proactive motivation model, which distinguishes three motivational bases for proactive behavior like OCB (i.e. can do, reason to, energized to). The underlying reason is that employees do not engage in proactive behavior such as OCB instantaneously but require a sense of autonomous motivation and regulation to engage in such efforts in a sustainable way that is in line with organizational aims (Wörtler *et al.*, 2020). In this way, SDT and the proactive motivation model help explain why employees pursue prosocial behaviors and how leaders can support them in satisfying these needs through inclusive leadership behaviors. This also resonates with recent research suggesting that PNS serves as an important motivational mechanism linking positive leadership styles to individual employee outcomes (Decuyper and Schaufeli, 2020). Therefore, we argue that PNS is a central mechanism of inclusive leaders' influence, which can satisfy autonomy and competence needs through their focus on employees' *uniqueness*, thereby supporting employees' independence (Randel *et al.*, 2018), individual strengths, and capabilities (Qi *et al.*, 2019); further, it can satisfy relatedness needs by fostering employees' *belongingness*, ensuring that they develop meaningful relationships with others in the workplace (Hetland *et al.*, 2011), and ultimately inspiring prosocial behaviors such as OCB (Chiniara and Bentein, 2016). This leads to the following research question: *Does inclusive leadership promote OCB, and can the underlying relationship be explained through individual PNS?*

By answering this question, the present study makes several important theoretical contributions. First, compared with traditional neo-charismatic and behavioral leadership approaches, such as transformational and servant leadership (e.g. Chiniara and Bentein,

2016; Kovjanic *et al.*, 2012; Leroy *et al.*, 2015), less is known about the association between inclusive leadership and employees' prosocial behaviors (Shore *et al.*, 2018; Sürücü *et al.*, 2023). Such knowledge is instrumental for the "coming of age" of inclusive leadership as a leadership style in its own right (Randel *et al.*, 2018). Furthermore, it aids organizations in addressing escalating diversity challenges, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Bauwens *et al.*, 2021). Second, by adopting the SDT-lens, this study extends past research (e.g. Decuyper and Schaufeli, 2020; Kovjanic *et al.*, 2012) on the individual psychological mechanisms that link leadership with employee outcomes and responds to the call of Dinh *et al.* (2014, p. 55) to advance general understanding of "how leaders influence underlying processes that lead to organizational outcomes."

Inclusive leadership and PNS

Inclusive leaders are open, accessible, and available leaders that engage in behaviors that stimulate employees' *belongingness*, such as supporting group members, ensuring that justice and equity are part of each member's experience, and providing opportunities for shared decision making (Carmeli *et al.*, 2010; Hirak *et al.*, 2012). In addition, inclusive leaders display behaviors that foster employees' *uniqueness*, such as encouraging employees to contribute to group work and helping employees fully offer their unique talents and perspectives to contribute to the organization (Nishii and Leroy, 2022; Randel *et al.*, 2018; Veli Korkmaz *et al.*, 2022).

As inclusive leaders strongly value each employee's uniqueness, they pay close attention to employees' needs, because the satisfaction of these needs allows employees to be their true selves at work (Chiniara and Bentein, 2016). According to SDT, employees possess three basic psychological needs: the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which are inherently connected to their intrinsic, autonomous motivation for certain workplace behaviors (Straus and Parker, 2014). These are identified as basic needs because their fulfillment is essential for employees' motivation and engagement, which, in turn, stimulates organizational effectiveness. Conversely, their absence leads to passivity and defensiveness (Deci *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, organizations should focus on creating workplace conditions that foster PNS. Past research suggests that leaders play an important role here (Chiniara and Bentein, 2016; Decuyper and Schaufeli, 2020; Decuyper *et al.*, 2022).

