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Assessing the Mediating Factors of Inclusive Leadership – Psychological Safety Relationship for Creative Performance

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Inclusive leadership style has demonstrated greater influence in determining the extent to which employees feel psychologically safe in the workplace environment. Inclusive leadership is believed to foster employee creative behaviour and improved psychological safety. Therefore, this study aims to assess the mediating factors of inclusive leadership and psychological safety relationship in the construction workplace due to scarce knowledge of these factors. The study obtained cross-sectional data through 179 (online) and 74 (hand-delivery) surveys from construction professionals in the Nigerian built environment. Firstly, the data were subjected to mean score testing, after which maximum likelihood factoring (MLF) with varimax rotation was used to establish three underlying factors that mediate inclusive leadership-psychological safety relationship. These factors include recognizing employee inputs and concerns, valuing an inclusive workplace culture, and supportive motivational climate. These findings could go a long way in guiding construction managers to lead inclusively, thereby fostering a psychologically safe workplace for improved creative behaviors in the Nigerian built environment.

Keywords: Construction, Environment, Inclusive leadership, Psychological safety, Workplace

Introduction

The significance of the construction industry in contributing to the development of nation's economy cannot be overemphasized. This is reflected in the industry role in providing basic infrastructure virtually for all sectors of a nation's economy. The construction industry is capable of creating multiplier effect in other sectors of the economy by influencing the production of construction materials (manufacturing industry), retailing (downstream industries) among others, thereby leading to economic growth and job creation. In Nigeria, combined construction activities contributed 11% to the National Gross Domestic Product (GDP), making the construction industry the 4th contributor to the Nigerian economy in the year 2023. The construction industry also emerged as the 8th largest employers of labour in Nigeria (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2023). The enormous benefits and contributions of the construction industry therefore necessitate continuing strategies in ensuring its survival. This could be achieved by sustaining employees' creative behaviour and engagement in construction organizations. As noted by Mumford et al. (2012) employees' creative and innovative behaviours are critical to the

growth and performance of either public or private organizations. Nevertheless, creativity is shaped by social and organizational contexts, where leadership and culture play a fundamental role in fostering or inhibiting creative potential (Amabile & Pratt, 2016). The autocratic leadership style has been a dominant leadership style in the Nigerian built environment (Oke, 2013) despite the fact that the autocratic leadership style is not preferred (Mesoma, 2022). Recent studies (e.g. Okolie et al., 2024; Elegba et al., 2025) have further shown the negative effects of autocratic leadership in relation to employee creativity and organizational performance in the Nigerian built environment. Okolie et al. (2024) highlighted certain actions and behaviours that led to the negative effects of autocratic leadership style in the Nigerian construction industry as “denying employees freedom to express their views,” “not welcoming questions or ideas from employees in matters related to organization’s affairs,” “taking vital decisions affecting employees without consulting the employees,” “disallowing employees to demonstrate initiatives and creativity in their work performance” (p. 12), among others. Studies have shown the effectiveness of inclusive leadership in accommodating employees’ input and creative and innovative behaviours and fostering psychological safety.

Employee creativity and innovative behaviours are best reflected when novel and useful ideas are generated and implemented in organizations (Carmeli et al., 2010). Leadership model such as inclusive leadership that prioritize psychological safety directly impact organization’s innovation capacity by fostering an environment where employees feel encourage taking risks and contributing creatively (Korkmaz et al., 2022). Coupled with the dynamic and complex nature of construction works, creative and innovative ideas are needed to enable effective project implementation. In their work, Almashhour et al. (2024) identified project managers’ creativity as a significant contributor to the success of construction projects. As stated by Siddiquel et al. (2023), a construction leader’s humour improves the psychological and relational processes involved in executing construction projects, which allows team members to come up with, communicate, and implement novel ideas without fearing creativity risks and repercussions. The inclusive leadership-psychological safety relationship is still an emerging concept in the Nigerian workplace setting. There is a gap in the literature since little to nothing is known about the potential mediating factors of the inclusive leadership-psychological safety concept. Hence, the need to assess the mediating factors of the inclusive leadership-psychological safety relationship in the Nigerian construction workplace. The knowledge of the mediating factors could be beneficial to construction managers in managing construction operations towards achieving a psychologically safe workplace environment, which is instrumental in determining the extent of employee creative behaviours.

