

Predicting Employee Creativity Based on Inclusive Leadership and Psychological Safety: The Mediating Role of Work Engagement

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to predict employee creativity based on inclusive leadership and psychological safety and to examine the mediating role of work engagement among employees working in Canada.

Methods and Materials: The study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational design. The participants were 312 employees working in public and private organizations in Canada who were recruited using convenience and purposive sampling. Data were collected using the nine-item Inclusive Leadership Scale, the seven-item Psychological Safety Scale, the nine-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, and the 13-item Employee Creativity Scale. Data were analyzed using Pearson correlation coefficients, confirmatory factor analysis, and structural equation modeling in IBM SPSS Statistics and AMOS. The significance of indirect effects was examined using bias-corrected bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples and 95% confidence intervals.

Findings: Inclusive leadership significantly predicted work engagement ($\beta = .31, p < .001$) and employee creativity ($\beta = .16, p = .005$), while psychological safety significantly predicted work engagement ($\beta = .39, p < .001$) and employee creativity ($\beta = .20, p = .003$). Work engagement was the strongest direct predictor of employee creativity ($\beta = .46, p < .001$). Inclusive leadership and psychological safety jointly explained 39% of the variance in work engagement, while the overall model explained 52% of the variance in employee creativity. Bootstrap analysis showed that work engagement significantly mediated the relationship between inclusive leadership and employee creativity ($\beta = .14, 95\% \text{ CI } [.09, .21], p < .001$) and the relationship between psychological safety and employee creativity ($\beta = .18, 95\% \text{ CI } [.11, .26], p < .001$). Because both corresponding direct effects remained significant, the mediation effects were partial.

Conclusion: The findings indicate that inclusive leadership and psychological safety contribute to employee creativity both directly and indirectly by strengthening employees' work engagement, highlighting the importance of supportive leadership, interpersonal safety, and motivational involvement in fostering workplace creativity.

Keywords: inclusive leadership, psychological safety, work engagement, employee creativity, structural equation modeling, Canada

1 Introduction

Organizations increasingly operate in environments characterized by technological acceleration,

competitive intensity, workforce diversity, hybrid working arrangements, and continuous pressure for adaptation. Under these conditions, employee creativity has become a central organizational capability because the generation of

novel and useful ideas can support innovation, problem solving, process improvement, service quality, and organizational resilience. Creativity at the employee level is particularly important because many organizational innovations originate not from formal research and development units but from employees who recognize inefficiencies, reinterpret established routines, and propose alternative ways of performing their work. Contemporary scholarship therefore increasingly treats employee creativity as a strategic human resource and leadership outcome rather than merely an individual personality characteristic. Recent research on organizational development similarly emphasizes that creative capacity is strongly affected by leadership systems, workplace climate, employee involvement, and the social conditions that enable employees to contribute ideas without fear of negative interpersonal consequences (Titrek et al., 2025). Research on diversity and inclusive human resource practices has also demonstrated that organizational efforts to create inclusive work systems may stimulate employee creativity when employees experience psychological compatibility, support, and inclusive leadership (Zhao & Ren, 2025). Accordingly, identifying leadership and psychological mechanisms that facilitate employee creativity remains an important concern for organizational behavior research.

Leadership is one of the most influential contextual factors affecting whether employees choose to contribute new ideas, challenge existing procedures, and engage in innovative work behavior. Traditional leadership models have provided substantial insight into employee attitudes and performance; however, rapidly changing and increasingly diverse workplaces have generated new leadership challenges that require greater responsiveness, openness, adaptability, and interpersonal sensitivity (Sekiguchi & Cuyper, 2022). Systematic reviews of leadership research also suggest that contemporary organizations need leadership approaches capable of supporting participation, empowerment, innovation, and positive employee experiences rather than relying solely on hierarchical control (Elkhwesky et al., 2022; Guchait et al., 2023). Studies comparing leadership approaches further indicate that combining direction with employee participation may contribute to a healthier and more productive workplace environment, particularly when employees perceive that their views are acknowledged and respected (Saber, 2024). Within this context, inclusive leadership has attracted growing attention because it explicitly emphasizes leader openness, accessibility,

availability, and willingness to recognize employees' contributions.

Inclusive leadership refers to leader behavior through which employees are encouraged to participate, express differing perspectives, seek assistance, and contribute to decision-making without being marginalized because of status, background, expertise, or identity. Unlike leadership approaches that primarily emphasize authority or transactional exchange, inclusive leadership highlights relational availability and acceptance. Leaders who behave inclusively communicate that employees' voices are valued and that differences can be treated as resources rather than threats. Evidence from organizational settings indicates that the practical implementation of inclusive leadership involves creating structures and interaction patterns in which employees experience genuine opportunities to contribute and participate (Budreikaitė et al., 2024). Inclusive leadership has also been associated with organizational learning behavior because open and accessible leaders can create conditions in which employees exchange knowledge, question assumptions, and learn collectively (Nejati & Shafaei, 2023). These behaviors are especially relevant to creativity because creative work requires employees to move beyond established routines and expose ideas that may initially be uncertain, incomplete, or unconventional.

