

Article

Moderated Mediation Analysis of the Relationship Between Inclusive Leadership and Innovation Behavior

Jialin Liu ^{1,*}, Xinyu Liu ² and Hongbo Gao ¹

¹ School of Business, Macau University of Science and Technology, Macau 999078, China; helvingao@163.com

² Economic Department, University of Florence, 50121 Florence, Italy; a710613631@163.com

* Correspondence: liujialin931022@163.com

Abstract: The spread of the pandemic has posed unprecedented challenges for Chinese enterprises, particularly in the new energy sector, where numerous companies have been forced to halt their development plans and suspend projects, awaiting opportunities to restart. In this context, enterprise performance is significantly affected, making employee innovation a critical factor in business survival and growth amid adversity. This study explored the intrinsic link between inclusive leadership styles and employees' innovative behaviors, with a particular focus on introspection and sense of accomplishment as key psychological mechanisms that drive innovation. Through mediation analysis, this study investigated how inclusive leadership could foster employees' innovative behaviors by influencing their introspection and sense of achievement. This study incorporated psychological safety and organizational support as moderating variables in its research methodology. Psychological safety refers to the extent to which employees can feel accepted and respected within an organization, whereas organizational support encompasses the assistance and resources provided by the organization. This study employed a detailed questionnaire to assess employees' perceptions of inclusive leadership, introspection, innovation behavior, psychological safety, and organizational support in energy companies. Following data collection, IBM statistic SPSS 27 software was used for correlation, regression, and moderated mediation analyses. This article concludes that leaders should not only focus on performance, but also on the psychological development of employees, such as their sense of achievement and introspection.



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1. Introduction

In 1912, Schumpeter [1] first introduced the term “innovation” in his book *Economic Development Theory*, proposing that the factors promoting economic development and progress can be integrated into a productive economic system, forming a functional relationship at the economic level. Jackson [2] later linked innovations to individuals within organizations through his research on the Personality Inventory of Innovation Disposition, leading to the concept of employee innovation behavior. This concept has evolved as academic research has deepened. Scott and Bruce [3] defined innovative employee behavior as the process from idea generation to implementation, comprising three stages: generating new ideas through problem analysis, seeking resources, and executing plans to achieve positive outcomes. Amabile [4] described innovation behavior as transforming ideas, thoughts, or concepts into practical activities, viewing it as a proactive approach for

handling complex and dynamic work tasks. Some scholars consider innovation behavior to be an extra-role activity, emphasizing that employees who gain organizational trust or peer respect exhibit faster and more independent innovation [5]. Zhou and George [6] further suggested that fostering individual creativity and realizing employees' innovative potential require the gradual implementation of new ideas and concepts, defining this process as individual innovation behavior.

Scholars have extensively studied the concept of employee innovation behavior. Lu and Zhang [7] defined it as the entire process of generating and implementing new ideas. Gu and Peng [8] described it as a continuous process in which employees can apply new ideas to solve work problems and actively promote their implementation. Similarly, Liu and Shi [9] described employee innovation behavior as the process of utilizing innovative ideas to address work-related challenges. Tu et al. [10] further defined it as the process through which employees can generate and implement new ideas.

The literature has highlighted various methods for measuring employee innovation, with Scott and Bruce's innovation behavior questionnaire and Claisen and Stirling's personal innovation behavior scale being among the most prominent tools. These have primarily contributed to the evaluation of individual innovation within organizations [3,11]. Scott and Bruce's [3] scale suggests that higher scores can reflect stronger innovation performance, which is consistent with their three-stage model of personal innovation: idea generation and problem identification, seeking support for ideas, and establishing standards for the dissemination and implementation of innovations.

Inclusive leadership promotes economic sustainability by fostering innovative behavior among employees, enhancing organizational resilience and long-term competitiveness; meanwhile, psychological safety and organizational support mechanisms contribute to achieving social sustainability goals.

In summary, the literature has extensively studied methods for measuring employee innovation behavior, with the innovation behavior questionnaire by Scott and Bruce and the personal innovation behavior scale by Claisen and Sturley being the two primary tools [3,11]. Scott and Bruce's scale assesses innovation behavior in three stages, whereas Claisen and Sturley's scale includes five dimensions, offering more detailed measurements [3,11]. On this basis, Ng and Lucianetti [5] developed a scale that integrated the strengths of previous research with modern innovation theories, providing a highly comprehensive and systematic tool for measuring employees' innovation behavior. Its reliability and validity have been confirmed through multiple empirical studies to ensure scientific robustness. Accordingly, this study adopted the scale of Ng and Lucianetti [5] to better align with the innovation needs of modern enterprises and deliver more accurate and comprehensive assessments.

1.1. Role of Inclusive Leadership

The inclusive leadership proposed by Western educational scholars emphasizes the application of inclusive education principles in schools and educational management. This approach enables schools and teachers to accept learners of diverse races, beliefs, social statuses, and regions. Given the diversity of learners, principals, as leaders, play a critical role in driving educational reforms and ensuring equal treatment for all students [12]. Over time, inclusive leadership has evolved into a distinct leadership style within Western educational communities.

Managing the diversity of employees in energy companies presents a significant challenge. Pless and Maak [13] discovered that employee diversity could be vital for shaping corporate values and culture, concluding that enterprises should create an inclusive environment to accommodate diverse employees. Nembhard and Edmondson [14] formally introduced the concept of "inclusive leadership", which involves valuing and recognizing

employees' contributions while accepting and encouraging their suggestions. They identified three core traits of inclusive leadership that refer to communication with members: availability, openness, and accessibility. These highlight not only the leader's behavior, but also the interaction process from the employees' perspective [15]. Hollander [16] further suggested that inclusive leadership could be a dynamic process involving active communication between leaders and employees. Similarly, Nishii and Mayer [17] emphasized that during this interaction, leaders delegate power, team members provide input to inform decision-making, and both parties collaborate to achieve organizational goals.