Autonomy refers to perceiving one's behavior as an expression that aligns with oneself (Deci *et al.*, 2017). Leaders can meet employees' needs for autonomy by allowing for choice, providing non-controlling positive feedback, and acknowledging employees' perspectives (Baard *et al.*, 2004; Slemp *et al.*, 2018). Such autonomy-supportive behavior is central to the behavioral repertoire of inclusive leaders that, in their focus on an individual's uniqueness, their responsiveness to individual employees' contributions, emphasizing shared decision-making and independent work, and allowing employees to decide how work is conducted (Randel *et al.*, 2018). Accordingly, Shakil *et al.* (2021) and Jolly and Lee (2021) demonstrated that employees experience more autonomy in the presence of inclusive leaders.

Competence refers to employees feeling effective and witnessing opportunities to use their capabilities (Deci *et al.*, 2017). As inclusive leaders recognize that employees have unique strengths and perspectives, and acknowledge their capabilities (Qi *et al.*, 2019; Randel *et al.*, 2018), one can expect that inclusive leaders are more likely to satisfy employees' need for competence based on this inclusiveness, for example, by offering them opportunities to showcase their talents and fully contribute to team efforts. Empirical studies by Javed *et al.* (2019) and Fang *et al.* (2019) confirm that inclusive leaders make employees feel more self-efficient and confident.

Relatedness encompasses employees' feelings of being connected to others (Deci *et al.*, 2017) and focuses on the social aspect of work and work-related relationships (Hetland *et al.*, 2011).

Through their focus on employees' belongingness, inclusive leaders actively contribute to fulfilling this need by creating a comfortable, psychologically safe environment and stimulating support for diverse opinions (Hirak *et al.*, 2012; Randel *et al.*, 2018). According to Choi *et al.* (2017), supportive behaviors displayed by inclusive leaders can meet employees' socioemotional needs and instill feelings of affection and emotional attachment. Therefore, inclusive leadership is associated with more high-quality relations between employees and their leaders in organizations (Jiang *et al.*, 2020). Together, these arguments and empirical findings suggest that inclusive leaders emphasize employees' choices (autonomy) and unique strengths (competence) and foster their belongingness (relatedness). Accordingly, we propose the following hypothesis:

- H1.* Inclusive leadership is positively related to (a) autonomy PNS, (b) competence, PNS and (c) relatedness PNS.

PNS and OCB

OCB refers to prosocial behavior that is not part of employees' formal job descriptions, but entails broader social and psychological benefits (Organ and Ryan, 1995). As OCB is usually undertaken with the intent to help others, it has been argued that PNS allows for the intrinsic motivation needed for employees to showcase prosocial behavior such as OCB. The reason follows from SDT, which postulates that employees are intrinsically motivated toward the psychological well-being and growth of peers, provided that their own psychological needs are met (Wörtler *et al.*, 2020).

First, employees are motivated to engage in OCB when their autonomous needs are met. Employees interpret autonomy provision as a signal that they are valued and supported by their organization, team, and/or supervisor. Consequently, in line with the principle of reciprocity, they are more likely to return the favor, which often takes the form of prosocial behaviors such as OCB (Park, 2018). Furthermore, when employees' autonomy needs are met, they experience greater mastery over the time and effort they can devote to activities from which they derive a sense of meaning and satisfaction (Gagné and Deci, 2005), such as helping others. Second, employees are more inclined toward OCB when their competence needs are satisfied. When employees feel competent, they tend to display positive feelings that increase their approach behavior toward other people (Van Woerkom and Meyers, 2015). Furthermore, feeling competent adds to employees' confidence and self-efficiency, which are instrumental to the self-initiated and persistent nature of proactive behaviors such as OCB (Van Woerkom *et al.*, 2016). Finally, employees are motivated to engage in OCB when their relatedness needs are met. Employees are more motivated to act in the interests of others with whom they feel a sense of belonging (Rosen *et al.*, 2014). Likewise, employees show stronger motivation for OCB in the presence of others who treat them with fairness and respect (Park, 2018). Based on these arguments and empirical support for the positive relationship between PNS and OCB (e.g. Chiniara and Bentein, 2016; Rosen *et al.*, 2014; Wörtler *et al.*, 2020), we formulate the following hypothesis:

- H2.* (a) Autonomy PNS, (b) competence PNS, and (c) relatedness PNS are positively related to OCB.