A growing body of research supports the relationship between inclusive leadership and innovative or creative outcomes. Inclusive leadership has been shown to encourage innovative behavior by reducing relational silence and increasing employees' willingness to communicate ideas that might otherwise remain unexpressed (Wu & Li, 2023). In healthcare settings, inclusive leadership has been linked to employee creativity through mechanisms involving psychological safety and employees' capacity to manage multiple tasks and demands (Fu et al., 2022). Multi-level research has likewise indicated that inclusive leadership can contribute to innovative performance by strengthening psychological safety at both individual and collective levels (Li & Tang, 2022). Other studies suggest that inclusive leadership can enhance creative self-efficacy and challenge-oriented organizational citizenship behavior, indicating that inclusive leaders may strengthen employees' confidence in their creative capacities as well as their willingness to constructively question existing practices (Mehmood et al., 2025). In emerging domains such as sustainable supply chains, inclusive leadership has also been associated with environmentally oriented employee creativity through supportive psychological climates (Rasheed et al., 2026).

These findings collectively indicate that inclusive leadership may be an important antecedent of creativity, but they also suggest that its effects depend on psychological and motivational processes within employees.

One particularly important psychological mechanism is psychological safety. Psychological safety refers to the perception that the interpersonal environment is sufficiently safe for employees to take risks, acknowledge mistakes, seek feedback, express disagreement, and propose ideas without expecting humiliation, punishment, rejection, or damage to professional standing. Creativity inherently involves interpersonal risk because proposing an unconventional idea may expose an employee to criticism or imply that existing procedures are inadequate. For this reason, even highly capable employees may withhold creative contributions when the workplace climate is perceived as threatening. Research examining leadership and psychological safety has consistently emphasized that leader behavior plays a central role in shaping whether employees feel secure enough to speak openly and experiment (Forte et al., 2024). Inclusive leaders may be especially important in this process because accessibility and openness signal that employee contributions are welcome and that mistakes or dissenting opinions will not automatically result in negative consequences.

Empirical evidence across organizational contexts supports the importance of psychological safety for creativity and innovation. Research involving physical education teachers found that psychological safety played a meaningful role in explaining how leadership contributed to innovative behavior (Chen et al., 2022). Similarly, studies of kindergarten teachers demonstrated that leadership-related influences on innovative behavior could operate through teacher efficacy and psychological safety in sequence (Mo et al., 2023). Research on employee innovation has also shown that psychological safety can help translate inclusive leadership into stronger innovative performance (Li & Tang, 2022). These findings are consistent with the broader proposition that employees are more likely to generate, communicate, and implement new ideas when they perceive interpersonal risk as manageable. Psychological safety therefore functions not merely as an affective condition but as an enabling organizational resource that makes experimentation and creative expression more feasible.

The relevance of psychological safety extends beyond creativity itself. It has also been linked to work-related wellbeing, participation, and engagement. For example, research examining humble leadership in Japanese

organizations found that psychological safety served as an important mediating mechanism in employee outcomes related to presenteeism (Matsuo et al., 2024). In university settings, psychological safety has been shown to mediate the relationship between socially responsible leadership and job engagement (Kyambade et al., 2024). Research on inclusive leadership has similarly indicated that favorable organizational climates can reduce psychological distress, further illustrating the broader psychological implications of inclusive leadership practices (Ibnis Shaid Bin Abdul et al., 2024). Collectively, these findings suggest that psychologically safe workplaces can increase employees' capacity to invest themselves in their work because cognitive and emotional resources do not need to be continuously directed toward self-protection.

Work engagement represents another critical construct for understanding employee creativity. Work engagement is commonly conceptualized as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Engaged employees tend to invest greater physical, cognitive, and emotional energy in their roles, persist when encountering obstacles, and become deeply involved in task accomplishment. Such motivational investment is highly relevant to creativity because generating and refining new ideas usually requires sustained attention, experimentation, persistence, and willingness to expend discretionary effort. Creative ideas rarely emerge from passive compliance alone; instead, they frequently require employees to explore alternatives, integrate diverse information, and continue developing possibilities despite uncertainty or initial failure. Consequently, employees who are highly engaged may be better positioned to transform supportive workplace conditions into observable creative behavior.

Previous studies provide substantial evidence for the relationship between inclusive leadership and work engagement. In the hospitality sector, inclusive leadership has been associated with greater employee engagement, with psychological safety serving as an important explanatory mechanism (Vakira et al., 2022). Research across multiple organizational contexts similarly found that psychological safety and trust in the leader help explain how inclusive leadership contributes to work engagement (Siyal, 2023). Studies conducted during and after the COVID-19 period have also shown that inclusive leadership can protect or sustain employee engagement when employees experience stress and psychological contract breach (Parku et al., 2023). More recent evidence concerning Generation Z employees

in hybrid workplaces indicates that inclusive leadership and work engagement remain important for adaptive performance and creativity under changing work arrangements (Katsaros, 2025). These studies indicate that inclusive leadership may create the interpersonal and motivational conditions necessary for employees to become more energetically involved in their work.

