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## Inclusive Leadership and Psychological Safety among Employees in the Automotive Manufacturing Industry

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**Abstract:** Human resources constitute a critical element in sustaining organizational success, particularly in automotive manufacturing environments that require precision, efficiency, and strict safety compliance. This study explored the association between inclusive leadership and psychological safety among employees of an automotive manufacturing company in Cikarang, Bekasi, Indonesia. Using a quantitative, cross-sectional correlational design, data were collected from 100 employees recruited through convenience sampling. The study employed two standardized instruments: the Inclusive Leadership Scale by Carmeli et al. (2010) and the Psychological Safety Scale developed by O'Donovan et al. (2020) and later refined by Sasaki et al. (2022). Statistical analyses, performed with SPSS, included descriptive statistics, reliability assessment, assumption testing, Pearson correlation, and simple linear regression. The findings indicated a positive and significant link between inclusive leadership and psychological safety ( $r = 0.46$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and confirmed that inclusive leadership significantly predicts psychological safety ( $\beta = 0.46$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), explaining 21 percent of its variance ( $R^2 = 0.21$ ). These results highlight that leaders who are open, approachable, and supportive of participation substantially contribute to a psychologically safe and collaborative workplace climate. Practically, inclusive leadership emerges as a strategic approach for strengthening employee engagement, encouraging innovation, and sustaining performance in the automotive manufacturing industry.

**Keywords:** Inclusive Leadership, Psychological Safety, Automotive Manufacturing, Employees, Organization.

### INTRODUCTION

The automotive manufacturing industry stands as one of the most dynamic, demanding, and rapidly evolving sectors in Indonesia's economy. It operates within a highly rigid environment defined by complex production systems, high-precision engineering standards, and relentless performance targets. In the modern era of lean manufacturing and continuous improvement, tolerance for error on the assembly line is virtually nonexistent. These intense operational pressures demand not only peak technical expertise but also profoundly influence

the psychological and social experiences of employees. Workers operate under tight schedules, strict occupational safety and health (K3) regulations, and rigid hierarchical supervision. Many employees face repetitive routines and time constraints that can elevate stress and mental fatigue if not managed properly. In such a high-stakes environment, where physical safety and product quality are paramount, psychological safety transitions from being merely a theoretical organizational behavior concept into an absolute practical necessity for maintaining employee well-being, sustaining human capital development, and ensuring long-term organizational productivity.

Psychological safety, a concept prominently introduced by Edmondson (1999), refers to a shared belief among team members that it is safe to speak up, admit mistakes, ask questions, or offer alternative opinions without the fear of embarrassment, marginalization, or punitive action. When this sense of security is embedded within the workplace climate, employees are significantly more willing to take the interpersonal risks necessary for continuous learning, cross-functional collaboration, and proactive problem-solving. Teams that feel psychologically safe consistently demonstrate higher performance, share critical knowledge more openly, and exhibit stronger innovative capabilities (Frazier et al., 2017; Kim & Kweon, 2020). Conversely, when such safety is absent, a culture of silence often prevails. Employees may choose self-preservation over expression, deliberately withholding valuable ideas or failing to report near-miss safety incidents and minor production anomalies. In the specific context of automotive manufacturing, where seamless coordination is vital, this lack of psychological safety can have severe tangible consequences. If a shop-floor worker notices a machine irregularity but remains silent due to fear of reprimand from a supervisor, the resulting outcomes can include catastrophic production defects, substantial financial losses, and critical compromises to physical safety.

Although research on psychological safety has expanded substantially over the past two decades, empirical studies focusing specifically on the manufacturing sector—particularly within the Indonesian context—remain surprisingly limited. A significant portion of the existing literature centers on service-oriented or knowledge-based industries such as healthcare, higher education, and technology, where organizational structures are flatter and communication flows more organically. Manufacturing settings, conversely, are typically characterized by entrenched, rigid hierarchies. Supervisors and managers often play dominant, directive roles in decision-making processes, creating a steep power differential. Consequently, employees may hesitate to voice differing opinions or highlight operational inefficiencies for fear of negative performance evaluations. This stark reality indicates that cultivating psychological safety in an industrial manufacturing environment requires highly intentional and strategic leadership practices capable of bridging the pervasive communication gap between management and the production workforce.

