

“The impact of inclusive leadership behaviors on innovative workplace behavior with an emphasis on the mediating role of work engagement”

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THE IMPACT OF INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP BEHAVIORS ON INNOVATIVE WORKPLACE BEHAVIOR WITH AN EMPHASIS ON THE MEDIATING ROLE OF WORK ENGAGEMENT

Abstract

Work creativity manifested in innovative workplace behavior (IWB) and employee work engagement is fundamental to maintaining firm's sustainability and competitiveness. In this regard, this study investigates the supporting effect of innovative leadership on IWB and employee engagement by maximizing employee vigor, dedication, and absorption. The study data were collected using a questionnaire-based technique, and the questionnaires were administered to 150 respondents working in mobile phone companies in Southern and Central Iraq. The results were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and SmartPLS software. The study results revealed that inclusive leadership and work engagement were significantly related to IWB, and work engagement played a mediating role between inclusive leadership and IWB. The findings further indicated that inclusive leadership behaviors such as openness, accessibility, and availability motivated the subordinates to be engaged in IWB. To promote IWB, company leaders need to effectively engage their followers by taking pride and satisfaction in employee output, which might help employee work engagement and IWB.

Keywords

innovation, leadership, work engagement, innovative workplace behavior, Hayes Process macro

JEL Classification

J81, O31, O36

INTRODUCTION

This research has been undertaken into the determinants of innovative workplace behavior (IWB), among which knowledge sharing, human resources, management practices, innovative environments, absorption, and perceived innovation work requirements, were at the main focus of study. Leadership as a determinant has been postulated as the motive that most influences innovation and creativity within companies. Innovative leadership enacts inclusiveness, openness, uniqueness, and support. Insights into how IWB can benefit from effective leadership were concluded from previous studies. Empirical studies investigating the inclusive leadership-innovative performance connection are sparse (Qi, Liu, Wei, & Hu, 2019).

IWB is believed to be mediated by work-life balance and moderated by gender role ideology, perceived social-organizational climate, organizational citizenship behaviors, psychological empowerment, and counter-productive behaviors (A. Abdallah & S. Abdallah, 2020). This study investigates the supporting effect of inclusive leadership on IWB and employee engagement by maximizing employee vigor, dedication, and absorption.



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1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the past century, global activities have taken place, initiating a dynamic change within the global economic competition, globalization of the labor force, the internationalization of business and transactions, and advancing information and communications technology. Such changes necessitate innovative participation to maintain viability, through the supply of innovative solutions within the present and the globalized competitive environment. The recent literature on employee empowerment, motivation, and integration in accelerating innovative efforts has concentrated attention upon innovation and originality. Thus, to maintain competitiveness, the organization needs innovative leadership to strengthen, in the long term, innovative workplace behavior (IWB) (Yi, Uddin, Das, Mahmood, & Sohel, 2019). Although previous studies have indicated that innovation concerns were not restricted to research and development professionals, employee performance across various sectors needs to be open to innovation to preserve sustained success for the individual organization (Javed, Abdullah, Zaffar, Haque, & Rubab, 2019a). This approach was more conducive to investigating innovative environments, as it offered an opportunity for in-depth scrutiny of leadership IWB, unlike the traditional view of focusing on leaders, their attitudes, and their behaviors. However, in the relational perspective, the leader's personality traits and employees' behaviors and relations with their leader, are integral to understanding this dynamic. In other words, the relational leadership mechanism stimulated employees into reciprocally dealing with the challenges posed by innovative workplace behavior. This claim is supported by a recent study of Javed, Naqvi, Khan, Arjoon, and Tayyeb (2019b), which emphasized the positive relationship between relational, inclusive leadership, and IWB.

Recent literature has suggested that leadership is integral to promoting employee integration and engagement, as the leader's role is a stimulus for employee satisfaction and the creation of a healthy environment (Rodriguez, 2006). Recent research suggests that interest in the impact of different leadership kinds on employee work engagement is crucial in maintaining sustainable relations. Such leadership includes ethical leadership (Hassan &

Ahmed, 2011), authentic leadership (Den Hartog & Belschak, 2012), transformational leadership (Ghadi, Fernando, & Caputi, 2013), and inclusive leadership (Choi, Tran, & Park, 2015). Yet the empirical evidence of such impacts is limited. The concern of leadership to fulfill employee needs is fundamental in maximizing optimum employee engagement. For this reason, inclusive leadership will ultimately shape employee integration and engagement as it essentially revolves around satisfying employee needs. Various studies indicate that transformational, ethical, paternalistic, and charismatic leadership have a great influence on employee innovation. Nevertheless, these studies have been concerned with the importance of leadership characteristics, such as personality traits and charismatic attitudes to enhance IWB. In contrast, the main role of the relationship between leaders and workers, and its subsequent impact on innovative workplace behavior has been relatively under-researched. This study investigates the relationship between inclusive leadership (IL) and IWB. It also evaluates the mediating role of work engagement within the conceptual framework of this relationship.