The direct relationship between work engagement and creativity can also be understood through resource investment perspectives. Employees with greater engagement possess stronger motivation to exceed minimum role requirements, explore new approaches, and devote attention to difficult tasks. Engagement can therefore function as a proximal motivational mechanism through which supportive contextual conditions influence creative performance. Evidence directly examining this process has shown that work engagement can mediate the influence of inclusive leadership on innovative behavior, particularly when employees also experience psychological safety (AlMunthiri et al., 2024). In this sense, inclusive leadership and psychological safety may provide contextual and relational resources, while engagement determines the extent to which employees mobilize those resources in active task involvement. The combination of a supportive leader, a safe interpersonal environment, and a highly engaged employee may therefore be especially conducive to creativity.

Although inclusive leadership has received increasing research attention, leadership-creativity relationships remain theoretically complex because other leadership styles can also affect innovation through related psychological processes. Studies of paternalistic leadership, for example, indicate that leadership can shape innovative work behavior indirectly through mediating mechanisms (Patel & Bakari, 2022). Research on authentic leadership similarly suggests that followers' creative behavior emerges partly through psychological processes linking leader behavior to employee perceptions and motivation (Malodia & Goyal, 2023). Studies examining continuous improvement and innovation have also demonstrated that leadership effects may depend on combinations of mediation and moderation rather than simple direct relationships (Nasir et al., 2023). These findings reinforce the importance of examining the internal mechanisms through which leadership becomes translated into creativity instead of assuming that leader behavior automatically produces innovative outcomes.

Research on innovative behavior also suggests that creativity is embedded in a broader system of individual,

relational, and organizational influences. Studies in emerging-market multinational organizations have shown that employee innovative behavior can result from integrated combinations of organizational and employee-level factors (Jim et al., 2022). In healthcare, leadership styles have been associated with nurses' innovative behaviors, emphasizing the importance of leadership support in occupations characterized by high responsibility and complex service demands (Labrague & Toquero, 2023). Likewise, recent research on organizational fairness, identity, empowerment, and corporate social responsibility indicates that employee creativity can be shaped by multiple psychological and contextual resources operating simultaneously (Mai et al., 2025). Such findings support models in which creativity is treated as the outcome of interconnected leadership, psychological, and motivational processes rather than as an isolated individual disposition.

Despite the growing literature, several issues remain insufficiently resolved. First, a substantial proportion of prior studies have examined innovative behavior rather than employee creativity specifically, even though these constructs are related but not identical. Creativity primarily concerns the generation of novel and useful ideas, whereas innovative behavior often includes the promotion and implementation of ideas. Second, many studies have investigated either inclusive leadership and psychological safety or inclusive leadership and work engagement, while fewer have integrated inclusive leadership, psychological safety, work engagement, and employee creativity within a single explanatory model. Third, although psychological safety is frequently conceptualized as a mediator of leadership effects, it can also be considered a direct contextual predictor of engagement and creativity because employees' perceptions of interpersonal safety may independently influence whether they invest effort and express novel ideas. Fourth, contextual differences across industries and countries limit the extent to which findings can automatically be generalized. The role of inclusive leadership, psychological safety, and engagement may vary depending on employment norms, organizational diversity, managerial practices, and contemporary work arrangements.

The Canadian organizational context provides a particularly relevant setting for examining these relationships. Canadian workplaces are characterized by substantial occupational, demographic, and cultural diversity, making inclusive leadership especially salient for effective employee participation. At the same time, organizations increasingly rely on knowledge work, hybrid

collaboration, decentralized decision-making, and employee initiative. Under such conditions, creativity is likely to depend not only on individual capability but also on whether employees perceive leaders as inclusive, experience interpersonal safety, and remain engaged with their work. The growing emphasis on inclusive workplaces further increases the importance of determining whether inclusive leadership produces concrete behavioral outcomes such as creativity. Research documenting inclusive leadership practices in other national and industry contexts demonstrates that formal commitment to inclusion does not always guarantee employees' lived experience of openness, accessibility, and psychological safety (Budreikaitė et al., 2024). Consequently, examining these constructs simultaneously can provide a more precise understanding of how inclusion becomes translated into creative employee behavior.

The proposed model also extends previous work by positioning work engagement as the central mediating mechanism linking both inclusive leadership and psychological safety to employee creativity. This approach reflects the proposition that supportive leadership and interpersonal safety may not be sufficient by themselves to generate creativity unless employees become motivationally invested in their work. Inclusive leaders can provide access, support, recognition, and permission to contribute, while psychological safety can reduce the anticipated interpersonal costs associated with experimentation. Work engagement may then transform these conditions into sustained energy, dedication, and cognitive immersion, thereby increasing the likelihood of creative behavior. The importance of this integrated mechanism is consistent with evidence showing that inclusive leadership, psychological safety, and work engagement can operate together in predicting innovative behavior (AlMunthiri et al., 2024; Siyal, 2023; Vakira et al., 2022). It is also consistent with the broader organizational literature emphasizing that supportive climates and leadership practices contribute to performance most effectively when employees internalize these resources and translate them into active involvement.