Combining the elements of the above hypotheses, we propose that inclusive leaders can create a work environment that supports and validates PNS, which in turn motivates employees to engage in OCB. Our theoretical rationale combines SDT with Parker *et al.*'s (2010) proactive motivation model. According to the latter, employees engage in proactive behavior, such as OCB when they feel they are able to (can do motivation), see its value (reason to motivation) or experience favorable emotional states (energized to motivation). First, inclusive leaders can

create a work environment that supports and validates individuals' PNS through practices like giving diverse employees a sense of ownership (autonomy), recognizing, and embracing employees' unique skills (competence), and building trust and coherence (relatedness) (Randel *et al.*, 2018; Slemp *et al.*, 2018; Veli Korkmaz *et al.*, 2022; Qi *et al.*, 2019). Subsequently, PNS can help to unlock specific motivational patterns favorable of OCB (Wörtler *et al.*, 2020). When employees' competence needs are met, they might feel more able to engage in voluntary discretionary actions characteristic of OCB (can do). Likewise, when employees' autonomous and relatedness needs are met, this freedom and belongingness might provide them with the necessary energy (energized to) or purpose (reason to) to return the favor in the form of OCB (Hong *et al.*, 2023). Hence, we propose:

H3. (a) Autonomy PNS, (b) competence PNS, and (c) relatedness PNS mediate the relationship between inclusive leadership and OCB.

Methods and materials

Research design and sample

This study adopted a quantitative cross-sectional design. Data were collected through an online survey (Google Forms) involving employees of a large company in the finance sector. To ensure appropriate data management and the privacy and rights of respondents, the survey was reviewed by the ethics review board of the corresponding author's institution (ref. RP295), privacy officer, and the compliance department of the company. Participants were selected using a proportionally stratified sample. The strata used were from different departments within the Dutch branch of the company. Random samples were obtained for each department. To ensure that the stratified sample was proportional, the relative size of each department was considered when determining the sample size for that department. Based on these criteria, 1,557 employees received invitations, resulting in 264 responses. In line with the company's annual report, 54.9% were male participants. The majority were 35–50 years old (36.0%), and had worked in the company for approximately 15 years (35.2), of which 2–12 months (40.5%) or 1–3 years (37.9%) under their current leader.

Instruments

All scales were derived from previous research and were scored on a five-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). For the Dutch versions, we adopted a forth-and-back translation process.

Inclusive leadership was measured using a 9-item scale developed by Carmeli *et al.* (2010). Sample items are "My manager is open to hearing new ideas" and "The manager encourages me to access him/her on emerging issues." Cronbach's alpha was 0.93.

PNS was measured using Chiniara and Bentein's (2016) 12-item short version of the scale developed by Van den Broeck *et al.* (2010). A sample item for autonomy is "I am satisfied with the level of autonomy I have in my job," for competence "I am confident about my ability to execute my job properly," and for relatedness "I feel of part of a group at work." Cronbach's alphas were 0.88, 0.89, and 0.85, respectively.

OCB was assessed using a 5-item scale (Ehrhart, 2004). A sample item is "Team members willingly help others who have work-related problems." Cronbach's alpha was 0.87.

Control variables were added for gender and tenure, as past research showed that these variables influence OCB (Van Woerkom and Meyers, 2015). Following Chiniara and Bentein (2016), we included both tenure with the organization and tenure with the current leader. Further use of control variables was restricted by the organization because of confidentiality concerns.