1.1. Innovative workplace behavior

Innovative workplace behavior (IWB) is the individual's conduct to initiate and deliberately integrate (within the workplace, the group, or the organization) novel and functional ideas, acts, products, and procedures (West & Farr, 1990). This claim parallels that of Janssen (2000), advocating that IWB is exemplified in the role of an employee who intentionally creates and applies new ideas for the sake of their work, group, or organizational profit. Tri (2019), Shanker, Bhanugopan, Van der Heijden, and Farrell (2017) postulated that IWB has a decisive role in the work environment as they are required by organizations to promote their flexibility, responsiveness, and effectiveness, because of the unpredictable nature of the business and the intensive obligation required to face the challenges posed by national and international competition.

Leadership is central to induce a change within organizations and the work environment. When the leader manifests supportive conduct to novel ideas, subordinates regard that as organizational support

to buttress IWB (Shanker et al., 2017). One of the unique techniques leaders invest to support their followers is that they are held accountable for ultimate outcomes (Hollander, 2012) and creative operations, irrespective of the failure that might be engendered by the new ideas. That is why, within inclusive leadership, subordinates are relaxed and exempted from assuming any risks associated with IWB. Swaroop and Dixit (2017) identified a close connection between employee creativity and IWB, since this latter may encompass a whole range of innovative demeanors. It ranges from gradual ameliorations to introducing novel ideas that may fit into operations and organizations at all levels, along with developing a new product (Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2009). Although novel and rare ideas are generally confined to research and development professionals, gradual ameliorations and small-scale suggestions are far-reaching and may emanate from employees in diverse domains. Some studies (Hakanen, Perhoniemi, & Toppinen-Tanner, 2008) mentioned that work engagement has a considerable impact on IWB when examined via social interaction theory. It is hypothesized that employees, with greater contributions in their work, are presumably enthusiastic and engaged, guiding them to be creative.

Successful organizations need to support innovative workplace behavior, benefit from creative employees, and manage the workplace's volatile nature. IWB denotes the exploration and application of novel and original ideas by employees while accomplishing their roles to upgrade their performance and the group and the organization. Past studies found that leadership was an operative for creativity and originality within organizations, and leaders had differing techniques to contribute to employee creativity (Hakanen et al., 2008). Initially, leaders could be role models for their followers. Through showing IWB, leaders could supply the necessary resources for creative efforts. Instantly, they allow more time for their followers to think and search for solutions to IWB. Leaders can equally motivate their subordinates to have substantial participation in creative activities. Furthermore, the relational support that leaders offer boosts employee IWB. Finally, leaders could pave the way for a supportive climate for innovative workplace behavior to monitor all its dimensions and aid inventions.

Although there is some compelling evidence in the business and management literature that connects all kinds of leadership and IWB, only a few studies have investigated this connection. Javed et al. (2019), aiming at examining the relationship between inclusive leadership and IWB. Its sample was based on employees from cargo and information technology companies. The research aim was to scrutinize psychological empowerment's mediating role in the relationship between inclusive leadership and IWB. Schoonus (2018) examined the mediating role of knowledge sharing between inclusive leadership and IWB. The study sample comprised 292 Dutch respondents who worked 12 hours or more weekly. The mediating role of the psychological contract in the relationship between inclusive leadership and IWB was also investigated on a sample of 15 Chinese companies. Irrespective of these studies, researchers concur that there is a lack of research addressing work engagement as a volatile mediator in the relationship between inclusive leadership and IWB. For this reason, the present study addresses work engagement as a mediator since it crucially affects organizational success, along with organizational outcomes akin to exhaustion, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship conduct. In this context, research findings displayed the leading and positive role of work engagement in promoting employee trust in the leader (Li, Sajjad, Wang, Muhammad Ali, Khaqan, & Amina, 2019). Employees, engaged as proactive, energetic, and satisfied agents in their work, are liable to take (Russell, Liggans, & Attah, 2018). Employees and organizations can obtain advantage from proactive subordinates as organizations count on employee proactivity to maintain their competitiveness in a shifting market. When leaders supply an efficient work environment to accommodate greater employee contributions, employees have the propensity to produce more creative ideas for themselves, their group, and their organization (Li et al., 2019).