From a practical perspective, understanding these relationships has direct implications for leadership development and organizational policy. If inclusive leadership predicts creativity both directly and through engagement, organizations may benefit from developing leaders who actively solicit ideas, remain accessible, encourage participation, and respond constructively to employee input. If psychological safety independently

predicts creativity and also contributes to engagement, managers must also pay attention to interpersonal norms surrounding errors, disagreement, feedback, and voice. The benefits of such practices may extend beyond creativity to learning, wellbeing, adaptability, and reduced distress (Ibnis Shaid Bin Abdul et al., 2024; Nejati & Shafaei, 2023). Moreover, the increasing complexity of contemporary workplaces suggests that leadership effectiveness cannot be separated from employees' psychological experience of the work environment (Sekiguchi & Cuyper, 2022). For organizations seeking continuous improvement and creative development, inclusive leadership and psychological safety may therefore represent complementary organizational resources whose effects are strengthened when employees are highly engaged.

Accordingly, the aim of the present study was to predict employee creativity based on inclusive leadership and psychological safety and to examine the mediating role of work engagement among employees working in Canada.

2 Methods and Materials

The present study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational research design to investigate the relationships among inclusive leadership, psychological safety, work engagement, and employee creativity, with particular emphasis on the mediating role of work engagement in the associations between inclusive leadership and psychological safety as predictor variables and employee creativity as the outcome variable. The study population consisted of employees working in public and private organizations in Canada during 2026. Participants were recruited from organizations operating in a range of occupational sectors, including administrative services, education, healthcare, financial and professional services, information technology, retail, and other service-based industries. This diversity was considered appropriate because the principal constructs examined in the study, particularly leadership behavior, psychological safety, work engagement, and workplace creativity, are relevant across a broad range of organizational contexts. A total of 347 individuals initially accessed the study questionnaire. After screening the returned questionnaires for completeness, response consistency, and eligibility, 35 cases were excluded because of substantial missing data, failure to meet the inclusion criteria, or patterned and incomplete responses. The final analytical sample therefore consisted of exactly 312 employees.

Participants were eligible for inclusion if they were at least 18 years of age, were currently employed in Canada on either a full-time or part-time basis, had worked in their current organization for at least six months, and reported to an identifiable immediate supervisor or manager. The minimum organizational tenure criterion was applied to ensure that participants had sufficient experience with their workplace environment and direct supervisor to provide meaningful evaluations of inclusive leadership and psychological safety. Employees who were self-employed, independent contractors without an identifiable organizational supervisor, interns with less than six months of organizational experience, or individuals who were not actively employed at the time of data collection were excluded from the study. Participants were recruited using a combination of convenience and purposive sampling through professional networks, organizational contacts, online professional communities, and electronic distribution of the study invitation. Before participation, respondents were provided with information concerning the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality of responses, and their right to discontinue participation without penalty. Electronic informed consent was obtained before access to the questionnaire was granted. No personally identifying information was included in the analytical dataset, and responses were used exclusively for research purposes.

Data collection was conducted through a secure online survey platform. Participants first completed demographic and occupational questions, including age, gender, educational level, employment status, organizational tenure, occupational sector, and managerial status, followed by the standardized measures of inclusive leadership, psychological safety, work engagement, and employee creativity. To reduce potential order-related response bias, the instructions emphasized that there were no correct or incorrect responses and requested that participants respond according to their actual workplace experiences. The study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles for research involving human participants, including voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, and secure management of research data.

Inclusive leadership was assessed using the Inclusive Leadership Scale developed by Carmeli, Reiter-Palmon, and Ziv. The instrument consists of nine items designed to assess employees' perceptions of the extent to which their immediate leader demonstrates openness, accessibility, and

availability in interactions with employees. The scale reflects three closely related dimensions of inclusive leadership: leader openness to employees' ideas and input, leader accessibility when employees need consultation or assistance, and leader availability for professional discussion and problem solving. Items assess behaviors such as the leader being open to hearing new ideas, being available for consultation, and encouraging employees to approach them regarding workplace issues. Responses were recorded using a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1, indicating strong disagreement, to 5, indicating strong agreement. A total inclusive leadership score was calculated by averaging responses across the nine items, with higher scores indicating stronger perceptions of inclusive leadership. Previous organizational research has demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency and construct validity for this instrument. Internal consistency was reassessed in the present sample using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability before the structural analyses were conducted.

Psychological safety was measured using Edmondson's seven-item Psychological Safety Scale, which evaluates the degree to which employees perceive their work environment as interpersonally safe for taking risks, expressing concerns, admitting mistakes, requesting assistance, and presenting ideas without fear of humiliation, rejection, or negative interpersonal consequences. The scale captures employees' shared perceptions regarding whether interpersonal openness and candor are accepted within the workplace. Several items are negatively phrased and were reverse-scored before computation of the total score. Participants indicated their level of agreement with each statement using a five-point Likert-type response format ranging from 1, strongly disagree, to 5, strongly agree. Following reverse scoring where required, item scores were averaged to obtain an overall psychological safety score. Higher scores represented stronger perceptions of psychological safety in the workplace. Because psychological safety constitutes a central mechanism through which employees may feel sufficiently secure to invest cognitive and emotional resources in their work and propose novel ideas, the construct was treated as an independent predictor of work engagement and employee creativity in the hypothesized model.