Results

Preliminary analyses

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to test the model. We first assessed the fit of the measurement model through a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), followed by a structural model specifying the relationships between the latent variables. Analyses were conducted using *Lavaan* in R (Rosseel, 2012). Concerning the measurement model, the hypothesized five-factor model with inclusive leadership, the three dimensions of PNS, and OCB was tested against a (1) one-factor model in which all items loaded one latent variable and (2) a three-factor model with inclusive leadership, a one-dimensional PNS, and OCB. The five-factor model showed a good fit with the data ($\chi^2 = 463.61$, $df = 289$, $CFI = 0.95$, $RMSEA = 0.05$, $SRMR = 0.06$). All items loaded sufficiently on their respective constructs (range 0.68–0.84) and average variance extracted for all factors was >0.50 (range 0.59–0.67). Both the one-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 1620.06$, $\Delta df = 10$, $p < 0.001$) and the three-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 583.59$, $\Delta df = 7$, $p < 0.001$) demonstrated a significantly lower fit. This suggests that common source bias presents no significant concern, and the hypothesized measurements can be maintained. Concerning the structural model, the hypothesized full mediation model fit the data well ($\chi^2 = 551.45$, $df = 289$, $CFI = 0.95$, $RMSEA = 0.05$, $SRMR = 0.06$). We compared this model to a partial mediation model, in which inclusive leadership also directly influences OCB. This model did not provide a significant improvement ($\Delta\chi^2 = 0.28$, $\Delta df = 1$, $p > 0.05$) and showed that the direct relationship between inclusive leadership and OCB was not significant ($\beta = 0.02$, $p > 0.05$). Hence, the hypothesized full mediation model was used for hypothesis testing.

Hypothesis testing

Figure 1 shows the structural model, and Table 1 lists the path coefficients. In line with H1a, inclusive leadership predicted higher autonomy PNS ($\beta = 0.25$, $p < 0.000$). Similarly, employees also reported higher competence PNS ($\beta = 0.31$, $p = 0.001$) and relatedness PNS ($\beta = 0.40$, $p < 0.000$) in the presence of inclusive leaders, confirming both H1b and H1c. Following H2a and H2c, autonomy PNS ($\beta = 0.21$, $p = 0.010$) and relatedness PNS ($\beta = 0.59$, $p < 0.000$) positively predicted employees' OCB. However, contrary to H2b and H3b, the same was not found for competence PNS ($\beta = 0.03$, $p = 0.81$). Mediation was assessed by bootstrapping indirect effects.

