

Summary

The Effect of Inclusive Leadership on Job Performance: Mediating Role of Job Autonomy and Moderating Role of Job Experience

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This study examines the effect of inclusive leadership on job performance as well as the mediating role of job autonomy. Inclusive leadership was first defined by Nembhard and Edmondson (2006) as a relationship style that accepts the diversity of different members. Nishii (2013) defined inclusive leadership as the ability to accept the different identities and perspectives of team members, actively integrate them into organizational processes, and ensure that all employees feel they belong to the organization. In addition, an inclusive leader is a type of leadership that encourages employees to participate in organizational decisions and values employees' diversity and ideas (Mitchell et al., 2015). Consequently, these leaders work consciously to ensure that team members express themselves freely and contribute to achieving organizational goals (Nishii, 2013).

Considering the value of labor-intensive health services, the working conditions of health workers, and the fact that health services are a team effort, the health sector was deemed worthy of study in terms of inclusive leadership. In this study, potential outcomes of inclusive leadership, job performance and job autonomy, are addressed within the framework of social exchange theory and self-determination theory. First, the effect of inclusive leadership on job performance is examined. It is stated that one of the important factors that increase the job performance of employees is job autonomy (Serinikli, 2020; Kuvaas et al., 2016; Khan et al., 2012).

Health institutions, where a hierarchical structure is experienced intensely, where mistakes should not be made and urgent decisions should be made, have an important place in human life. In these institutions, the autonomy of healthcare professionals in their jobs causes them to show higher performance (Serinikli, 2020). Finally, it is also possible that these attitudes may differ between more senior employees and less experienced employees. This phenomenon requires further research.

A comparison of more senior employees and less experienced employees regarding the two outcomes of inclusive leadership will provide practical implications for managers in understanding the different attitudes.

Method

Participants and Procedures

The research universe comprises medical professionals, namely doctors and nurses who are employed in hospitals located within the province of Kocaeli. Since it was not possible to reach all employees, a convenience sampling method was used. 235 people working in 3 private hospitals were reached. Participants were requested to complete the survey forms by sending a link via the internet or by contacting the participants face to face. When the incomplete and carelessly filled forms were excluded from the analysis, 194 forms were evaluated. Upon examination of the demographic information of the participants, it was determined that the majority of the participants were female (54.2%), married (61.2%), nurses (56.7%), had obtained a bachelor's degree (59.5%), and were between the ages of 31 and 40 (55.1%). Furthermore, an examination of the total service period in the sector revealed that 57.8% of the participants had accumulated 15 years or more of seniority.

Data Collection Tools

The questionnaires began with questions about the participants' demographic characteristics. This was followed by the completion of the Inclusive Leadership Scale, the Job Autonomy Scale, and the Job Performance Scale. All measurements were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree). The 9-item scale developed by Carmeli et al. (2010) regarding inclusive leadership, the 4-item scale developed by Kirkman and Rosen (1999) and Sigler and Pearson

(2000) regarding job performance, and the four-item job autonomy scale developed by Breugh (1985) and subsequently shortened by Dude (2012) regarding job autonomy were used.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using IBM SPSS 22 and AMOS 24 package programs. Descriptive analysis of the demographic characteristics of the participants and reliability analysis were performed via SPSS. AMOS was used in confirmatory factor analysis to validate the measurement model and structural equation modeling to test the study hypotheses.

Research Findings

Prior to testing the hypotheses, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted using a structural equation modeling to assess the construct validity and reliability of the measurement model employed in the study. In order to determine the goodness of fit of the measurement model, χ^2/df , NFI, CFI, RMSEA values were calculated. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the goodness of fit values were within the acceptable limits ($\chi^2/df = 3.29$; NFI: 0.941; CFI: 0.958; RMSEA: 0.078) (Bentler, 1987; Browne and Cudeck, 1989). Four hypotheses were tested in this study.

H₁: Inclusive leadership positively and significantly affects job performance.

H₂: Inclusive leadership positively and significantly affects job autonomy.