Chinese scholar Zhu [18] defined inclusive leadership as a management approach that can motivate subordinates to achieve team goals through an open and inclusive model. This leadership style emphasizes promoting democracy, prioritizing people, and balancing various aspects to foster effective team collaboration. Building on our prior research, Fang [19] identified five key aspects of inclusive leadership: fostering positive communication and cooperation among groups, treating subordinates fairly, accommodating and encouraging employee differences, recognizing employee contributions, and tolerating mistakes while helping employees to correct them. Similarly, He [20] redefined inclusive leadership as a philosophy whereby leaders encourage employee participation in decision-making and emphasize team sharing of work results, aiming for harmonious and sustainable team development. Zhu and Qian [21] characterized inclusive leadership as a people-oriented style in which leaders respect individual differences, value employees' opinions, recognize their contributions, provide opportunities for participation in company development, and share organizational achievements to collectively achieve goals. Liu [22] further defined inclusive leadership as leaders' ability to treat employees equally, acknowledge their contributions, adopt their suggestions, and collaborate with them to achieve organizational objectives.

The concept of inclusive leadership has evolved with the proposal of various definitions by scholars based on different research perspectives and contexts, and no unified and widely accepted definition currently exists. Internationally, scholars have often defined inclusive leadership as a response to a complex and rapidly changing external environment. In contrast, Chinese scholars have adapted the concept to the Chinese context, drawing on international research while incorporating local cultural elements, such as socialism, with Chinese characteristics and Confucianism. In addition, inclusive leaders are characterized by their tolerant attitude toward employees' mistakes and failures, their ability and willingness to guide learning and innovation, and their efforts to establish leadership–employee relationships based on mutual trust and respect.

1.2. Role of Employee Introspection

Western scholars such as Locke and Spinoza were among the earliest to conduct systematic research on self-reflection. In *A Theory of Human Understanding*, Locke described self-reflection as the ability of individuals to deeply examine their thoughts and ideas during psychological activities. He emphasized its role in understanding and regulating ideas, considering it a key component of the mind in cognitive processes [23]. This concept aligns with the concept of metacognition in modern cognitive psychology, in which individuals actively reflect on and regulate their psychological activities as objects of thought. Spinoza expanded the concept of self-reflection in his philosophical works by framing it as a spiritual practice that transcends everyday thinking. He suggested that self-reflection could be not limited to cognitive processes, serving as a method for individuals to understand their connections to the universe. Spinoza emphasized that deep reflection on one's thoughts and emotions enables individuals to transcend limited self-awareness, attaining higher wisdom and inner peace. This process of self-reflection could promote profound self-awareness, which leads to spiritual elevation and tranquility [24].

Early domestic researchers defined self-reflection as the process through which individuals recognize and evaluate their own behavior [25]. As research progressed, self-reflection came to be understood as a critical psychological process through which individuals can comprehensively examine their behavior, internal experiences, and external environment and engage in self-regulation [26]. Further studies have suggested that self-reflection involves consciously linking a behavior to its outcomes and analyzing the specific relationship between the two [27]. John Dewey expanded this understanding by describing self-reflection as an active and deep contemplation of personal beliefs and assumptions, highlighting the essential role of voluntary effort and belief construction in the reflective process [28].

From an objective perspective, studies by foreign scholars such as Gross and Skarlicki have demonstrated significant differences between reflective and non-reflective individuals in managing tasks and learning from experience. By analyzing past experiences, reflective individuals can effectively improve their behavior and gain greater confidence and expertise in future actions [29,30]. From a subjective perspective, Liu [26] reported that regular self-reflection enables individuals to gain a clearer understanding of their mental health status. Berry and Seiders [31] suggested that self-reflection can reduce negative emotions and enhance emotional well-being during periods of distress. Similarly, Zhong and Cao [32] emphasized that self-reflection helps individuals to build and maintain self-esteem, allowing them to face life and work challenges more positively.

Reflexivity is an important psychological variable that has been studied and defined as a measurement dimension by various scholars, from different perspectives. Carmeli et al. [33] categorized reflexivity into three dimensions: deep dialogue, reflective work styles, and questioning of existing methods. These dimensions can highlight the process through which individuals enhance their goals and methods by engaging in in-depth dialogue, continuously reflecting on their work practices, and evaluating whether the existing approaches are optimal.

West categorized introspection into two dimensions: task reflection and social reflection. This method was further developed and applied in subsequent research on team reflections. Personal reflection involves the independent evaluation of one's behavior and outcomes to foster continuous improvement and growth [34]. Dreu [35] emphasized that introspection involves problem identification and solution generation, enabling individuals to recognize existing issues and develop innovative solutions, particularly when facing challenges. Moreland and McLean further argued that introspection encompasses not only task-specific reflection, but also a broader evaluation of the learning process and outcomes, allowing individuals and teams to learn and improve from past experiences. This perspective has also been expanded and applied in team reflection research [36].

In summary, introspection serves as a multidimensional psychological process encompassing various aspects, ranging from individuals to teams and from tasks to social interactions. These dimensions collectively form a comprehensive framework, allowing researchers to better understand and assess the impact of introspection on work performance and innovative behavior.