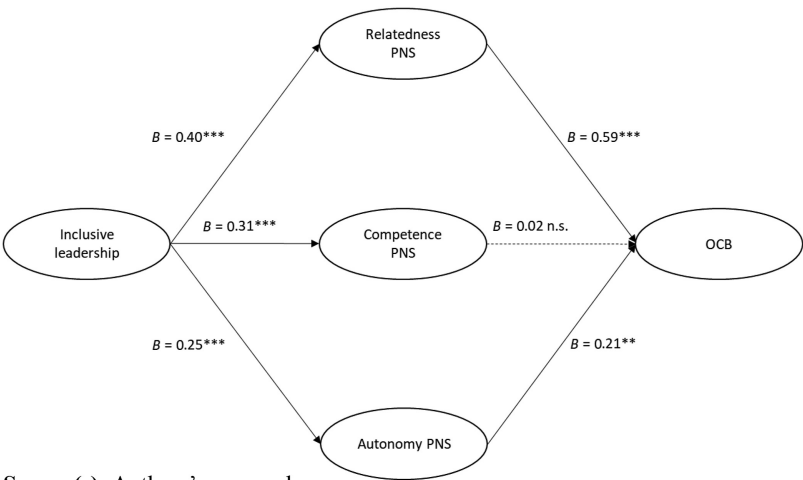


Figure 1.
Structural paths model

Source(s): Authors' own work

Path	B	SE	95% CI	<i>p</i>
<i>Direct effects</i>				
Gender → Autonomy PNS	-0.16	0.08	[-0.33; -0.03]	0.02*
Tenure with organization → Autonomy PNS	0.12	0.02	[-0.01; 0.08]	0.10
Tenure with leader → Autonomy PNS	-0.04	0.04	[-0.09; 0.05]	0.55
Inclusive leadership → Autonomy PNS	0.25	0.08	[0.14; 0.46]	0.000***
Gender → Competence PNS	-0.14	0.08	[-0.31; 0.10]	0.04*
Tenure with organization → Competence PNS	0.16	0.02	[0.01; 0.09]	0.03*
Tenure with leader → Competence PNS	0.06	0.04	[-0.04; 0.12]	0.37
Inclusive leadership → Competence PNS	0.31	0.11	[0.15; 0.59]	0.001***
Gender → Relatedness PNS	0.01	0.09	[-0.17; 0.19]	0.91
Tenure with organization → Relatedness PNS	0.11	0.03	[-0.01; 0.09]	0.13
Tenure with leader → Relatedness PNS	0.06	0.05	[-0.05; 0.13]	0.35
Inclusive leadership → Relatedness PNS	0.40	0.13	[0.33; 0.85]	0.001***
Gender → OCB	-0.11	0.06	[-0.22; -0.01]	0.047*
Tenure with organization → OCB	-0.02	0.02	[-0.05; 0.02]	0.30
Tenure with leader → OCB	-0.09	0.03	[-0.15; -0.04]	0.002**
Autonomy PNS → OCB	0.21	0.07	[0.04; 0.33]	0.01**
Competence PNS → OCB	0.02	0.07	[-0.12; 0.16]	0.81
Relatedness PNS → OCB	0.59	0.08	[0.28; 0.58]	0.000***
<i>Indirect effects (bootstrapped)</i>				
Inclusive leadership → Autonomy PNS → OCB	0.05	0.02	[0.01; 0.09]	0.02*
Inclusive leadership → Competence PNS → OCB	0.01	0.02	[-0.03; 0.05]	0.73
Inclusive leadership → Relatedness PNS → OCB	0.24	0.05	[0.14; 0.34]	<0.001***
Note(s): *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.010$, * $p < 0.050$				
Source(s): Authors' own work				

Table 1.
Structural
paths (n = 258)

In line with the previous hypotheses, the indirect effects of inclusive leadership via autonomy ($\beta = 0.05$, $CI[0.01; 0.10]$, $p = 0.017$) and relatedness PNS were significant ($\beta = 0.26$, $CI[0.15; 0.37]$, $p = 0.000$), thus supporting H3a and H3c. The indirect effect of competence PNS was not significant ($\beta = 0.01$, $CI[-0.04; 0.06]$, $p = 0.795$), and H3b was not supported.

Post-hoc analysis

Recent studies, such as Teng *et al.* (2022), point to the possibility of sequential relations among the PNS subdimensions. This suggests that the relationship between inclusive leadership and OCB mediated by PNS may be more complex than initially expected. To this end, we conducted additional analyses in which we estimated serial mediation models with the three PNS dimensions as sequential mediators between inclusive leadership and OCB. We tested all possible sequential orders of PNS dimensions and compared the models. The results displayed a good data fit ($\chi^2 = 554.60$, $df = 357$, $CFI = 0.94$, $RMSEA = 0.05$, $SRMR = 0.05$) for the model in which inclusive leadership predicted relatedness PNS ($\beta = 0.40$, $p < 0.000$), which in turn predicted competence PNS ($\beta = 0.47$, $p = 0.000$), autonomy ($\beta = 0.36$, $p < 0.000$), and ultimately OCB ($\beta = 0.22$, $p = 0.007$). The indirect effect of inclusive leadership through these three sequential mediators was also significant ($\beta = 0.04$, $CI[0.01, 0.06]$, $p = 0.004$). Figure 2 depicts this model.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine PNS as an individual psychological mechanism that links inclusive leadership to OCB. While the results of the study endorse full mediation for autonomy and relatedness PNS, supplementary analyses support the sequential mediation of all PNS dimensions.