H₃: Job autonomy positively and significantly affects job performance.

H₄: Job autonomy has a mediating role in the relationship between inclusive leadership and job performance.

H₅: Job experience moderates the relationship between job autonomy and job performance, such that when job experience increases, the positive effect of job autonomy on job performance will be higher than when job experience decreases.

As a result of the structural equation modeling analysis established to test the hypotheses, it was found that inclusive leadership has a positive and statistically significant effect on job performance ($\beta = .707, p < .001$) and job autonomy ($\beta = .722, p < .001$). These findings support hypotheses H₁ and H₂. In addition, job autonomy is also seen to have a positive and significant effect on job performance ($\beta = .535, p < .001$). This finding also supports hypothesis H₃.

The bootstrap method was used to test whether job autonomy has a mediating role in the relationship between participative leadership and job performance. 5,000

subsamples were produced and values were calculated in this way (Preacher et al., 2007). According to the bootstrap results, the indirect effect of inclusive leadership on job performance through job autonomy was found to be positive and significant ($\beta = .386, p < .001$). Finally, when the direct effect of inclusive leadership on job performance is examined ($\beta = .321, p < .001$), it is seen that this relationship is still positive and significant. Therefore, the partial mediation effect of job autonomy is mentioned. Thus, hypothesis H₄ is also supported.

When the moderating effect of job experience is examined, it is evident that job autonomy exerts a positive and significant influence on job performance among more experienced employees ($\beta = .602, p < .001$). The magnitude of this positive effect is weaker in the group with less experience ($\beta = .393, p < .001$). The difference between the β values is statistically significant ($\Delta\beta = .209$). Consequently, it can be concluded that job experience exerts a moderating influence on the relationship between job autonomy and job performance. This finding supports H₅. As a result, job experience strengthens the effect of job autonomy on job performance. In other words; when employees with more experience have job autonomy, they increase their job performance more compared to less experienced employees.

Discussion

The present study has contributed to the theoretical framework and management practices by directly and indirectly developing the understanding of inclusive leadership and its effect on employees' job performance through an effective mechanism such as job autonomy. The research findings reflect employees operating in the health sector in Kocaeli. The study's participants comprised 194 individuals, including doctors and nurses employed in three private hospitals in Kocaeli. The findings of the study reveal that inclusive leadership exerts a positive influence on job performance. A review of the extant literature reveals studies on two variables (Sekar et al., 2024; Umrani et al., 2024; Siyal et al., 2023; Erkal, 2023; Baş, 2022; Nguyen et al., 2019).

The current study's findings are consistent with those of previous studies in terms of both theoretical underpinnings and practical applications. Nevertheless, it is posited that the number of studies regarding the two variables in the health sector and in Turkey is inadequate. The health sector has a dynamic structure due to its complex nature and the vital importance of its services. This dynamism encompasses a significant workforce, particularly doctors and nurses. Considering difficulties

such as workforce diversity, risky procedures, chronic diseases, time pressure, etc., the healthcare sector offers a unique environment for examining the effect of inclusive leadership on employee job performance. For this reason, it is thought that the present study will contribute to the extant literature on the subject.

In addition to the direct effect of inclusive leadership on employees' job performance, this study observed that inclusive leadership also exerts an indirect effect on job performance through job autonomy. Inclusive leadership has been demonstrated to provide employees with significant opportunities to guide themselves and feel more autonomous (Fang et al., 2019). Moreover, individuals working within an inclusive environment are engaged with issues related into their work, fostering a sense of belonging. Employees feel freedom over their work in such a process, which results in job autonomy. The sense of autonomy provided by leaders in business life also brings about an increase in job performance (Slemp et al., 2018). In healthcare institutions, where human life holds critical importance, a hierarchical structure is strongly evident, and there is no room for error. Rapid decision-making is essential and granting healthcare workers autonomy in their tasks contributes to higher performance and enables them to carry out their work more effectively and efficiently. On the other hand, employees who are deprived of autonomy experience a decline in performance and exhibit a more cynical attitude (Serinikli, 2020). No previous studies have examined these three variables. This is another contribution of this study to the literature.