Inclusive leadership has emerged as a highly effective and promising approach to address this organizational challenge. This leadership paradigm emphasizes genuine openness, approachability, and active engagement, encouraging leaders to intentionally create space for diverse ideas and mutual respect (Carmeli et al., 2010; Li & Tang, 2022). Inclusive leaders do not merely direct; they listen attentively, deeply value employee input, and actively invite participation in daily problem-solving. By demonstrating these behaviors, leaders can gradually transform rigid, fear-based hierarchical interactions into collaborative, trust-based partnerships. Prior empirical evidence strongly supports this connection: when leaders consistently demonstrate inclusivity, employees feel empowered to speak up, share innovative operational improvements, and experience a robust sense of psychological safety (Frazier et al., 2017; Javed et al., 2019).

However, it is critical to recognize that leadership practices and organizational behavior do not operate in a vacuum; they are heavily influenced by the surrounding socio-cultural

environment. Cultural norms, power distance, and traditional organizational structures significantly dictate how inclusive leadership is both perceived and enacted. In Indonesia, deep-rooted values such as respect for authority, paternalistic leadership expectations, and the prioritization of collective harmony heavily shape workplace interactions. Furthermore, the cultural phenomenon of *sungkan*—a deep-seated feeling of reluctance, deference, or discomfort in contradicting superiors—often prevents subordinates from providing constructive feedback or admitting errors. Therefore, the mechanism through which inclusive leadership influences psychological safety may manifest quite differently in Indonesia compared to Western contexts, where autonomy, assertiveness, and direct feedback are culturally normative.

Exploring this relationship within the Indonesian automotive sector is therefore both timely and of immense practical value. This study specifically examines the relationship between inclusive leadership and psychological safety among employees of an automotive manufacturing company located in Cikarang, Bekasi. Cikarang is recognized as one of the largest and most concentrated industrial manufacturing hubs in Southeast Asia, frequently characterized by a unique blend of stringent multinational corporate standards and local Indonesian workforce dynamics. By focusing on this specific, high-pressure industrial setting, this research aims to expand theoretical understandings of organizational behavior while offering highly practical insights for leadership and human capital development. It is anticipated that the findings will not only validate the critical role of inclusive leadership as a determinant of psychological safety but also illuminate how culturally attuned management practices can successfully foster open communication, interpersonal trust, and collective growth in highly demanding manufacturing environments..

## **METHOD**

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional correlational design to explore how inclusive leadership relates to psychological safety among employees in an automotive manufacturing company. The design was selected because it enabled the researcher to observe and analyze employee perceptions at a single point in time, offering a snapshot of how leadership behaviors and feelings of safety coexist within a high-pressure production environment. This approach was particularly suitable for capturing the nuances of workplace dynamics in the manufacturing sector, where employees' experiences are shaped by structured routines and hierarchical management systems. The participants consisted of 100 full-time employees working in an automotive manufacturing company located in Cikarang, Bekasi, Indonesia. Participants were selected using a convenience sampling technique, emphasizing voluntary participation and accessibility. To ensure data quality, only employees who had worked for at least six months and who provided informed consent were included in the sample. Most respondents worked in operational and technical roles, which accurately reflected the company's workforce composition. This focus allowed the research to capture genuine perspectives from employees who are directly involved in production activities—individuals who often experience firsthand how leadership behavior influences communication, trust, and daily interaction at the shop-floor level.

Two well-established psychometric instruments were used to measure the study variables. The first instrument was the Inclusive Leadership Scale developed by Carmeli et al. (2010), which includes nine items designed to assess three key aspects of inclusive leadership: openness, availability, and accessibility. Responses were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with a sample item from the Indonesian adaptation reading: "My supervisor is open to listening to new ideas". The scale has shown strong internal reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.91$ ) and a validated three-dimensional factor structure. In this study, the instrument was carefully translated and

contextualized to ensure cultural relevance for Indonesian manufacturing employees. The second instrument was the Psychological Safety Scale, originally developed by O’Donovan et al. (2020) and later validated by Sasaki et al. (2022) . It comprises 19 items that assess psychological safety in three relational domains: leader interactions (9 items), peer relationships (7 items), and team climate (3 items). Participants responded using a seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The instrument demonstrated excellent psychometric properties (CFI > 0.95; RMSEA < 0.05; Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  > 0.85), ensuring reliability and validity for this research context. Measuring these constructs allowed the researcher to capture both structural and emotional dimensions of leadership and safety in the factory setting.