1.3. Role of Sense of Accomplishment

Achievement motivation is a multifaceted construct encompassing various components, such as ability self-concept, task values, goals, and achievement motivation [37]. Previous studies have explored this sense of accomplishment extensively. For instance, research on teaching has shown that moderately difficult tasks foster a strong sense of accomplishment and generate intrinsic learning motivation [38]. Jing Tian's study, based on national survey data from private universities in China ($n = 3816$), examined how university

satisfaction, sense of accomplishment, and student happiness could influence freshmen's sense of belonging [39]. Similarly, Magen Nagar's research investigated the role of learning strategies as mediators between motivation and achievement in large-scale open online courses [40].

Psychological studies have also explored sense of accomplishment, with research indicating that tasks of moderate difficulty generate the greatest sense of accomplishment and intrinsic learning motivation [38]. An empirical study explored the perspectives of student affairs and service practitioners regarding their sense of accomplishment derived from their work. The findings revealed that helping students, collaborating with colleagues, contributing positively to the broader community, and experiencing autonomy and participation in their roles could all contribute to the employees' sense of accomplishment across various countries and regions [41].

In the field of management, studies on sense of accomplishment have highlighted its importance in various professional contexts. Shih et al. [42] examined the job burnout theory, emphasizing the overlooked dimensions of depersonalization and a reduced personal sense of accomplishment to provide a more comprehensive understanding of IT worker burnout. Levin et al. [43] investigated the correlation between social workers' professional identity and job quality, which was reflected in their perceived job performance and sense of accomplishment. Similarly, T. Kim et al. explored how commitment to emotional expression rules could moderate the relationship between emotional labor and sense of accomplishment [44].

Many researchers have investigated variables related to sense of accomplishment, including a study examining the relationships between personal achievement, guidance, emotions, creative self-efficacy, and creative participation. Using a sample of working adults ($N = 242$), structural equation modeling demonstrated a strong alignment with the theoretical model, indicating that creative self-efficacy fully mediated the relationships between personal achievement and creative work engagement, as well as between guidance and creative work participation [45].

Another study during the COVID-19 pandemic tested the mediating effect of creativity on the relationship between personal achievement and task performance [46].

Few studies have examined sense of accomplishment as a mediating variable in the relationship between inclusive leadership and innovative behavior. This study aimed to investigate its role as a mediating variable.

1.4. Psychological Safety Status as a Moderator

Schein and Bennis first defined psychological safety in the context of organizational change, describing it as an individual's sense of security and confidence in their ability to manage change [47]. Edmondson [48] later expanded the concept beyond the individual level, framing psychological safety as a team-level variable. It was defined as the shared belief among team members regarding the safety of engaging in interpersonal risk-taking behaviors within the team.

Research has shown that individual factors, such as employees' perception of compliance with colleagues' norms, professional status, self-awareness, and similarity in understanding system dynamics, can affect employees' sense of psychological security. Mayer et al. [49] discovered a negative correlation between employees' perceptions of compliance with colleagues' norms and psychological security. Nemphard and Edmondson [14] investigated interdisciplinary healthcare teams, revealing that occupational status could be adopted to predict psychological security, with doctors experiencing higher levels than nurses and nurses experiencing higher levels than respiratory therapists. Individuals with high self-awareness are more sensitive to the negative consequences of their actions because of their acute perception

of others' views, which leads to lower levels of psychological security than in those with low self-awareness [50]. Additionally, Bendoly's research demonstrated that the similarity between an individual's understanding of system dynamics and the typical understanding within a team could positively predict psychological security, as understanding system dynamics reflected familiarity with real-world systems and their conceptual modeling [51].

Organizational factors, particularly leadership behavior and interpersonal relationships, can play a significant role in influencing psychological security. A supportive, flexible, and clear management style has been shown to enhance psychological security [52]. Edmondson [48] identified a positive correlation between team leaders' coaching behavior and team psychological security, while Nembhard and Edmondson [14] demonstrated that inclusive leadership can positively affect employees' team psychological security. Detert and Burris [53] observed that managerial openness could significantly predict psychological security, whereas the predictive power of transformational leadership remained inconsistent. Walumbwa and Schaubroeck [54] identified a positive relationship between ethical leadership and team psychological security, while Zhang et al. [55] highlighted that trust could partially mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and team psychological security. Conversely, Liang et al. [56] reported that abusive management could negatively affect psychological security, while another study found a positive correlation between authentic leadership and psychological security [57]. Additionally, interpersonal relationships, characterized by mutual trust and respect, can contribute significantly to psychological security. Kahn argued that supportive and trusting relationships can help employees to feel psychologically secure [52], and that high-quality interpersonal relationships can positively predict psychological security [15,58]. Siemsen et al. [59] demonstrated that higher communication frequency among employees and colleagues enhanced psychological security. Group factors may also play critical roles. Edmondson [48] found that situational support for team experiences, such as access to sufficient resources, information, and rewards, was positively correlated with team psychological security. Faraj and Yan [60] observed that team boundary buffering and boundary reinforcement were positively associated with team psychological security, whereas team boundary crossing demonstrated no significant relationship. Ashauer and Macan [61] reported that teams with control-oriented goals exhibited higher psychological security than those with performance-oriented or goalless goals. Additionally, Guchai et al. [62] found that interactive memory systems were positively correlated with team psychological security. Employees may experience the highest levels of psychological security when organizational context components, including instrumental rewards, normative values, and evaluative pressure, consistently support innovation, as this clearly indicates that failure is tolerable [48,52]. Conversely, when these components are inconsistent, psychological security declines due to increased ambiguity and unpredictability, with conflicting organizational demands causing anxiety and reducing psychological security [58,63].