Literature Review

The Mediating Factors of Inclusive Leadership-Psychological Safety Relationship in a Creative Workplace

Given the value of creative behaviours in an organizational workforce, Qi et al. (2019) stressed the significance of determining the factors that mediate employees’ innovative and creative behaviours. The mediating factors are needed in enabling a creative workplace environment where employees have a sense of psychological empowerment, inclusion, knowledge sharing, equal treatment, trust in leadership, and decision autonomy (Carmeli et al., 2010; Korkmaz et al., 2022). According to Spreitzer (1995), psychological empowerment (PE) presents an intrinsic motivational state in which employees feel they have a sense of control over their work. Employee perception of control and influences on their job increases when their views and inputs are valued and encouraged by a leader exhibiting

inclusive leadership. Employee empowerment is beneficial in attaining an inclusive and psychologically safe workplace, where employees perceived safety when undertaking risky initiatives. As noted by Mitchell et al. (2015), inclusive leaders exhibit inclusiveness and support when different viewpoints are encouraged and valued from diverse members in workgroup, thereby empowering employees to get more autonomy and freedom to engage in creative and innovative behaviours. By displaying a high level of availability and accessibility to employees, inclusive leaders signal that it is safe to engage in risky behaviours without fear of negative consequences, which in turn increases employee's psychological safety (Carmeli et al., 2010). Similarly, Knowledge sharing is vital in facilitating a creative and psychologically safe workplace where diverse inputs, contributions are valued and encouraged. As an essential mechanism, knowledge sharing mediates the link between psychological safety and team creative performance (Kessel et al., 2012), which provides an opportunity for mutual learning, facilitating the creation of new knowledge and enhancing the team's ability to generate novel ideas (Booyesen, 2014).

The employee level of trust in leaders to guarantee freedom of idea expression could also be beneficial in attaining a creative and psychologically safe workplace. As noted by Kahn (1990), there is a tendency that employees will feel psychologically safe when there is a trusting and supportive interpersonal relationship with leaders and colleagues in the workplace. With theoretical backing, Nembhard and Edmondson (2006) identified perceived organizational support and trust in leadership as enablers of psychological safety at workplace. In which fundamental attribution biases are reduced and employees willingly discuss their mistakes regardless of the blames and actions that could affect their standings (Van Dyck et al., 2005). As noted by Korkmaz et al. (2022) inclusive leaders can strengthen the feelings of belongingness in the workgroup by ensuring equity through unbiased judgements.

With increasing motivation, employees are more likely to get involved in innovative behaviours (Carmeli, 2010). As revealed by the self-determination theory (SDT), individuals function most effectively when their basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness are satisfied, which in turn promotes well-being (Deci & Ryan 1985). Moreover, inclusive leaders who remain attentive and responsive to their employees' needs enhance positive emotions and job satisfaction (Ye et al., 2018). In assessing organizational innovation processes, it is noted that positive feedback from the leader positively influenced the followers' voice behaviours, job autonomies, and innovative and creative behaviours (Lee et al., 2021). The positive feedback reflects feelings of praise, motivation, and a supportive climate in promoting employee psychological safety in the workplace. The workplace interactions through communication could be significant in mediating leader-follower relationship for creative behaviours. As noted by Parish et al. (2008), harmonious communication between the leader and the followers in searching for better solutions to workplace tasks could help increase the followers' creative capabilities. Importantly, inclusive leaders adapt their communication style to enable vibrant connection with diverse audiences, fostering understanding, and collaboration for creative behaviours (Korkmaz et al., 2022). A review of inclusive leadership-psychological safety relationship by Oladele et al. (2025) revealed that key elements such as inclusion, openness, commitment to diversity, awareness to bias, learning culture, supportive feedback, trust and respect are essential in achieving belongingness, and supportive climate in the construction workplace.