Work engagement was assessed using the nine-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, commonly referred to as the UWES-9. The UWES-9 conceptualizes work engagement as a positive and fulfilling work-related psychological state characterized by vigor, dedication, and

absorption. Vigor reflects high levels of energy, persistence, and mental resilience while working; dedication represents enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, significance, and strong involvement in one's work; and absorption refers to being fully concentrated and deeply immersed in work activities. The instrument contains three items representing each dimension. Participants responded to the items using a seven-point frequency scale ranging from 0, never, to 6, always or every day. Although the three dimensions can be examined separately, the present study used the overall work engagement score because the hypothesized mediation model conceptualized engagement as a global motivational state linking employees' perceptions of their leadership and interpersonal work environment to creative performance. The overall score was calculated as the mean of the nine items, with higher scores indicating greater work engagement. The UWES-9 has been extensively applied in organizational research and has demonstrated satisfactory reliability and factorial validity across occupational and cultural contexts.

Employee creativity was assessed using the 13-item Employee Creativity Scale developed by Zhou and George. This instrument measures the extent to which employees perceive themselves as generating novel and useful ideas, developing new approaches to workplace problems, suggesting new ways of improving work processes, and demonstrating creativity in carrying out their job responsibilities. Items address behaviors such as searching for new technologies, processes, techniques, or product ideas; generating creative solutions to problems; suggesting innovative methods for achieving goals; and developing practical new ideas that contribute to organizational performance. Participants rated each statement on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1, strongly disagree, to 5, strongly agree. Item responses were averaged to generate an overall employee creativity score, with higher scores reflecting greater self-reported workplace creativity. Although creativity may also be evaluated through supervisor ratings, a self-report assessment was considered appropriate for the present cross-sectional model because the study focused on employees' perceptions of their leadership environment, psychological experiences, motivational engagement, and creative workplace behaviors. The reliability of the creativity scale was examined using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability in the current sample.

A demographic and occupational information form was also included to characterize the sample and identify

variables that could potentially influence the primary study relationships. The form collected information regarding participants' age, gender, educational attainment, employment status, organizational tenure, occupational sector, and whether they held a supervisory or managerial position. Prior to hypothesis testing, all multi-item measures were examined for missing responses, internal consistency, distributional characteristics, and inter-item relationships. Negatively worded items were reverse-coded according to the scoring instructions for their respective instruments before scale scores were calculated.

Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics and AMOS. Before testing the hypothesized relationships, the dataset was screened for accuracy, missing values, univariate and multivariate outliers, and violations of the assumptions underlying multivariate statistical analysis. Cases containing substantial missing information were excluded during the initial screening stage. For retained cases with minimal missing responses, the pattern and extent of missingness were evaluated before appropriate treatment. Univariate normality was examined through skewness and kurtosis statistics, histograms, and standardized values, while multivariate outliers were assessed using Mahalanobis distance. The linearity and homoscedasticity of relationships among continuous variables were examined through scatterplots and residual diagnostics. Potential multicollinearity among predictor variables was evaluated using tolerance statistics and variance inflation factors, with tolerance values greater than .10 and variance inflation factor values below 5.00 considered indicative of an acceptable level of collinearity.

Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, minimum and maximum values, frequencies, and percentages, were calculated as appropriate to describe the demographic characteristics of the participants and the distributions of the principal study variables. The internal consistency of each measurement instrument was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, with coefficients of .70 or higher interpreted as indicating satisfactory reliability. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were subsequently calculated to determine the magnitude and direction of the bivariate relationships among inclusive leadership, psychological safety, work engagement, and employee creativity. Statistical significance was evaluated using a two-tailed alpha level of .05.

The hypothesized mediation model was evaluated using structural equation modeling. Before testing the structural relationships, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to

assess the adequacy of the measurement model and determine whether inclusive leadership, psychological safety, work engagement, and employee creativity represented empirically distinguishable latent constructs. Model adequacy was evaluated using multiple fit indices rather than relying exclusively on the chi-square statistic because chi-square is sensitive to sample size. The indices considered included the chi-square to degrees-of-freedom ratio, comparative fit index, Tucker-Lewis index, incremental fit index, root mean square error of approximation, and standardized root mean square residual. Values of χ^2/df below 3.00, CFI, TLI, and IFI values of approximately .90 or higher, RMSEA values below .08, and SRMR values below .08 were considered indicative of an acceptable model fit. Standardized factor loadings were examined to evaluate indicator adequacy, while composite reliability and average variance extracted were used to assess construct reliability and convergent validity. Composite reliability values above .70 and average variance extracted values approaching or exceeding .50 were considered evidence of adequate measurement quality.

Following confirmation of the measurement model, the structural model was estimated to examine both direct and indirect relationships among the study variables. Inclusive leadership and psychological safety were specified as exogenous predictor variables, work engagement was specified as the mediating variable, and employee creativity was specified as the endogenous outcome variable. Direct paths were estimated from inclusive leadership and psychological safety to work engagement, from work engagement to employee creativity, and from both inclusive leadership and psychological safety directly to employee creativity. This specification made it possible to determine whether work engagement partially or fully mediated the relationships between the two workplace predictors and employee creativity. Standardized path coefficients, standard errors, critical ratios, significance levels, and coefficients of determination were examined to evaluate the magnitude and statistical significance of the proposed relationships.