Edmondson [48] observed that consistent information supporting innovation within an organizational environment increased employees' psychological security. Kahn [52] emphasized that the psychological security enables employees to participate actively in their work without fear of negative evaluations or punishment. Baer and Frese [63] further highlighted that consistency in organizational contexts is a critical factor in ensuring psychological security. Carmeli and Gittell [58] suggested that high-quality relationships and supportive environments within organizations significantly enhance psychological security, helping employees to handle challenges and uncertainties better. Li and Yan [64] demonstrated a positive correlation between organizational trust and employees' psychological security. Similarly, Zhang et al. [55] found that procedural fairness and distributive fairness positively influenced employees' sense of psychological security. Additionally,

Guchai et al. [62] reported that organizational, supervisor, and colleague support for error management positively affected psychological security.

1.5. Organizational Support Status as a Moderator

Numerous studies have provided detailed explanations of organizational support. For instance, Sun [65] reviewed over 70 studies on perceived organizational support, which can reflect employees' beliefs that their organization values their contributions and cares about well-being. The findings indicate that three types of beneficial factors, such as fairness, supervisor support, organizational rewards, and favorable working conditions, can be positively associated with employees' sense of organizational support. Organizational support is linked to outcomes that benefit both employees, such as job satisfaction and positive emotions, and organizations, including emotional commitment, improved performance, and reduced withdrawal behavior.

Researchers have analyzed the partial and simultaneous effects of perceived organizational support, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behavior on employee performance at SPMI private universities in West Sumatra [66]. The findings have revealed that perceived organizational support, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behavior can positively and significantly influence employee performance, both individually and collectively, at SPMI private universities in West Sumatra.

Research has highlighted the critical role of POS in employee motivation and performance. Eisenberger et al. [67] suggested that limitations in providing rewards can negatively affect employees' POS. For instance, teachers anticipating regional budget cuts that hinder professional development are less likely to perceive high POS. Employees with high POS are more likely to reciprocate with positive attitudes and behaviors [68]. Studies have confirmed a positive correlation between POS and job attendance, performance, willingness to assist colleagues, constructive feedback, and emotional commitment [68–70]. Employees with higher POS are also more likely to engage in organizational citizenship behaviors and demonstrate greater organizational commitment [71].

Erdogan and Enders [72] proposed that POS moderates the relationship between leader–member exchange (LMX), job satisfaction, and performance. Based on social exchange theory, they suggested that the interactions between supervisors, organizations, and subordinates are interconnected, as high-performing supervisors possess greater resources to communicate effectively with their teams.

Malik and Noreen [73] demonstrated POS as a moderator in the relationship between teacher stress and well-being. Using survey data from 210 teachers, this study assessed their work-related emotional well-being, occupational stress, and POS. These findings indicate that POS can moderate the effects of stress on teachers' happiness and well-being, thereby providing valuable insights for future research.

This study examines the moderating role of POS in the relationship between innovative behavior and inclusive leadership by exploring how POS can shape these dynamics within an organizational context.

2. Method and Variables

2.1. Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1. *Employee introspection partially mediates the relationship between inclusive leadership and innovation behavior.*

Hypothesis 2. *Sense of accomplishment partially mediates the relationship between inclusive leadership and innovation behavior.*

Hypothesis 3. *Psychological safety is assumed as a mediator in the relationship between inclusive leadership and innovation behavior.*

Hypothesis 4. *Organizational support is assumed to be a mediator in the relationship between inclusive leadership and innovation behavior.*

2.2. Method

The analysis included 138 participants from the new energy sector, with a nearly equal gender distribution (49.28% male and 50.72% female) and an average age of 35.6 years. The online survey took approximately 20–30 min to complete. Participation was voluntary, and participants could withdraw at any time, with their data being processed unless requested otherwise. Upon completion, the participants were debriefed and thanked for their contribution.

Building on prior research and surveys, we conducted questionnaires with the selected employees and leaders. The Inclusive Leadership Scale was adapted from the questionnaire by Carmeli et al. [15] and structured interviews, whereas the Innovative Behavior Scale employed a five-point Likert scoring method. The model diagram can be seen in Figure 1.

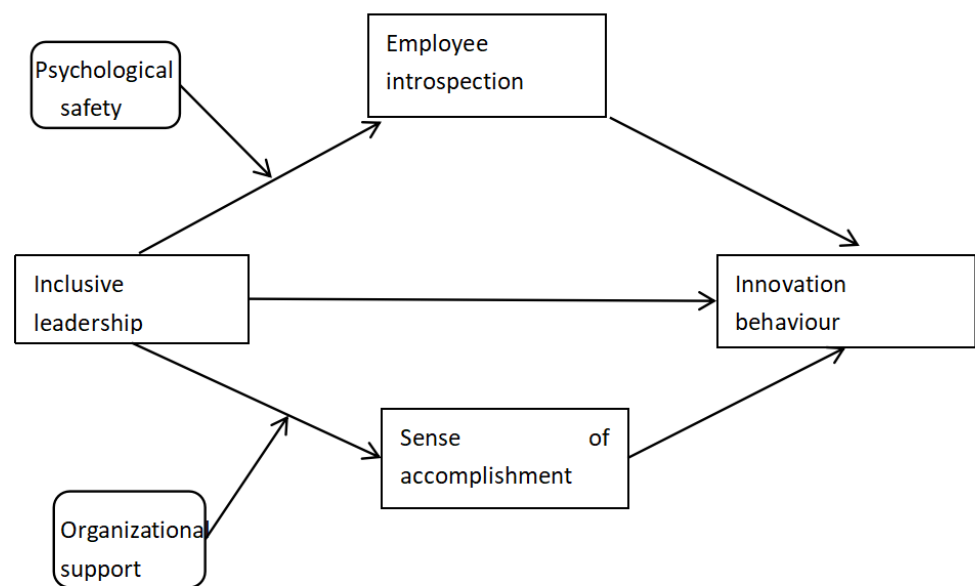


Figure 1. Model diagram.