Methodology

The study utilized cross-sectional survey data gathered through questionnaire in assessing the mediating factors of inclusive leadership-psychological safety relationship in the Nigerian built environment. The study population are the professionals in the Nigerian built environment. A mixed approach was

adopted in administering the questionnaire randomly to the construction professionals. This involves online survey and hand-delivery. This approach is essential in order to achieve high response rates. The online survey was carried out using Google forms. The designed Google forms link was sent to individuals and professional WhatsApp platforms. The targeted professionals WhatsApp platforms belong to architects, builders, engineers, quantity surveyors, estate valuers, and town planners. Periodic reminders were sent to these WhatsApp platforms spanning between 5 to 6 months. A notice was also posted imploring the professionals to share the link among their professional networks. A total number of 179 responses were obtained through the online survey without discarding any of the responses. This is because all the questions in the online survey were marked as mandatory. 110 hard copies of the questionnaire were hand-delivered to the construction professionals in the study area, out of which 84 copies were successfully retrieved. 10 copies out of the 84 retrieved copies were unsuitable for analysis due to incomplete information and multiple responses to a single question. In total, 179 and 74 suitable responses were gotten from online and hand-delivery survey respectively, totally 253 responses. The retrieved primary data were subjected to mean score (MS) and factor analysis. MS is helpful in determining the significance level of variables in a survey (Asante et al., 2025). As noted by Matsunaga (2010) EFA is a tool intended to help generate *a new theory* by exploring latent factors that best accounts for the variations and interrelationships of the manifest variables (observable variables). The maximum likelihood factoring (MLF) was used for the data extraction. Unlike other extraction methods, the associated statistical tests for goodness-of-fit for the number of factors extracted are available in MLF (Fabrigar & Wegener, 2012).

The mediating factors of inclusive leadership-psychological safety relationship were identified through desk survey and comprehensive literature review. The identified items were incorporated into a questionnaire and rated by the respondents, thereby assuming a deductive approach. The items of the mediating factors of inclusive leadership-psychological safety relationship were rated using the 5-point Likert scale: 1- strongly disagree to 5- strongly agree. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient test value of 0.874 was obtained for the measuring instrument. This is essential in determining the reliability and internal consistency of the survey scale. A Cronbach's Alpha test results in a co-efficient of 0.70 or greater is considered reliable (Cho & Kim, 2015). The obtained data were screened using mean score analysis (Asante et al., 2025), with 3.0 as the minimum threshold. A mean score value ≥ 3.0 is considered significant for analysis (Asante et al., 2025). The calculated mean score values (see Table 1) for the variables are between 3.11 and 4.01 respectively.

Results and Discussion

Demographic Data of Respondents

This section highlights the general statistics of the study respondents (N= 253). This is helpful in identifying respondents' background knowledge and to add credence to the obtained data. A breakdown of the retrieved questionnaire showed that 64.82% are male and 35.18% female. The high percentage for male still reflects the predominant presence of male workers in the construction workplaces. Majority of the respondents are between 41-50 years of age (29.64%). 24.51% and 19.37% of them had B.Sc. and M.Sc. as their highest academic qualification respectively. Their professional experience is in the range of 11-15 years (33.99%) and 16-20 years (27.67%). The analysis showed that 20.55% of them are Civil engineers and 18.18% are builders. Large number of the respondents work in medium enterprises/50-249 employees (49.80%) and 27.27% in small enterprises (10-49 employees).

Table 1

Descriptive statistics

ID	Mediating Factor	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	Ranking
MF1	Managing bias and assumptions	4.01	1.024	-0.934	0.326	1
MF2	Fault tolerant mechanisms	3.99	0.978	-0.900	0.443	2
MF3	Building an inclusive culture in workplace dealings	3.81	0.949	-0.539	-0.192	3
MF4	Top management support	3.63	1.017	-0.375	-0.602	4
MF5	Willingness to take risks	3.62	0.983	-0.669	0.318	5
MF6	Listening and seeking inputs	3.59	1.018	-0.266	-0.675	6
MF7	Providing equal opportunities in the workplace and fair treatment	3.57	0.905	-0.099	-0.320	7
MF8	Freedom to make independent decisions	3.47	0.945	-0.270	-0.320	8
MF9	Practicing how best to work and communicate through self-awareness	3.47	0.949	-0.127	-0.087	9
MF10	Giving freedom to experiment	3.47	1.122	-0.308	-0.724	10
MF11	Empowering and valuing individuals	3.35	0.979	0.023	-0.532	11
MF12	Meeting employees' basic needs	3.33	1.004	-0.149	-0.601	12
MF13	Team members involvement in decision making process	3.30	1.038	-0.079	-0.598	13
MF14	Positive feedback	3.28	1.104	-0.307	-0.551	14
MF15	Being open to feedback	3.28	1.132	-0.189	-0.747	15
MF16	On-going encouragement	3.21	1.237	-0.215	-0.942	16
MF17	Demonstrating understanding	3.18	1.022	-0.003	-0.777	17
MF18	Being vulnerable with the team	3.16	0.993	0.038	-0.301	18