The statistical significance of the indirect effects was evaluated using bias-corrected bootstrap estimation with 5,000 resamples and 95% confidence intervals. An indirect effect was considered statistically significant when its bootstrap confidence interval did not include zero. Separate indirect effects were estimated for the pathway from inclusive leadership to employee creativity through work

engagement and for the pathway from psychological safety to employee creativity through work engagement. The corresponding direct effects were retained in the model to determine the nature of mediation. Mediation was interpreted as partial when both the indirect effect through work engagement and the remaining direct effect on employee creativity were statistically significant, whereas mediation was interpreted as full when the indirect effect was statistically significant but the corresponding direct effect became statistically nonsignificant after inclusion of the mediator. All inferential tests were conducted at a significance level of $p < .05$, and standardized estimates were used to facilitate interpretation and comparison of the relative strength of the relationships included in the final structural model.

3 Findings and Results

The final sample consisted of 312 employees working in public and private organizations in Canada. Participants ranged in age from 21 to 61 years, with a mean age of 37.42 years ($SD = 9.18$). Of the participants, 168 (53.85%) identified as women, 139 (44.55%) identified as men, and 5 (1.60%) identified as non-binary or preferred another gender designation. Regarding educational attainment, 38 participants (12.18%) had completed high school or an equivalent qualification, 74 (23.72%) held a college diploma or associate-level qualification, 123 (39.42%) held a bachelor's degree, and 77 (24.68%) held a master's or doctoral degree. In terms of employment status, 268 participants (85.90%) were employed full-time and 44 (14.10%) were employed part-time. Organizational tenure ranged from 6 months to 27 years, with a mean of 6.84 years ($SD = 5.43$). With respect to occupational sector, 62 participants (19.87%) worked in administrative and professional services, 49 (15.71%) in education, 46 (14.74%) in healthcare, 44 (14.10%) in financial and business services, 41 (13.14%) in information technology, 36 (11.54%) in retail or customer services, and 34 (10.90%) in other occupational sectors. A total of 72 participants (23.08%) reported holding a supervisory or managerial position, whereas 240 (76.92%) were employed in non-managerial positions. These characteristics indicated that the sample represented a heterogeneous group of Canadian employees with variation in age, educational background, tenure, employment status, and occupational context.

Table 1*Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Inclusive Leadership, Psychological Safety, Work Engagement, and Employee Creativity*

Variable	M	SD	Minimum	Maximum	Skewness	Kurtosis	1	2	3	4
1. Inclusive leadership	3.72	0.67	1.56	5.00	-0.41	-0.18	1.00			
2. Psychological safety	3.65	0.61	1.71	5.00	-0.36	0.12	.58***	1.00		
3. Work engagement	4.21	0.89	1.11	6.00	-0.29	-0.31	.49***	.54***	1.00	
4. Employee creativity	3.79	0.59	1.85	5.00	-0.33	0.08	.46***	.51***	.63***	1.00

As presented in Table 1, the mean scores for all four principal constructs were above the midpoint of their respective response scales, indicating generally favorable perceptions of leadership inclusiveness, psychological safety, work engagement, and creative behavior among the participating employees. Inclusive leadership had a mean of 3.72 (SD = 0.67), while psychological safety had a mean of 3.65 (SD = 0.61). The mean work engagement score was 4.21 (SD = 0.89) on the seven-point response scale, and the mean employee creativity score was 3.79 (SD = 0.59). Skewness values ranged from -0.41 to -0.29 and kurtosis values ranged from -0.31 to 0.12, suggesting no substantial deviation from univariate normality. All bivariate correlations were positive and statistically significant at $p <$

.001. Inclusive leadership was moderately and positively correlated with psychological safety ($r = .58$), work engagement ($r = .49$), and employee creativity ($r = .46$). Psychological safety was also positively correlated with work engagement ($r = .54$) and employee creativity ($r = .51$). The strongest bivariate relationship was observed between work engagement and employee creativity ($r = .63$), indicating that employees who reported greater energy, dedication, and absorption in their work also tended to report higher levels of creative workplace behavior. None of the correlations exceeded .80, providing preliminary evidence that excessive multicollinearity was unlikely and that the constructs were sufficiently distinct for subsequent multivariate analysis.