1.2. Inclusive leadership behaviors

Inclusive leadership was initially studied in the Western Education domain and advocated that people of various ethnic backgrounds and abilities should be educated inclusively (Fang, J. Chen, Wang, & C. Chen, 2019). Nembhard and

Edmonson (2006) coined the term ‘inclusive leadership’ defining “leader inclusiveness” as leaders’ verbal and behavioral performance to motivate and appreciate employee contribution. Hollander (2012) defines inclusive leadership as a win-win situation for leaders and subordinates alike with the aim of a beneficially mutual relationship. He emphasized the role of subordinates in this relationship as well as their concept of appropriate leadership. Building on Hollander’s leadership concept, Carmeli, Reiter-Palmon, and Ziv (2010) developed their notion of inclusive leadership defined as a “leaders’ ability to exhibit openness, accessibility, and interaction with followers”. This approach has been widely adopted in subsequent studies on inclusive leadership (Choi, Tran, & Kang, 2017). Based on this model, inclusive leaders demonstrate that they are individuals with unbiased judgments. They are leaders who manifest this behavior, learn, support, lead, and motivate their followers in reproducing IWB (Hantula, 2009; Lin, 2018). Inclusive leaders are more apt to show concern for followers’ expectations and feelings, leading them to be more supportive of their subordinates (Javed et al., 2019). Specifically, inclusive leaders share their visions about organizational infrastructure with employees whose ideas are being implemented. For this reason, employees feel empowered and engaged with their leaders, which leads them to be more responsive in their behavior and demonstrate conduct exceeding their average output (Choi et al., 2017).

Inclusive leadership stands for positive interaction with employees. In this interaction, inclusive leadership is marked by three characteristics: openness, accessibility, and availability (Carmeli et al., 2010). These features of inclusive leadership enhance employee satisfaction, along with expanding knowledge frames and expertise. Accordingly, employees are motivated to contribute to innovative operations, and inclusive leaders support employee participation in decision-making processes, to support “inclusive culture”. Through active decision-making and contributions, employees willingly support and implement progressive ideas. Inclusive leadership enables solid connections and reliable support of employee inputs and outputs without depending on individual output.

Recent case studies demonstrate the impact of inclusive leadership on employee contribution to

innovative missions (Qi & Liu, 2017), moral and organizational commitments, and overall work contribution (Nembhard & Edmonson, 2006), well-being behavior. Further important factors are employee empowerment and team performance (Choi, Tran, & Park, 2015). Backed by recent scholarship, a positive relationship between inclusive leadership and IWB has been proved (Qi & Liu, 2017).

They similarly found a positive relationship between inclusive leadership and IWB of communication companies’ personnel in Vietnam. Javed et al. (2019) examined the relationship between inclusive leadership and IWB and between the supervisor and the subordinate. The findings underscored the fact that inclusive leadership positively shaped IWB. IWB is crucial to organizations’ success, given their eminent concern with overall organizational improvement (Fuller, Marler, & Hester, 2006). For this reason, various researchers concentrated on employee IWB through organizational hierarchies. IWB encompasses irregular conduct that is susceptible to create, disseminate, and access novel ideas. Employees exhibiting IWB are proactive in their job performance. They tend to exceed ordinary organizational measures and to challenge their leaders. They require a supportive workplace in their respective organizations to enhance their job autonomy. When supported by their leaders, subordinates feel more incentivized to be creative (De Beer, Tims, & Bakker, 2016). Previous research findings indicated that employees, being involved in creative activities, had solid connections with their leaders, which led them to face the challenges of creating, disseminating, and accessing unique ideas.