The data collection process began after obtaining official approval from company management. Questionnaires were distributed in printed form to employees during scheduled work breaks to minimize disruption to production. Before filling out the questionnaire, participants received an information sheet explaining the study’s purpose, procedures, confidentiality policy, and voluntary nature. Only those who provided written consent continued to participate, and they completed the questionnaires anonymously to encourage honest and unbiased responses. Questionnaires that were incomplete or contained invalid responses were excluded from the final analysis. Subsequently, the data were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software. Preliminary steps included descriptive analysis to summarize participant demographics and the general distribution of variables. Instrument reliability was examined through Cronbach’s alpha, while normality and linearity assumptions were verified to ensure appropriate use of parametric statistical tests. The primary analysis involved Pearson’s correlation to determine the direction and strength of the relationship between inclusive leadership and psychological safety, and simple linear regression was conducted to examine how inclusive leadership predicts psychological safety levels among employees. The entire research process was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Indonesian Psychological Association (HIMPSI) and Law No. 23 of 2022 on Education and Psychological Services, ensuring participation was entirely voluntary and all personal information was treated with strict confidentiality.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Demographic Profile of Participants

The analysis began with a descriptive overview of the study participants. A total of 100 employees from an automotive manufacturing company in Cikarang, Bekasi, Indonesia, participated in this research. The detailed demographic profile is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Demographic Profile of Participants (N = 100)**

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n) / Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	68
	Female	32
Age	21 – 35 years	62
	Other ages	38
Employment Duration	< 2 years	18
	2 – 5 years	44
	> 5 years	38

As shown in Table 1, the majority of respondents were male (68%) and relatively young, with 62% aged between 21 and 35 years. Furthermore, a significant portion of the participants had been working for more than two years. This demographic profile suggests that the majority of employees were in the prime of their careers, representing a workforce

that is energetic, technically skilled, and accustomed to structured operational systems—characteristics that make them ideal for examining how leadership behavior affects interpersonal trust and communication within a manufacturing environment.

### Descriptive Statistics

Turning to the main research variables, the descriptive statistics for inclusive leadership and psychological safety are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Main Variables**

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
Inclusive Leadership	19	45	33.84	5.67
Psychological Safety	74	131	104.62	13.45

Table 2 indicates that, on average, employees perceived their supervisors as moderately to highly inclusive ( $Mean = 33.84$ ). In other words, most leaders were viewed as approachable, willing to listen, and supportive of employee participation. However, the range of scores shows varying perceptions, suggesting that leadership practices may differ across departments or supervisors. Meanwhile, psychological safety scores ( $Mean = 104.62$ ) demonstrate that employees generally felt comfortable expressing ideas, asking questions, and admitting mistakes. Nonetheless, a subset of employees indicated lower levels of comfort, hinting that while the overall climate was positive, some pockets of the organization still struggled with communication barriers or hierarchical pressures.

### Assumption and Hypothesis Testing

Before testing the hypothesis, the data were examined to ensure they met statistical assumptions. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov test produced a  $p$ -value of 0.200 for both variables, confirming that the data were normally distributed. Additionally, the linearity test produced an  $F$  value of 21.47 ( $p < 0.001$ ), indicating a linear relationship between inclusive leadership and psychological safety, thus justifying the use of parametric analysis.

The results of the hypothesis testing, utilizing Pearson correlation and simple linear regression, are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3. Correlation and Simple Linear Regression Results**

Variable	r	R <sup>2</sup>	β	t	p-value
Inclusive Leadership → Psychological Safety	0.46	0.21	0.46	5.12	< 0.001

The correlational analysis showed a moderate positive and statistically significant relationship between inclusive leadership and psychological safety ( $r = 0.46, p < 0.001$ ). Furthermore, the regression analysis revealed a significant predictive effect ( $\beta = 0.46, p < 0.001$ ). The coefficient of determination ( $R^2 = 0.21$ ) indicated that inclusive leadership accounted for approximately 21 percent of the variation in employees’ psychological safety levels. Overall, the statistical findings strongly supported the research hypothesis that inclusive leadership contributes positively to psychological safety.

### Discussion

The present study explored the connection between inclusive leadership and psychological safety within the context of Indonesia’s automotive manufacturing industry. The statistical findings confirm that when leaders act with openness, accessibility, and a willingness to listen, employees tend to feel safer to express opinions and engage in constructive dialogue. In a work culture where strict procedures, high precision standards,

and performance targets often dominate daily operations, leadership behaviors that nurture inclusion act as a vital buffer against pressure and uncertainty. These findings align closely with the concept of psychological safety introduced by Edmondson (1999), which emphasizes that employees perform best when they do not fear being judged for speaking up or admitting mistakes. In environments where employees must coordinate tightly and follow strict routines, feeling safe to communicate enhances both efficiency and creativity. Employees who believe that their voices are valued are more likely to engage proactively in solving production challenges rather than passively following instructions.