Table 2*Reliability, Convergent Validity, and Measurement Model Statistics*

Construct	Number of Items	Standardized Loading Range	Cronbach's α	Composite Reliability	AVE
Inclusive leadership	9	.68–.86	.91	.92	.57
Psychological safety	7	.62–.82	.87	.88	.52
Work engagement	9	.66–.85	.90	.91	.54
Employee creativity	13	.64–.84	.93	.93	.51

Table 2 presents the results of the reliability and measurement model assessment. All four scales demonstrated satisfactory to excellent internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from .87 for psychological safety to .93 for employee creativity, exceeding the conventional .70 criterion. Composite reliability coefficients similarly ranged from .88 to .93, supporting the reliability of the latent constructs. Standardized factor loadings were statistically significant and ranged from .62 to .86 across all indicators, indicating that each item contributed meaningfully to its intended latent factor. Average variance extracted values were .57 for inclusive leadership, .52 for psychological safety, .54 for work engagement, and .51 for employee creativity, all exceeding the commonly recommended .50 threshold and

therefore supporting convergent validity. The four-factor confirmatory factor analysis also demonstrated a satisfactory fit to the observed data. The chi-square to degrees-of-freedom ratio was 1.42, which was below the recommended upper limit of 3.00. The comparative fit index and incremental fit index were both .95, while the Tucker-Lewis index was .94. The RMSEA was .037 with a 90% confidence interval ranging from .030 to .043, and the SRMR was .046. Collectively, these values indicated a good-fitting measurement model and supported the empirical distinctiveness of inclusive leadership, psychological safety, work engagement, and employee creativity. The adequacy of both reliability and construct validity justified proceeding to the structural model and mediation analyses.

Table 3*Direct Effects in the Structural Model*

Structural Path	B	SE	β	Critical Ratio	p
Inclusive leadership → Work engagement	0.38	0.07	.31	5.43	< .001
Psychological safety → Work engagement	0.51	0.08	.39	6.38	< .001
Inclusive leadership → Employee creativity	0.14	0.05	.16	2.80	.005
Psychological safety → Employee creativity	0.18	0.06	.20	3.00	.003
Work engagement → Employee creativity	0.31	0.04	.46	7.75	< .001

As shown in Table 3, all hypothesized direct paths in the structural model were positive and statistically significant. Inclusive leadership had a significant positive effect on work engagement ($B = 0.38$, $SE = 0.07$, $\beta = .31$, $p < .001$), indicating that employees who perceived their leaders as more open, accessible, and available tended to report stronger engagement with their work. Psychological safety also had a significant positive effect on work engagement ($B = 0.51$, $SE = 0.08$, $\beta = .39$, $p < .001$), and its standardized effect was somewhat stronger than that of inclusive leadership. Together, inclusive leadership and psychological safety explained 39% of the variance in work engagement, demonstrating that both leadership behavior and the interpersonal climate of the workplace represented substantial predictors of employee motivational involvement.

The direct effects on employee creativity were also statistically significant. Inclusive leadership positively predicted employee creativity ($B = 0.14$, $SE = 0.05$, $\beta = .16$,

$p = .005$), suggesting that employees working under more inclusive leaders were more likely to report generating and implementing novel and useful ideas. Psychological safety had a significant positive direct effect on employee creativity as well ($B = 0.18$, $SE = 0.06$, $\beta = .20$, $p = .003$), indicating that a work environment in which employees felt safe to speak up, take interpersonal risks, ask questions, and express unconventional ideas was associated with greater creative behavior. Work engagement demonstrated the strongest direct effect on employee creativity ($B = 0.31$, $SE = 0.04$, $\beta = .46$, $p < .001$), showing that employees who experienced greater vigor, dedication, and absorption in their jobs were substantially more likely to engage in creative workplace behavior. The predictors jointly explained 52% of the variance in employee creativity, representing a substantial proportion of explained variance. The structural model demonstrated good overall fit, with $\chi^2/df = 1.44$, CFI = .95, TLI = .94, IFI = .95, RMSEA = .038, and SRMR = .049, supporting the adequacy of the proposed theoretical model.

Table 4*Bootstrap Analysis of Indirect, Direct, and Total Effects on Employee Creativity*

Predictor	Effect Type	Standardized Effect	Boot SE	95% Lower CI	95% Upper CI	p
Inclusive leadership	Direct effect	.16	.06	.05	.27	.005
Inclusive leadership	Indirect effect through work engagement	.14	.03	.09	.21	< .001
Inclusive leadership	Total effect	.30	.05	.21	.40	< .001
Psychological safety	Direct effect	.20	.06	.08	.31	.003
Psychological safety	Indirect effect through work engagement	.18	.04	.11	.26	< .001
Psychological safety	Total effect	.38	.05	.28	.48	< .001

The mediation analysis presented in Table 4 demonstrated that work engagement significantly mediated the relationships of both inclusive leadership and psychological safety with employee creativity. The standardized indirect effect of inclusive leadership on employee creativity through work engagement was .14, and the 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval ranged from .09 to .21. Because this interval did not include zero, the indirect effect was statistically significant at $p < .001$. At

the same time, the direct effect of inclusive leadership on employee creativity remained statistically significant ($\beta = .16$, $p = .005$). These results indicate partial mediation, meaning that inclusive leadership influenced employee creativity both directly and indirectly through its positive association with work engagement. The total standardized effect of inclusive leadership on employee creativity was .30, indicating that the combined direct and mediated