1.3. Work engagement

Work engagement is traditionally defined as a state of mind characterized by being “positive, dedicated, absorbed, and vigorous” in the workplace. Within the framework of broaden-and-build theory, positive impact expands action, cognition, and attention, resulting in augmenting work resources. Thus, work engagement is defined as the criterion of employee proactivity, commitment in their workplace, and a method of physical, intellectual, and moral self-expression while accomplishing their missions. Employees, proactively,

and intensely engaged in their work, are sincerely, physically, and emotionally enmeshed in their roles (Okolo, Kamarudin, & Ahmad, 2018). Work engagement is also about a positive and absorbed state of mind, marked by employee enthusiasm and engagement (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002). In this regard, employee engagement leads to enhancing customer satisfaction, increasing productivity, profitability, and augmenting earnings per share rather than increasing turnover, absenteeism, or service failure. Menguc, Auh, Yeniaras, and Katsikeas (2017) emphasized the magnitude of employee engagement in the customer engagement market.

Work engagement is considered an organizational necessity, and it is fundamental to organizational success. It influences central organizational outcomes such as exhaustion, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behavior. Engaged employees are proactive in and enthusiastic about their respective roles, which guide them to be happily engaged in their work and be willing to embark on initiatives (Russell, Liggans, & Attoh, 2018). The managerial style that is oriented to individual and collective participation (in decision-making) is particularly significant to work engagement (Baran & Sypniewska, 2020).

Different studies demonstrated that accessible, inclusive leaders provide their followers with opportunities to advance their skills, knowledge, and capacities. In their turn, these opportunities shape job-related and personal resources to promote work engagement feelings. In the recent literature, it has been indicated that leadership is integral to employee engagement since the leader's role incentivizes employee performance and satisfaction by creating a healthy and convenient environment for work engagement. The leader's concern, then, to satisfy employee needs is central for employee engagement. Put differently, inclusive leadership is suitable to strengthen employee engagement as it aids in developing workplace relationships at all the organizational hierarchies to accomplish work missions for joint benefit. Inclusive leadership will forge work engagement because it is distinguished by its core focus on meeting employee needs, whereas other leadership kinds

diverge in this regard (Rodriguez, 2006). Work engagement is positively related to leadership. Inclusive leaders, identified by openness, readiness, and accessibility, provide their followers with functional resources motivating them to be engaged in their organizational work via entire moral and physical engagement (Jalil, 2017). In the same vein, Choi et al. (2015) stressed that inclusive leadership is positively related to work engagement through diverse factors.

In the context of the social interaction theory, inclusive leaders, signaled by their openness, accessibility, and readiness, offer utilitarian resources for their subordinates. Perceiving these resources' reception stimulates a similar response from employees, who entirely invest their personalities in their missions and allocate more substantial cognitive, emotional, and material resources for the organization. That is why, as positive feedback on receiving practical resources, employees become more engaged in their work. Second, inclusive leaders challenge and encourage their followers to provide greater contributions to their organizations. Providing support motivates followers to overcome their job necessities. Third, through being open, accessible, and ready, leaders boost employee job satisfaction, positively impacting employee engagement.

2. AIM AND HYPOTHESES

This study investigates the supporting effect of innovative leadership on IWB and employee engagement by maximizing employee vigor, dedication, and absorption. Therefore, the following hypotheses are formulated:

- H1:* There exists a positive relationship between work engagement and IWB.
- H2:* Work engagement is the mediator in the relationship between inclusive leadership and IWB.
- H3:* There exists a positive relationship between inclusive leadership and IWB.
- H4:* There is a positive relationship between inclusive leadership and work engagement.