This study employed the following six scales:

The Inclusive Leadership Scale was developed based on pilot studies and in-depth interviews.

The Employee Innovative Behavior Scale was adapted from Scott and Bruce [3].

The Psychological Safety Scale was adapted from Youssef and Luthans [74].

The Employee Introspection Scale was also from Scott and Bruce [3].

The Sense of Accomplishment Scale was from Lewis et al. [75].

Perceived organizational support was measured using an eight-item scale developed by Eisenberger et al. [68], with a five-point Likert scale for assessment, slightly modified to fit employee characteristics.

All scales used a five-point Likert scale, with questionnaire items provided in Appendix A for reference. The detailed process of scale development is outlined below.

2.3. Data Analysis

2.3.1. Reliability and Validity Tests

Building on the existing literature and survey data, we conducted questionnaire surveys and interviews with employees and leaders, performing a factor analysis of 138 items from the Inclusive Leadership Scale. The KMO test (value = 0.929) and Bartlett's sphericity test ($p < 0.01$) which could be seen in Table 1 confirmed the suitability of the data for factor analysis. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.939, indicating high reliability.

Table 1. Reliability and Validity Tests.

KMO and Bartlett			
KMO		0.929	
Bartlett	Chi-square	1726.522	
	<i>df</i>	120	
	<i>p</i>	0.000	
Cronbach			
	(CITC)	Deleted alpha coefficient	Cronbach's α
Age	−0.034	0.947	0.939
Gender	−0.056	0.946	
My career conditions are excellent.	0.701	0.935	
My organization strongly considers my goals.	0.801	0.932	
My organization strongly considers my values.	0.857	0.931	
I am satisfied with my career.	0.607	0.937	
Leaders recognize my efforts and contributions.	0.819	0.932	
In my work, leaders encourage me to propose new plans and ideas.	0.810	0.932	
Leaders treat employees fairly.	0.797	0.932	
When something goes wrong, I engage in self-reflection.	0.468	0.939	
Leaders emphasize fairness and justice in team management.	0.822	0.931	
I regularly align my personal goals with the organization's objectives.	0.619	0.937	
Leaders appreciate and support cross-departmental collaboration.	0.796	0.933	
When employees make mistakes, leaders express emotional understanding and provide constructive feedback.	0.798	0.932	
Leaders openly recognize employees' achievements.	0.782	0.933	
In my work, leaders actively seek my opinions and thoughts.	0.839	0.931	
Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.927$			

2.3.2. Correlational Analysis

The correlation analysis results in Figures 2–4 indicate that the three dimensions of inclusive leadership were significantly and positively correlated with employee introspection and innovative behavior. It can be seen that when an employee adapts inclusive leadership, it will arouse employee introspection and have a positive impact on innovative behavior.

The correlation analysis results in Figures 5 and 6 exhibit a significant positive correlation between innovative behavior, sense of achievement, and inclusive leadership. From the above pictures, it can be seen that via sense of achievement, inclusive leadership has significantly positive impact on innovation behavior. We think the reason for this is that when employees feel a sense of individual achievement, they want to devote more of their efforts to innovative behavior.

Correlations

			Leaders appreciate and support cross-departmental collaboration	Leaders openly recognize employees' achievements	When employees make mistakes, leaders express their emotional understandings and provide constructive feedback.	I regularly align my personal goals with the organization's objectives.	When something goes wrong, I engage in self-reflection
Spearman's rho	Leaders appreciate and support cross-departmental collaboration	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.721**	.681**	.495**	.560**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.000	.000
		N	138	138	138	138	138
	Leaders openly recognize employees' achievements.	Correlation Coefficient	.721**	1.000	.673**	.506**	.545**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.000	.000
		N	138	138	138	138	138
	When employees make mistakes, leaders express their emotional understandings and provide constructive feedback.	Correlation Coefficient	.681**	.673**	1.000	.280**	.564**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.001	.000
		N	138	138	138	138	138
	I regularly align my personal goals with the organization's objectives.	Correlation Coefficient	.495**	.506**	.280**	1.000	.523**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.001	.	.000
		N	138	138	138	138	138
	When something goes wrong, I engage in self-reflection	Correlation Coefficient	.560**	.545**	.564**	.523**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.
		N	138	138	138	138	138

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Figure 2. Correlational analysis between inclusive leadership and employee introspection.

Correlations

			I regularly align my personal goals with the organization's objectives.	When something goes wrong, I engage in self-reflection	In my work, leaders actively seek my opinions and thoughts.	In my work, leaders encourage me to propose new plans and ideas.	Leaders recognize my efforts and contributions.
Spearman's rho	I regularly align my personal goals with the organization's objectives.	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.523**	.345**	.394**	.462**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.000	.000
		N	138	138	138	138	138
	When something goes wrong, I engage in self-reflection	Correlation Coefficient	.523**	1.000	.530**	.545**	.579**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.000	.000
		N	138	138	138	138	138
	In my work, leaders actively seek my opinions and thoughts.	Correlation Coefficient	.345**	.530**	1.000	.760**	.734**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.000	.000
		N	138	138	138	138	138
	In my work, leaders encourage me to propose new plans and ideas.	Correlation Coefficient	.394**	.545**	.760**	1.000	.741**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.	.000
		N	138	138	138	138	138
	Leaders recognize my efforts and contributions.	Correlation Coefficient	.462**	.579**	.734**	.741**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.
		N	138	138	138	138	138

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Figure 3. Correlational analysis between innovation behavior and employee introspection.