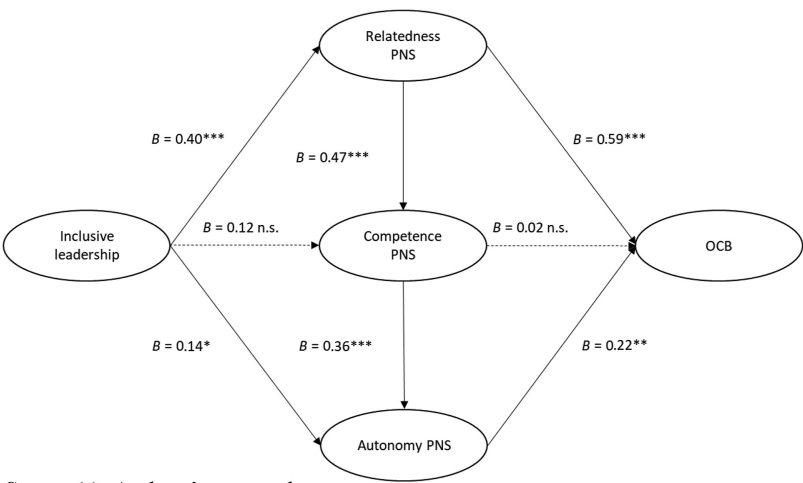


Figure 2.
Post-hoc model

Source(s): Authors' own work

This research makes two significant theoretical contributions to the growing inclusive leadership literature. First, by showing the association between inclusive leadership and OCB, we expanded research findings on leadership and prosocial behaviors to a leadership style that is unique in terms of “the relational importance of making members feel a part of the group and cultivating a sense of belongingness and being valued” (Jolly and Lee, 2021, p. 1397). This is important because the nexus between inclusive leadership and employee prosocial behaviors is less developed (Shore *et al.*, 2018), especially when compared with traditional leadership approaches such as transformational and servant leadership (e.g. Chiniara and Bentein, 2016; Kovjanic *et al.*, 2012; Leroy *et al.*, 2015). Our findings support multiple indirect relationships between inclusive leadership and OCB, suggesting that inclusive leadership can effectively inspire this kind of proactive behavior.

Second, by examining PNS as a mechanism between inclusive leadership and OCB, we answered calls from researchers to determine the underlying mechanisms that explain how leaders influence employee and organizational outcomes (Dinh *et al.*, 2014). More specifically, we advance the SDT perspective on leader-outcome relations (e.g. Chiniara and Bentein, 2016; Kovjanic *et al.*, 2012; Zhang and Chen, 2013) by demonstrating that the influence of inclusive leadership, which is a predominantly a relational approach (Randel *et al.*, 2018), is not limited to fulfilling relational needs. Following the proactive motivation model (Parker *et al.*, 2010), inclusive leadership supports employees in the engagement of OCB by fostering employees “can do”, “reason to” and “energized to” motivations. Our results show that this influence also directly extends to employees’ need for autonomy and indirectly to their competence needs (Slemp *et al.*, 2018; Veli Korkmaz *et al.*, 2022; Qi *et al.*, 2019). Both autonomy and relatedness fully mediated the relationship between leadership and OCB. However, a similar relationship was not observed for competence. One explanation for this is that employees who feel competent might feel less connected to their workplace and, therefore, might be less inclined to go an extra mile for their team members (Van den Broeck *et al.*, 2016). Nevertheless, additional analyses revealed that inclusive leaders can also influence competence and autonomy needs by satisfying relational needs. In other words, fostering meaningful relations (relatedness) can also help employees identify their unique strengths (competence), reinforcing their leeway (autonomy) to engage in prosocial behaviors. By demonstrating the existence of such sequential “PNS chains” (cf. Teng *et al.*, 2022), the present study contributes to a more fine-grained understanding of the SDT

perspective on leadership. Furthermore, by linking OCB to the proactive motivation model and the SDT lens on leadership, our study helps also understand OCB beyond a social exchange phenomenon, as behavior that is driven by employees' needs to make their own choices and have meaningful connections with others (Wörtler *et al.*, 2020).