3. METHODOLOGY

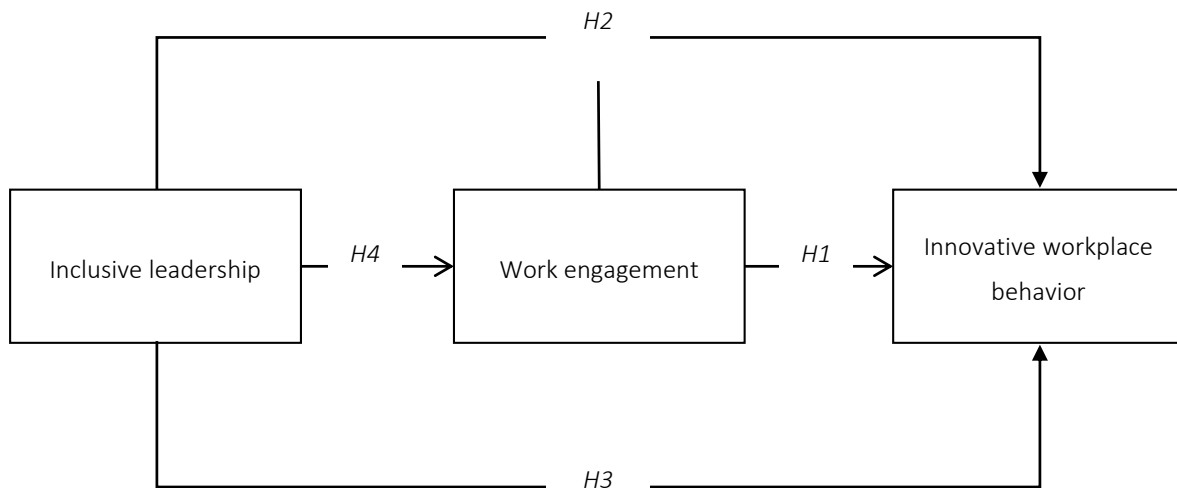
Data collection in this study is aimed at charting the relationship between inclusive leadership and IWB, by focusing on the mediating role of work engagement on a sample of employees in the communication sector in Southern and Central Iraq (Asiacell Company-Zain Iraq). These employees regularly face unpredictable work nature and innovative technologies, which necessitated a high concentration level and creativity. The data collection method was based on a questionnaire, including two groups. To this end, the inclusive leadership behaviors (ILB) questionnaire (Carmeli et al., 2010) was developed to inspect employee responsiveness to innovative leadership behaviors. The items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale. Respondents' data on work engagement (WE) was analyzed using the UWES 9-item scale (Lindell & Whitney, 2001), which include nine questionnaire items, and responses were measured using a 5-point Likert scale.

Here, communication employees in different provinces were involved. They represent a remarkable percentage in this regard (in Southern and Central Iraq). Therefore, this study sample is amply representative. The data were collected through questionnaires and personal interviews.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Participants and procedure

Upon receiving the human resources manager's approval, the nature and the aim of the questionnaire were explained to the study participants. Respondents were approached to provide, within their capacities, honest replies to the questionnaire items. This procedure aims to limit the potential impact of employee hesitation and bias towards social desirability (P. Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & N. Podsakoff, 2003). The questionnaires were administered along different periods to control the potential impact of common bias in data collection procedures (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Lindell & Whitney, 2001). In the first time frame, the questionnaire was directly administered to the study respondents. In the second time frame, the questionnaire was administered to the respondents by the human resources managers, without the researchers' interference. The final sample obtained from both time frames included 150 questionnaires out of 205. The response rate reached 73%, which is acceptable for paper-based questionnaires in the Asian workplace. The sample of 150 questionnaires was obtained from 113 males and 37 females. Most of the respondents' age ranged from 35 to 44 years, representing 36%. Forty-eight



Note: The dashed line represents the indirect effect of inclusive leadership on innovative workplace behavior, and the mediator has also been introduced in the model.

Figure 1. Research model

respondents had a university degree, 6 obtained a master's degree, and 77 finished their bachelor's degree. Table 1 displays the demographic profile of the participants.

Table 1. Demographic profile of respondents

| Characteristics | Frequencies | Percentage |
|------------------------|-------------|------------|
| Gender | | |
| Male | 113 | 75.3% |
| Female | 37 | 24.7% |
| Age | | |
| < 24 | 20 | 13% |
| 25-34 | 49 | 33% |
| 35-44 | 54 | 36% |
| 45-54 | 27 | 18% |
| Education | | |
| Secondary | 19 | 0.13% |
| Bachelor's | 77 | 0.51% |
| Diploma | 48 | 0.32% |
| MA | 6 | 0.04% |
| Tenure | | |
| < 1 | 17 | 0.11% |
| 2-5 | 47 | 0.31% |
| 6-10 | 69 | 0.46% |
| > 11 | 17 | 0.11% |
| Department | | |
| Administration | 34 | 0.23% |
| Human Resources | 22 | 0.15% |
| Accounts | 12 | 0.08% |
| Sale | 48 | 0.32% |
| Information Technology | 34 | 0.23% |

4.2. Measurement model analysis

4.2.1. Descriptive statistics and correlation

Table 2 presents the results of descriptive statistics and correlation analysis. The mean and standard deviation values for inclusive leadership, work engagement, and IWB are $M = 4.019$, $SD = .760$, $M = 3.882$, $SD = .718$, and $M = 3.727$, $SD = .849$, respectively. The Pearson correlation coefficient shows a positive and significant relationship between inclusive leadership and IWB ($r = .814$, $p < 0.1$), and also a positive and significant relationship between inclusive leadership and work engagement ($r = .851$, $p < 0.1$). It also indicates a positive relationship between work engagement and IWB ($r = .814$, $p < 0.1$). These correlations were expected in the study hypotheses.