Exploratory Factor Analysis Application

The inclusive leadership-psychological safety relationship mediating factors were subjected to exploratory factor analysis using maximum likelihood factoring (MLF) with varimax rotation using IBM SPSS 26 version. This is necessary in order to identify the underlying traits of the mediating factors of inclusive leadership and psychological safety relationship. Before performing the EFA, the normality of the dataset was checked using univariate skewness and kurtosis (Fabrigar & Wegener, 2012). For dataset to attain normality, the absolute value of the skewness and kurtosis should be less than 3.0 and 8.0 respectively (Fabrigar & Wegener, 2012). The skewness values (see Table 1) are less than 3.0 and the kurtosis values less than 8.0. All items (see Table 2) recorded communality values between 0.360 and 0.999, indicating dataset adequacy. Four (4) criteria, such as root mean square error of

approximation (RMSEA), RMSEA change, scree plot, and pattern of factor loadings were used in determining the goodness-of-fit and the number of factors extracted. To achieve this, the factors were increased one at a time until satisfactory goodness-of-fit was attained. The factor loadings threshold was set at 0.55. The rotated factor matrix shows that 7 items (MF1, MF2, MF4, MF6, MF9, MF10 and MF18) did not constitute any of the factors extracted due to low loadings.

Table 2

Inclusive leadership-psychological safety relationship mediating factors

Mediating Factor	Code	Rotated Factor Matrix ^a			Communalities Extraction
		1	2	3	
Recognizing employees inputs and concerns					
Demonstrating understanding	MF17	0.795			0.728
Being open to feedback	MF15	0.763			0.657
Team members involvement in decision making process	MF13	0.602			0.448
Meeting employees' basic needs	MF12	0.596			0.398
Valuing an inclusive workplace culture					
Building an inclusive culture in workplace dealings	MF3		0.558		0.360
Empowering and valuing individuals	MF11		0.555		0.490
Freedom to make independent decisions	MF8		0.530		0.405
Providing equal opportunities in the workplace and fair treatment	MF7		0.525		0.389
Supportive motivational climate					
Positive feedback	MF14			0.933	0.999
On-going encouragement	MF16			0.753	0.722
% of variance		16.789	11.321	10.766	
Cumulative %		16.789	28.110	38.876	
Eigenvalues		5.946	1.645	1.611	
Cronbach's Alpha		0.820	0.742	0.910	
Goodness-of-fit test					
Chi-Square (x ²)		254.306			
Degree of freedom (df)		87			
Significance (sig)		0.000			
Extraction method: Maximum likelihood					
Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization					
a. rotation converged in 6 iterations					

Interpreting the Mediating Factors

Researchers have suggested that labels can be assigned to factor analysis outputs based on the loadings of the sub factors or using theoretical and subjective judgements (Asante et al., 2025). More importantly, the assigned labels should encompass the properties of the high loading variables for each factor (Costello et al., 2005). The three latent mediating factors of inclusive leadership-psychological safety relationship were labelled to reflect the properties of the sub factors.