This study has several limitations. First, the leadership field (Batistič *et al.*, 2017), and research on inclusive leadership specifically (Nishii and Leroy, 2022), often lacks multilevel research highlighting the interactions between the team and the leader. Unfortunately, because of privacy and confidentiality restrictions on the part of the company, we were not allowed to account for the nested nature of the data, meaning that the individual employees might work in teams that are supervised by a single leader. From a systematic review of the inclusive leadership literature, Veli Korkmaz *et al.* (2022) concluded that there is still some confusion concerning how inclusion is theorized and operationalized. Therefore, future research should explore the multilevel relationships of inclusive leadership, including the dyadic, team, and broader organizational aspects of inclusive leadership (Nishii and Leroy, 2022; Veli Korkmaz *et al.*, 2022).

Second, this study is limited by its focus on the private sector. While the organization under study is characteristic of other organizations in the financial sector and we attempted to mitigate potential bias through a proportional stratified sampling strategy, the results should be interpreted with caution. However, authors like Ashikali *et al.* (2021, p. 512) state that while differences in organizational characteristics might shape its effectiveness, inclusive leadership is fundamentally important in every context and therefore “conceptually and theoretically generalizable” to other organizations. Nevertheless, we invite future scholars to replicate our model in other organizational settings.

Finally, we collaborated with a private company, necessitating a delicate equilibrium between research rigor and the company's limitations regarding questionnaire length and personal data usage. Consequently, we limited the inclusion of control and moderating variables during data collection. Previous research (Veli Korkmaz *et al.*, 2022) highlights the significance of professional diversity and power distance as moderators in the context of inclusive leadership, while OCB research (Organ and Ryan, 1995) underscores the importance of job attitudes and personality as control variables. Thus, we encourage future investigations to delve deeper into the impact of these variables on the relationship between inclusive leadership and OCB.

Practical implications

Our study shows that inclusive leaders have the power to stimulate prosocial behaviors in their employees, which underscores that inclusiveness is not only important from a moral perspective but also from a business perspective: OCB can lead to lower turnover intentions, lower unit-level costs, and increased organizational effectiveness (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2009). Therefore, organizations should develop inclusive leadership by stimulating a behavioral repertoire that facilitates belongingness and values uniqueness. To achieve this, we suggest the following practical interventions: first, introducing a 360-degree feedback system on specific inclusive leadership behaviors. Receiving feedback from multiple sources (peers, subordinates, supervisors and clients) about one's leadership behavior supports employees' reflexivity and fosters professional development. Based on this feedback concrete behaviors can be trained. For example, in each conversation, an effort can be made to value employees' individual contributions explicitly or adopt active listening (Veli Korkmaz *et al.*, 2022). Second, peer supervision opportunities for leaders. For instance, leaders can share feedback about the difficulties they face, in the inherent tensions that come with inclusive leadership (Ferdman, 2017), simultaneously emphasizing the uniqueness of individuals, fostering belongingness, and nurturing a safe team climate. Third, we suggest that organizations support leaders in developing skills for behaviors targeted at the employee (e.g. empowering

employees), team (e.g. sharing decision-making), and organizational levels (e.g. communicating a vision about how diversity contributes to the organization). Such behaviors can help to unlock specific motivational patterns among employees that make them prone to proactive behaviors like OCB.

Conclusion

This study investigated the relationship between inclusive leadership and OCB through PNS. Our study contributes to the literature by examining inclusive leadership from the perspective of the employee-leader relationship. Specifically, it demonstrated that while inclusive leadership is a relational approach to leadership, its influence is not limited to pure relational needs but also extends to followers' needs in the competence and autonomy domains, for example, emphasizing the use of strength or autonomy-supportive behavior. Using unique data from the financial sector, this study also shows that needs are interconnected: inclusive leadership can foster a sequential PNS chain leading to OCB. As OCB can lead to lower turnover intention, lower unit-level costs and increased organizational effectiveness, these findings underscore that inclusive leadership is not only beneficial from a moral perspective but also from a business perspective. Therefore, organizations should develop inclusive leader behaviors at different levels, for example, through 360-degree feedback systems and peer supervision.

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