Table 2. Mean, standard deviations, and correlations between main variables

| Variables | M | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|-------------------------------|-------|-------|--------|--------|--------|
| Inclusive leadership | 4.019 | 0.760 | 1 | .851** | .814** |
| Work engagement | 3.884 | 0.718 | .851** | 1 | .814** |
| Innovative workplace behavior | 3.727 | 0.718 | .814** | .814** | 1 |

Note: $N = 150$, ** $p < 0.01$.

4.3. Reliability and validity measurement

Table 3 demonstrates the analysis results of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The values above 0.5 indicate that the study's constructs have established the convergent validity (Henseler, Ringle, & Sinkovics, 2009). This table similarly presents the reliability analysis through Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability. The values are greater than 0.7, indicating that this study's research instrument shows a high value of internal consistency (Hair, Sarstedt, Hopkins, & Kuppelwieser, 2014; Nunally & Bernstein, 2005). Figure 2 shows the results of factor loadings, having a value of 0.7 or higher, which is an acceptable measure. Therefore, it could be claimed that the measurement paradigm of this study corresponds to reliability and validity criteria.

Table 3. Average Variance Extracted, composite reliability, and Cronbach's alpha

| Variable (dimensions) | AVE | Composite reliability | Cronbach's alpha |
|-------------------------------|-------|-----------------------|------------------|
| Inclusive leadership behavior | 0.816 | 0.930 | 0.887 |
| Openness | | | |
| Accessibility | 0.588 | 0.851 | 0.767 |
| Availability | 0.803 | 0.891 | 0.757 |
| Work engagement | 0.802 | 0.895 | 0.823 |
| Vigor | | | |
| Dedication | 0.576 | 0.924 | 0.876 |
| Absorption | 0.739 | 0.803 | 0.639 |
| Innovative workplace behavior | 0.689 | 0.930 | 0.909 |