Finally in the present study, the moderating effect of job experience was examined. The findings indicate that the effect of job autonomy on job performance becomes stronger as job experience increases. This can be interpreted as a reflection of the confidence that the experience gained in professional life creates in managers and thus managers tend to give more autonomy to employees. Indeed, studies on job experience and job autonomy indicate that employees with more job experience generally benefit from a higher level of autonomy than those with less experience (Mulyana et al., 2024; Mert and Türkmen, 2020; Amini et al., 2015; Butler et al., 2014; Papathanassoglou et al., 2012). In a sector such as healthcare, where urgent and serious decisions are made and which deal with human life, it is conceivable that those with greater tenure are granted more autonomy than their newer, less experienced colleagues. This effect of job experience on job autonomy demonstrates the originality of the study by investigating job performance from the perspective of inclusive leadership, job autonomy, and work experience.

Research findings have facilitated hospital administrations in focusing on supportive and inclusive policies and practices to help employees enhance their job performance. Inclusive leaders prioritize discussing important issues with employees, listening to them, and supporting their job performance accordingly. These attitudes of inclusive leaders reflect their core characteristics, such as openness, accessibility, and responsiveness toward their employees. Additionally, these leaders ensure employee participation and support in achieving work-related goals. An inclusive leader is someone who seeks new ways for the organization to achieve its goals, motivates employees, and helps them feel respected and valued. Thus, inclusive leadership behaviors can contribute to improving employee job performance. Managers should be encouraged to implement an inclusive leadership style across all organizational units. In conclusion, hospitals aiming to enhance employee performance should allocate resources to developing inclusive leadership skills and ensure that managers receive the necessary training and support to adopt inclusive leadership characteristics.

Managers and leaders should understand the mechanisms that can be effective in supporting employees' job performance. In this study, job autonomy has been proposed as one such mechanism, and research findings from the healthcare sector support this notion. In other words, the current study highlights that hospital leaders should focus not only on enhancing employee performance but also on recognizing the importance of job autonomy. It is thought that when employees see inclusive behavior from their leaders, they will be more courageous in taking risks and their tendency to work autonomously will increase. Organizations should incorporate strategies that promote employee autonomy into their leadership development programs. Previous studies have suggested that certain practices encourage employees to behave autonomously at work. For instance, creating an empowerment climate, fostering trust in employees, and using rewards instead of punishments can strengthen employees' perceptions of autonomy (Choi et al., 2020; Zhu & Akhtar, 2014). Additionally, hospitals can implement policies that involve doctors and nurses in decision-making processes, assign them tasks aligned with their training, and provide opportunities to enrich their professional experiences. These measures can be meaningful for both job autonomy and job performance. When an employee enhances their knowledge, recognition, and reputation, management may develop greater trust in them and feel more comfortable granting autonomy. Thus, job performance may also improve. Furthermore, doctors and nurses actively embracing their

roles and advocating for these matters with hospital management can be beneficial in enhancing their job performance.

The current study also has some limitations. One of the limitations is that the study only includes data from hospitals in Kocaeli. This raises concerns about the generalization of the study findings. Therefore, it is recommended that the sample size be increased and the data be obtained from a wider area in future studies. Another limitation is that the study only covers the private sector. It is recommended that a comparison of the public and private sectors be made for future studies. A different perspective can be obtained if it is supported by qualitative research. Finally, the present study examines job performance and job autonomy as outcomes of inclusive leadership. Leadership styles have significant effects on explaining employee behaviors. Inclusive leadership, which is characterized by recognizing employees as valuable members of the organization, valuing their opinions, listening to their ideas, and encouraging their participation, has been increasingly researched. Examining inclusive leadership in relation to various employee behaviors such as organizational identification, person-job fit, job engagement, employee voice, psychological safety, and organizational commitment in future studies can provide valuable contributions to the literature in this field.