Correlations								
Spearman's rho	In my work, leaders actively seek my opinions and thoughts.		In my work, leaders actively seek my opinions and thoughts.	In my work, leaders encourage me to propose new plans and ideas.	Leaders recognize my efforts and contributions.	Leaders appreciate and support cross-departmental collaboration	Leaders openly recognize employees' achievements	When employees make mistakes, leaders express their emotional understandings and provide constructive feedback.
			1.000	.760**	.734**	.703**	.741**	.728**
		Correlation Coefficient						
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
		N	138	138	138	138	138	138
	In my work, leaders encourage me to propose new plans and ideas.	Correlation Coefficient	.760**	1.000	.741**	.791**	.740**	.713**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000
		N	138	138	138	138	138	138
	Leaders recognize my efforts and contributions.	Correlation Coefficient	.734**	.741**	1.000	.708**	.739**	.717**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000
		N	138	138	138	138	138	138
	Leaders appreciate and support cross-departmental collaboration	Correlation Coefficient	.703**	.791**	.708**	1.000	.721**	.681**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000
		N	138	138	138	138	138	138
	Leaders openly recognize employees' achievements.	Correlation Coefficient	.741**	.740**	.739**	.721**	1.000	.673**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000
		N	138	138	138	138	138	138
	When employees make mistakes, leaders express their emotional understandings and provide constructive feedback.	Correlation Coefficient	.728**	.713**	.717**	.681**	.673**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	
		N	138	138	138	138	138	138

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Figure 4. Correlational analysis between innovation behavior and inclusive leadership.

Correlations							
Spearman's rho	In my work, leaders actively seek my opinions and thoughts.		In my work, leaders actively seek my opinions and thoughts.	In my work, leaders encourage me to propose new plans and ideas.	Leaders recognize my efforts and contributions.	I am satisfied with my career.	My career conditions are excellent
			1.000	.760**	.734**	.533**	.625**
		Correlation Coefficient					
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
		N	138	138	138	138	138
	In my work, leaders encourage me to propose new plans and ideas.	Correlation Coefficient	.760**	1.000	.741**	.472**	.581**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000
		N	138	138	138	138	138
	Leaders recognize my efforts and contributions.	Correlation Coefficient	.734**	.741**	1.000	.558**	.580**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000
		N	138	138	138	138	138
	I am satisfied with my career.	Correlation Coefficient	.533**	.472**	.558**	1.000	.637**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000
		N	138	138	138	138	138
	My career conditions are excellent	Correlation Coefficient	.625**	.581**	.580**	.637**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
		N	138	138	138	138	138

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Figure 5. Correlational analysis between innovation behavior and sense of accomplishment.

Correlations

			I am satisfied with my career.	My career conditions are excellent	Leaders appreciate and support cross-departmental collaboration	Leaders openly recognize employees' achievements	When employees make mistakes, leaders express their emotional understandings and provide constructive feedback.
Spearman's rho	I am satisfied with my career.	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.637**	.438**	.468**	.495**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.000	.000
		N	138	138	138	138	138
	My career conditions are excellent	Correlation Coefficient	.637**	1.000	.525**	.612**	.624**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.000	.000
		N	138	138	138	138	138
	Leaders appreciate and support cross-departmental collaboration	Correlation Coefficient	.438**	.525**	1.000	.721**	.681**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.000	.000
		N	138	138	138	138	138
	Leaders openly recognize employees' achievements.	Correlation Coefficient	.468**	.612**	.721**	1.000	.673**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.	.000
		N	138	138	138	138	138
	When employees make mistakes, leaders express their emotional understandings and provide constructive feedback.	Correlation Coefficient	.495**	.624**	.681**	.673**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.
		N	138	138	138	138	138

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Figure 6. Correlational analysis between inclusive leadership and sense of accomplishment.

3. Discussion on Results

3.1. Mediation Analysis

We conducted a regression analysis to examine the influence of inclusive leadership on employee innovation, and investigated the mediating roles of employee autonomy and sense of achievement showing in Table 2. Following Baron and Kenny's [76] mediation criteria, three conditions were established. The independent variable should significantly affect the dependent variable, the independent variable should significantly influence the mediator, and the mediator should significantly affect the dependent variable. Full mediation occurred when the mediator's significance rendered the independent variable's effect non-significant, whereas partial mediation reduced its effect.

3.2. Moderated Mediation Analysis

From the Table 3, it can be seen that the regulatory effect of psychological safety on the model was not significant.

The Table 4 illustrates that the regulatory effect of organizational support on the model was not significant.

Table 2. Mediation Analysis.