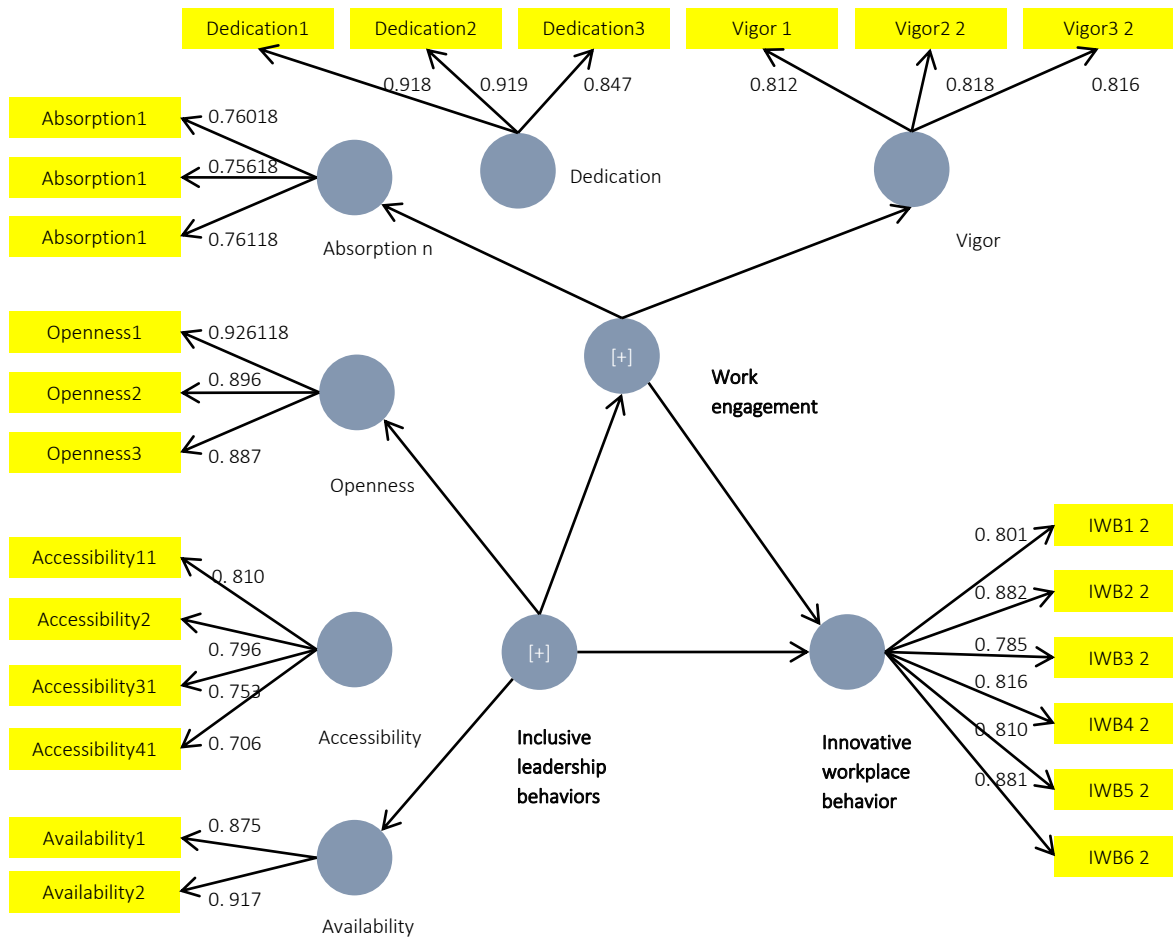


Figure 2. Structural model

4.4. Tests of hypotheses

This study examined the impact of inclusive leadership on IWB through work engagement. Table 4 illustrates the outer loading, outer weight, and VIF for each indicator.

To show the mediating role of work engagement, the SPSS process macro was used, as shown in Table 5. The results show that inclusive leadership is positively related to IWB ($\beta = 0.325, p < .001$), supporting *H3*. Inclusive leadership shows a positive relationship with work engagement ($\beta = 0.867,$

Table 4. Outer loading, outer weight, and VIF for each indicator

| Indicator | Outer loading | Outer weight | VIF |
|----------------|---------------|--------------|-------|
| Accessibility1 | 0.803 | 0.322 | 1.838 |
| Accessibility2 | 0.784 | 0.298 | 1.713 |
| Accessibility3 | 0.735 | 0.273 | 1.569 |
| Accessibility4 | 0.733 | 0.418 | 1.216 |
| Availability1 | 0.898 | 0.56 | 1.591 |
| Availability2 | 0.896 | 0.555 | 1.591 |
| Openness1 | 0.926 | 0.384 | 3.083 |
| Openness2 | 0.884 | 0.33 | 2.515 |
| Openness3 | 0.898 | 0.393 | 2.352 |
| Absorption1 | 0.689 | 0.341 | 1.372 |
| Absorption2 | 0.712 | 0.336 | 1.409 |
| Absorption3 | 0.835 | 0.63 | 1.142 |

Table 4 (cont.). Outer loading, outer weight, and VIF for each indicator

| Indicator | Outer loading | Outer weight | VIF |
|-------------|---------------|--------------|-------|
| Dedication1 | 0.917 | 0.366 | 3.271 |
| Dedication2 | 0.922 | 0.389 | 3.287 |
| Dedication3 | 0.846 | 0.361 | 1.826 |
| Vigor1 | 0.892 | 0.433 | 2.101 |
| Vigor2 | 0.89 | 0.397 | 2.2 |
| Vigor3 | 0.793 | 0.328 | 1.59 |
| IWB1 | 0.801 | 0.221 | 2.217 |
| IWB2 | 0.882 | 0.221 | 3.132 |
| IWB3 | 0.785 | 0.201 | 2.007 |
| IWB4 | 0.817 | 0.184 | 2.808 |
| IWB5 | 0.81 | 0.178 | 2.616 |
| IWB6 | 0.881 | 0.201 | 3.548 |

Table 5. Path coefficients, mean, st. dev., t-test, and p-values

| Effect | Hypotheses | β | Mean | St. dev. | t-test | p |
|-----------------|--|---------|-------|----------|--------|-------|
| Direct effect | Inclusive leadership behaviors → innovative workplace behavior | 0.325 | 0.314 | 0.085 | 3.828 | 0.000 |
| | Inclusive leadership behaviors → work engagement | 0.867 | 0.865 | 0.030 | 28.797 | 0.000 |
| | Work engagement → innovative workplace behavior | 0.571 | 0.583 | 0.080 | 7.132 | 0.000 |
| Indirect effect | Inclusive leadership behaviors → work engagement → innovative workplace behavior | 0.496 | 0.505 | 0.073 | 6.748 | 0.000 |