Furthermore, the results lend empirical support to the multidimensional framework of psychological safety proposed by O'Donovan et al. (2020), which identifies leader, peer, and team interactions as interrelated sources of safety. While the leader dimension is clearly dominant in this study, the findings imply that leadership inclusivity may indirectly strengthen the quality of peer relationships and team cohesion. When leaders model openness and acceptance, they create ripple effects that normalize empathy and mutual respect across the organization. This relational dynamic is particularly crucial in the manufacturing sector, where hierarchical distance between supervisors and subordinates can easily suppress communication if not managed with sensitivity.

Beyond its theoretical implications, this study contributes to a broader understanding of leadership in the Indonesian cultural context. In organizations where authority is often highly respected and power distance is relatively high, employees may hesitate to disagree or offer alternative viewpoints. The evidence from this study indicates that inclusive leadership can help bridge this communication gap by redefining authority—not as control, but as a partnership. Leaders who make themselves approachable and transparent send a clear message that respect and participation are compatible values. Over time, such behaviors can reshape organizational norms from compliance-based to collaboration-driven, leading to stronger engagement and collective learning.

The regression results revealed that inclusive leadership explained about 21 percent of the variance in psychological safety. Although this influence is substantial, it also highlights that psychological safety is not determined by leadership alone. Other social and structural factors—such as peer trust, managerial consistency, and organizational culture—undoubtedly play a role. Leadership serves as a starting point for safety, but maintaining it requires systemic support throughout the organization.

From a practical standpoint, companies in the automotive manufacturing sector should invest in leadership development programs that emphasize inclusivity, empathy, and two-way communication. Training that helps supervisors listen more deeply, invite feedback, and recognize diverse perspectives could significantly enhance both morale and performance. Embedding these practices into the company's management culture through regular feedback sessions, peer learning circles, or psychological safety check-ins may ensure that inclusivity becomes a sustainable habit rather than a temporary initiative. Ultimately, inclusive leadership is not simply a management style; it is a social process that gives meaning to work, recognizes the human dimension in demanding industries, and helps organizations evolve toward healthier, more adaptive cultures.

## CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore how inclusive leadership shapes employees' sense of psychological safety within Indonesia's automotive manufacturing industry. The results clearly show that when leaders act with openness, availability, and genuine concern for their employees, they help create a climate where people feel comfortable speaking up, sharing ideas, and acknowledging mistakes without fear. These findings reaffirm that leadership is

not only about directing performance but also about creating emotional conditions that allow people to contribute fully and confidently.

From a theoretical perspective, the study provides further evidence for the multidimensional nature of psychological safety as described by O'Donovan et al. (2020). It also demonstrates that inclusive leadership continues to be a meaningful predictor of psychological safety across different cultural and industrial contexts, including those characterized by hierarchy and standardization. This reinforces the idea that inclusion, empathy, and accessibility are not merely leadership ideals they are mechanisms that sustain trust and collaboration in complex organizations.

Practically, the study highlights how inclusivity can be translated into real management practices. Companies operating in manufacturing environments can begin by equipping their leaders with skills that promote open communication and mutual respect. Training programs that emphasize active listening, empathy, and participatory problem-solving could help leaders bridge communication gaps that often exist between management and production teams. When employees feel genuinely heard and supported, they are more likely to engage creatively, learn from mistakes, and collaborate more effectively behaviors that ultimately enhance both morale and performance. In essence, this study suggests that inclusive leadership can serve as a stabilizing force in demanding industrial settings. Leaders who remain approachable and responsive in high-pressure contexts provide employees with a sense of security that fuels confidence and motivation.

Although this study provides valuable insights, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, this study used a cross-sectional approach, which captures perceptions at a single point in time, and as a result, cannot determine causality between variables. Future research could apply longitudinal or experimental designs. Second, participants were selected using convenience sampling from a single company, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future studies are encouraged to include larger and more diverse samples across different regions and sectors. Comparative research between manufacturing and service industries could reveal interesting cultural and structural differences.

Another limitation relates to the measurement method; data were collected through self-report questionnaires, which may introduce response bias. Future researchers could combine self-report data with qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups for deeper exploration. Furthermore, the study did not account for moderating or mediating variables (such as organizational culture or job stress) that might influence the relationship between inclusive leadership and psychological safety. Future studies may integrate these variables into their models. Lastly, this study was conducted within the Indonesian cultural context, characterized by high power distance. Future research could examine how cultural values interact with leadership inclusivity across countries or regions.

Despite these limitations, this research provides a meaningful starting point for understanding how inclusive leadership contributes to psychological safety in high-demand industrial settings. It is hoped that future scholars and practitioners will build upon these findings to design leadership interventions and organizational policies that prioritize employee well-being, trust, and human connection at work.

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