		My career conditions are excellent.	leaders openly Recognize employees’ achievements.	In my work, leaders actively seek my opinions and thoughts.	My career conditions are excellent.
Constant		1.370 ** (4.740)	0.288 (1.088)	0.138 (0.581)	1.282 ** (4.599)
Leaders appreciate and support cross-departmental collaboration.		0.258 * (2.581)	0.584 ** (6.378)	0.541 ** (6.604)	0.023 (0.199)
When employees make mistakes, leaders express their emotional understanding and provide constructive feedback.		0.389 ** (4.630)	0.345 ** (4.471)	0.392 ** (5.679)	0.235 * (2.568)
Leaders openly recognize employees’ achievements.					0.199 * (2.037)
In my work, leaders actively seek my opinions and thoughts.					0.218 * (1.997)
Sample size		138	138	138	138
R ²		0.362	0.560	0.618	0.420
Adjusted R ²		0.352	0.553	0.613	0.403
F		F (2,135) = 38.283, p = 0.000	F (2,135) = 85.769, p = 0.000	F (2,135) = 109.364, p = 0.000	F (4,133) = 24.089, p = 0.000
* p < 0.05 ** p < 0.01 ():t					
	I regularly align my personal goals with the organization’s objectives.	Leaders recognize my efforts and contributions.	Leaders actively seek my opinions and thoughts.	In my work, leaders encourage me to propose new plans and ideas.	I regularly align my personal goals with the organization’s objectives.
Constant	1.263 ** (4.251)	0.602 * (2.447)	0.146 (0.635)	0.099 (0.440)	1.095 ** (3.684)
Leaders appreciate and support cross-departmental collaboration.	0.444 ** (4.052)	0.447 ** (4.931)	0.462 ** (5.442)	0.637 ** (7.715)	0.315 * (2.359)
Leaders openly recognize employees’ achievements.	0.197 * (2.181)	0.395 ** (5.282)	0.451 ** (6.452)	0.313 ** (4.591)	0.058 (0.546)
Leaders recognize my efforts and contributions.					0.259 * (2.411)
In my work, leaders actively seek my opinions and thoughts.					0.137 (1.153)
In my work, leaders encourage me to propose new plans and ideas.					−0.080 (−0.662)
Sample size	138	138	138	138	138
R ²	0.330	0.566	0.639	0.656	0.372
Adjusted R ²	0.320	0.559	0.633	0.651	0.349
F	F (2,135) = 33.233, p = 0.000	F (2,135) = 87.862, p = 0.000	F (2,135) = 119.273, p = 0.000	F (2,135) = 128.950, p = 0.000	F (5,132) = 15.668, p = 0.000
* p < 0.05 ** p < 0.01 ():t					

Table 3. Moderated mediation analysis.

	In My Work, Leaders Actively Seek My Opinions and Thoughts.				When Something Goes Wrong, I Engagee in Self-Reflection.				I Regularly Align My Personal Goals with the Organization's Objectives.			
	β	SE	t	p	β	SE	t	p	β	SE	t	p
Constant	0.626	0.302	2.074	0.040 *	3.509	0.507	6.928	0.000 **	2.927	0.564	5.189	0.000 **
Leaders recognize my efforts and contributions.	0.639	0.064	10.010	0.000 **	0.139	0.143	0.969	0.334	−0.071	0.159	−0.447	0.655
Leaders treat employees fairly.					−0.271	0.188	−1.442	0.152	−0.175	0.210	−0.833	0.406
Leaders recognize my efforts and contributions. × Leaders treat employees fairly.					0.074	0.044	1.674	0.097	0.119	0.049	2.417	0.017 *
When something goes wrong, I engage in self-reflection.	−0.081	0.085	−0.955	0.341								
I regularly align my personal goals with the organization's objectives.	0.239	0.072	3.328	0.001 **								
Sample size			138				138				138	
R^2			0.593				0.238				0.346	
Adjusted R^2			0.581				0.215				0.326	
F	$F(3,134) = 65.121, p = 0.000$				$F(3,134) = 13.958, p = 0.000$				$F(3,134) = 23.624, p = 0.000$			
* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ Direct Effect												
Effect	SE	t	p		LLCI				ULCI			
0.639	0.064	10.010	0.000		0.514				0.765			

Thus, from above tables, we know that Hypotheses 1 and 2 have been proved, but Hypotheses 3 and 4 are not established. We may speculate that employees from different cultural backgrounds have different perceptions and responses to psychological safety and organizational support. In a collectivist culture, employees may place more emphasis on team harmony, and even if their sense of psychological safety is low, they may express fewer negative emotions due to considering the overall situation, making the moderating effect of psychological security on leadership and introspection less apparent. However, the sample we surveyed was mainly concentrated in China, so the moderating effect of psychological security on the relationship between inclusive leadership and employee self-reflection was not significant.

We speculate that the relationship between inclusive leadership and sense of achievement may not be a simple linear relationship, but a more complex nonlinear relationship, such as an inverted U-shaped relationship. In this case, the role of organizational support as a moderating variable may be difficult to determine, because it cannot change the nature of this nonlinear relationship. In addition, employees' personality traits, such as self-esteem, achievement motivation, and neuroticism, can affect their perception and response to inclusive leadership and organizational support. For example, employees with higher self-esteem may be more inclined to seek a sense of achievement from their own abilities and efforts, and less dependent on external support and leadership styles. On the contrary, employees with lower self-esteem may be more sensitive to organizational support, but this sensitivity may not be sufficient to make organizational support play a significant

moderating role between inclusive leadership and achievement. Finally, the small sample size may also be one of the reasons why its regulatory effect was not significant.

Table 4. Moderated mediation analysis.