$p < .001$), supporting *H4*. Similarly, *H1* also shows a positive relationship between work engagement and IWB ($\beta = 0.571$, $p < .001$). To test *H2*, bootstrapping analysis was run to test the correlation of bootstrapping samples with a 95% confidence interval (CI) on 5,000 sub-samples, as suggested by Preacher and Hayes (2018). Using SmartPLS software, work engagement's mediating effect on the relationship between inclusive leadership and IWB work engagement was validated. Hence, *H2* is also supported.

5. DISCUSSION

Companies and researchers have shown considerable attention to innovation as it is a persistent need for companies' sustainable work. IWB has significant importance in the communication and technology sector to promote the supplied service and company competitiveness, which has also been highlighted during the early pandemic period. This paper's core purpose was to examine the mediating role of work engagement between inclusive leadership and IWB, considering a sample of employees in the communication sector in Southern and Central Iraq. Relevant studies emphasized leadership's role

in such economic turmoil in the UAE context (A. Abdallah & S. Abdallah, 2020).

The study findings indicated that the level of attention attributed to inclusive leadership behaviors was higher than work engagement and IWB. The plausible reasons leading to this result could be the uneven gender distribution in the study sample. Generally, males would prefer inclusive leadership behaviors in a workplace environment favoring creativity. This result is expected in the Iraqi context, given that men are more interested in technology and communication than women. The findings also demonstrated a connection between inclusive leadership and IWB, which was also examined by another study (Javed et al., 2019a), highlighting the significant effect of inclusive leadership in prompting IWB. Choi et al. (2015) examined the relationship between inclusive leadership and work engagement considering 246 employees in 6 service companies in Vietnam, and they corroborate the significant relationship between these two variables. Other researchers used different mediating variables to explain the effect of inclusive leadership on IWB. These variables are psychological empowerment, knowledge sharing, and moral contract, among others. Similarly, a

study by Wang et al. (2019) also examined the relationship between work engagement and IWB, and they considered the moderating role of inclusive leadership on a sample of 374 nurses in Chinese hospitals. To the best of the authors' knowledge, this study is the first one considering work engagement as a mediating variable to explain the relationship between leadership and IWB. Regression

analysis results revealed that inclusive leadership and work engagement were independent predictors for IWB. Considering these findings, this study provides suggestions to company leaders to create an innovative environment, support innovation, stimulate employees to express novel ideas, and conduct more research on organizations' innovation capacities.

CONCLUSION

Through hierarchical regression and bootstrap analysis, the results show that inclusive leadership has a significant positive impact on job satisfaction of new generation employees; work engagement has a partial mediating role between inclusive leadership and job satisfaction; procedural justice has a positive adjustment effect in the mediation role of work engagement between inclusive leadership and job satisfaction, employee empowerment, culture, employee diversity, person-job fit, creativity, innovative job performance, and reduced turnover. The usual framework of exploring these relations integrated the behavioral theory of leadership with job demands-resources theory of engagement. This study revealed that employees in the communication domain in Iraq were concerned with IWB. Inclusive leadership, manifested by openness, accessibility, and availability of a leader, was characterized by higher level of attention than work engagement and IWB. Both inclusive leadership and work engagement were correlated with IWB. Both had shown positive effects on IWB. Furthermore, work engagement played a mediating role in the relationship between inclusive leadership and IWB.

Depending on how much inclusive leadership is endorsed across multiple levels of the system, and enacting individual, relational, and organizational dimensions, managerial benefits increase. Given the heterogeneous nature of the fabric of Iraqi society and the turbulent circumstances, managers should put into innovative action the principles of inclusive leadership. Subsequently, it is fundamental to promote the notion of work engagement for communication employees and consider it an intervening criterion to develop IWB to enhance cooperation, integration, and leadership vision.

Limited internal consistency in the present study could be attributed to the unequal gender distribution of the respondents. Accordingly, future studies could consider including many female employees in the communication sector to explore the gender influence between inclusive leadership, work engagement, and IWB. It is pivotal and enriching to have access to different sources of data (such as peer reports and leaders' reports) to clearly understand the interactions between the study factors.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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