Discussion

Factor 1: Recognizing Employee Inputs and Concerns

This factor accounts for 16.79% of the total variance. Four mediating items (see Table 2) underlie this factor. Having a leader that demonstrates understanding is critical to assure the followers that their views in implementing creative initiatives are welcomed and recognized. This also signifies the leader's willingness to address concerns in the workplace. By acknowledging and valuing inputs and differences, inclusive leaders are more likely to satisfy employees' intrinsic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. As noted by Randel et al. (2018), managers are positioned to facilitate a psychologically safe workplace environment by being open to feedback and willing to learn from others. This is deemed significant in assuring construction employees that their contributions matter and welcome when proffering creative solutions to workplace issues. As noted by Kuknor et al. (2025), employee inclusion in decision making is found significant to mediate inclusive leadership and organization-based self-esteem relationship with consequent increase in the psychological safety/well-being of an employee. According to Randel et al. (2018), a psychologically safe and inclusive workplace is attained through leader support, genuine caring, increase trust, high-quality relationships, and adequate concerns about the followers' needs. Moreover, when individuals' basic needs are met at workplace, they experience thriving, autonomy, and competence (Deci & Ryan 1985).

Factor 2: Valuing an Inclusive Workplace Culture

The second factor (see Table 2) that mediates the inclusive leadership-psychological safety relationship accounts for 11.32% of the total variance. A critical attribute of inclusive leaders lies in their abilities to demonstrate inclusiveness by valuing different creative viewpoints and empowering employees to get more autonomy and freedom to engage in creative and innovative behaviours (Mitchell et al., 2015). By valuing an inclusive workplace culture, construction employees are empowered and likely to develop adequate psychological safety that is needed in making independent decisions on construction projects. Accordingly, psychologically empowered employees are expected to be open to solving problems and offering innovative ideas (Carmeli et al., 2010; Amabile & Pratt, 2016). By exercising inclusive practices, employees are motivated to thrive, thereby promoting creative behaviours in the workplace (Carmeli et al., 2010; De Baylo, 2023). It is noted that leader inclusiveness captures attempts by a leader to include others in discussions and decisions in which their voices and perspectives might otherwise be absent (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). Inclusive leadership projects inclusion by embracing diversity, enabling employees' equal participation in organizational activities, encouraging and valuing diverse contributions from employees and empowering them to contribute to their full potential (Pless & Maak, 2004; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006).

Factor 3: Supportive Motivational Climate

The third mediating factor (see Table 2) account for 10.77% of the total variance. Positive feedback is proven to improve interpersonal relationships, enhance the employee experience, and contribute to increased feelings of psychological safety at workplace (Stone & Heen, 2014). In assessing organizational innovation processes, it is noted that positive feedback from the leader positively influenced the followers' voice behaviours, job autonomies, and innovative and creative behaviours (Lee et al., 2021). The positive feedback reflects feelings of praise, motivation, and supportive climate in promoting employee psychological safety in the workplace. Accordingly, positive interaction and feedback between the leader and followers, in searching for a better solution to a given task, can help increase the followers' creative capabilities (Parish et al., 2008). Thereby creating an inclusive, motivative, and supportive learning environment (Campean et al., 2024). Among other dimensions of inclusive leadership, a leader's encouragement and recognition of employees are found to have significant influence on employee's innovative outcomes and thinking (Fang et al., 2019). Inclusive leader's effectiveness is reflected in their capability to increase the inherent motivation of team members by committing to the interests, expectations, and feelings of team members needs for achievement, development and growth (Carmeli et al., 2010).

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study assesses the mediating factors of the inclusive leadership and psychological safety relationship for effective employee creative behaviours in the Nigerian built environment. The maximum likelihood factoring analysis with varimax rotation established three underlying mediating factors of inclusive leadership and psychological safety relationship in the Nigerian built environment. These factors include recognizing employee inputs and concerns, valuing an inclusive workplace culture, and creating a supportive motivational climate. The results of the study showed that a leader's demonstration of understanding is crucial in propelling employee creative behaviours in the workplace. It is noted that openness to feedback could enable an inclusive and psychologically safe workplace environment where construction employee feels valued and involved in decision making process. By valuing an inclusive workplace culture, construction employees are empowered to make independent decisions when implementing creative initiatives in the construction workplace. The study showed that on-going encouragement and positive feedback from construction managers/leaders is essential to enable a supportive motivational climate in a creative workplace such as the construction industry. Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that construction organizations prioritize employee's recognition in relation to creative inputs and contributions in attaining organizational creativity. More importantly, adherence to inclusive practices is necessary for a psychologically safe workplace environment.

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