	In My Work, Leaders Actively Seek My Opinions and Thoughts.				My Career Conditions Are Excellent.				I Am Satisfied with My Career.			
	β	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	β	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	β	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	0.186	0.247	0.751	0.454	2.588	0.585	4.425	0.000 **	1.990	0.617	3.226	0.002 **
Leaders openly recognize employees' achievements.	0.577	0.063	9.180	0.000 **	−0.091	0.170	−0.536	0.593	−0.069	0.180	−0.382	0.703
My organization strongly considers my goals.					−0.046	0.201	−0.227	0.821	0.456	0.212	2.154	0.033 *
Leaders openly recognize employees' achievements × My organization strongly considers my goals.					0.118	0.050	2.367	0.019 *	0.030	0.053	0.564	0.574
My career conditions are excellent.	0.130	0.085	1.534	0.128								
I am satisfied with my career.	0.196	0.076	2.568	0.011 *								
Sample size			138				138				138	
<i>R</i> ²			0.617				0.465				0.406	
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²			0.605				0.448				0.388	
<i>F</i>	<i>F</i> (3,134) = 71.911, <i>p</i> = 0.000				<i>F</i> (3,134) = 38.760, <i>p</i> = 0.000				<i>F</i> (3,134) = 30.490, <i>p</i> = 0.000			
* <i>p</i> < 0.05 ** <i>p</i> < 0.01												
Direct Effect												
Effect	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>		LLCI				ULCI			
0.577	0.063	9.180	0.000		0.454				0.701			

4. Discussion and Limitations

Leadership has recently become a prominent research topic. Based on the concept of inclusivity in Chinese culture, this study examined the relationship between inclusive leadership and innovative employee behavior through the mediating role of employee self-reflection. The following conclusions were drawn.

In new energy enterprises, employee innovation behavior can accelerate green technology research and development, while an inclusive leadership style helps to build a fair and inclusive organizational culture, reduce talent loss, and support the dual sustainable goals of environment and society.

The new energy industry is the core of low-carbon economic transformation, and employee innovation behavior is directly related to breakthroughs in clean technology and resource efficiency improvement. Inclusive leadership is the key to maintaining a balance between the social and environmental responsibilities of such enterprises.

This study demonstrated that inclusive leadership significantly and positively affected innovative employee behavior. Specifically, leaders' encouragement and recognition could strongly promote innovative thinking and achievements among the new generation of employees, while respect and fair treatment by leaders significantly enhanced their innovative outcomes. Furthermore, the findings highlight that managers adopting inclusive leadership styles could effectively and accurately stimulate the innovation potential of a new generation of employees.

This study found that employee self-reflection mediated the relationship between leaders' respect and fair treatment and employees' innovative achievements. These findings

contribute a new perspective to the existing literature by highlighting the role of employee self-reflection in linking various inclusive leadership behaviors to innovative behaviors.

This study examined the moderating effects of employees' psychological safety and organizational support on the mediating process, but found no significant impact.

This study provides a theoretical foundation and valuable insights for future research, deepening our understanding of the relationship between inclusive leadership and employee innovation. It also offers new perspectives on human resource management strategies designed for new generations of workers.

Enterprises should cultivate an innovative culture through inclusive leadership, while incorporating employee well-being into sustainable development strategies in response to SDGs 8 and 5.

Our findings provide practical insights into shaping HR practices and leadership strategies in modern enterprises, offering guidance to leaders on leveraging the strengths of the new workforce to drive organizational growth. Leaders are encouraged to focus not only on their leadership style, but also on nurturing employees' psychological capital, as highlighted by Youssef and Luthans [74], to foster innovation and enhance organizational values. Key qualities, such as encouragement, recognition, respect, tolerance, and fair treatment, are essential for cultivating a culture of innovation.

Although our study offers valuable insights, it has several limitations. One limitation is that the data collected through questionnaires completed by Chinese participants may have been biased. To address this, we implemented measures, such as reordering questionnaire items, to reduce the risk of participants inferring causal relationships. However, the sample was limited to Jiangsu Province, China, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Future research should expand the geographical scope and sample size to enhance the universality of the conclusions and account for cultural, institutional, and social differences through case studies.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

SDG Sustainable Development Goal

Appendix A Variables and Scales

Sense of accomplishment

1. I am satisfied with my career.
2. My career conditions are excellent.

Organizational support

3. My organization strongly considers my goals.
4. My organization strongly considers my values.

Innovation behavior

5. In my work, leaders actively seek my opinions and thoughts.
6. Leaders recognize my efforts and contributions.
7. In my work, leaders encourage me to propose new plans and ideas.

Inclusive leadership

8. Leaders appreciate and support cross-departmental collaboration.
9. Leaders openly recognize employees' achievements.
10. When employees make mistakes, leaders express their emotional understanding and provide constructive feedback.

Employee introspection

11. When something goes wrong, I engage in self-reflection.
12. I regularly align my personal goals with the organization's objectives.

Psychological safety

13. Leaders treat employees fairly.
14. Leaders emphasize fairness and justice in team management.

Table A1. Variables and Scales.

Variables	Sense of Accomplishment	Organizational Support	Innovation Behavior	Inclusive Leadership	Employee Introspection	Psychological Safety
Scales	1. I am satisfied with my career.	3. My organization strongly considers my goals.	5. In my work, leaders actively seek my opinions and thoughts.	8. Leaders appreciate and support cross-departmental collaboration.	11. When something goes wrong, I engage in self-reflection.	13. Leaders treat employees fairly.
	2. My career conditions are excellent.	4. My organization strongly considers my values.	6. Leaders recognize my efforts and contributions.	9. Leaders openly recognize employees' achievements	12. I regularly align my personal goals with the organization's objectives.	14. Leaders emphasize fairness and justice in team management.
			7. In my work, leaders encourage me to propose new plans and ideas.	10. When employees make mistakes, leaders express their emotional understanding and provide constructive feedback.		

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