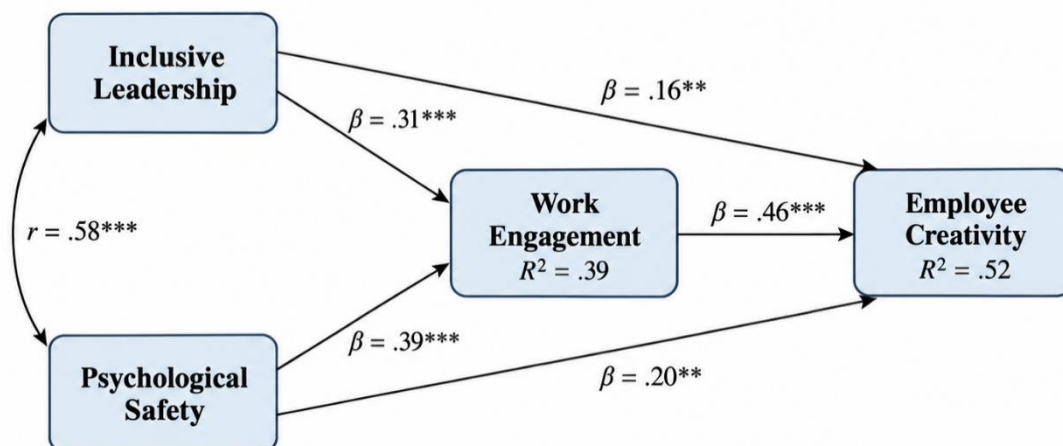
influence of inclusive leadership was substantively meaningful.

A similar pattern emerged for psychological safety. The standardized indirect effect of psychological safety on employee creativity through work engagement was .18, with a 95% bootstrap confidence interval ranging from .11 to .26. The confidence interval excluded zero, demonstrating a statistically significant mediation effect at $p < .001$. The direct effect of psychological safety on employee creativity also remained statistically significant after work engagement was incorporated into the model ($\beta = .20$, $p = .003$). Therefore, work engagement partially mediated the relationship between psychological safety and employee

creativity. The total standardized effect of psychological safety on employee creativity was .38, which was larger than the total effect observed for inclusive leadership. This finding suggests that psychological safety had both a direct contribution to creative behavior and an additional indirect contribution by promoting a more engaged psychological state among employees. Overall, the mediation findings supported the proposed mechanism whereby favorable leadership and interpersonal workplace conditions contribute to employee creativity partly because they increase employees' willingness to invest their physical, cognitive, and emotional resources in their work roles.

Figure 1

Structural Model of the Relationships Among Inclusive Leadership, Psychological Safety, Work Engagement, and Employee Creativity



The overall structural pattern provided consistent support for the proposed conceptual framework. Inclusive leadership and psychological safety were both positively associated with work engagement, and all three variables contributed positively to employee creativity. Work engagement emerged as the strongest proximal predictor of employee creativity and served as a statistically significant partial mediator in both hypothesized indirect pathways. The results therefore suggest that inclusive leadership and psychological safety do not operate solely through direct effects on creative behavior. Rather, part of their influence occurs through the motivational process represented by work engagement. Employees who perceived greater openness and support from their leaders and who experienced stronger interpersonal safety appeared more likely to become psychologically invested in their jobs, and this heightened engagement was subsequently associated with greater generation and expression of creative ideas. The persistence

of statistically significant direct effects after inclusion of the mediator further indicated that other mechanisms beyond work engagement may also contribute to the relationships between the organizational predictors and employee creativity.

4 Discussion

The present study investigated the prediction of employee creativity based on inclusive leadership and psychological safety, with particular emphasis on the mediating role of work engagement among employees working in Canada. The findings provided overall support for the proposed model. Inclusive leadership was positively associated with work engagement and employee creativity, psychological safety positively predicted both work engagement and employee creativity, and work engagement emerged as the strongest direct predictor of employee creativity. In addition,

work engagement significantly mediated the relationships of both inclusive leadership and psychological safety with employee creativity. Because the direct effects of inclusive leadership and psychological safety on employee creativity remained statistically significant after the mediator was introduced, the mediation effects were partial rather than complete. Collectively, these findings suggest that employee creativity is shaped not only by supportive leadership and a psychologically safe work environment but also by the degree to which employees become cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally invested in their work.

The first major finding was that inclusive leadership significantly and positively predicted work engagement. Employees who perceived their leaders as open, accessible, available, and receptive to employee contributions reported greater vigor, dedication, and absorption in their work. This finding is consistent with previous research showing that inclusive leadership can promote stronger employee involvement by creating relational conditions characterized by support, participation, respect, and leader responsiveness. Siyal found that inclusive leadership was positively related to work engagement across organizational contexts and emphasized the importance of psychological safety and trust in the leader as mechanisms supporting this relationship (Siyal, 2023). Similarly, Vakira and colleagues demonstrated that inclusive leadership enhanced employee engagement in the hospitality industry, with psychological safety playing a mediating role in this process (Vakira et al., 2022). Parku and colleagues also reported that inclusive leadership could protect employee engagement under stressful working conditions and in situations involving psychological contract breach (Parku et al., 2023). The present results therefore extend a consistent line of evidence suggesting that employees are more likely to invest substantial energy and attention in their work when leaders communicate openness and recognition rather than distance, exclusion, or interpersonal threat.

The relationship between inclusive leadership and work engagement can be explained by the relational resources generated through inclusive leader behavior. Employees are more likely to become engaged when they perceive that their contributions matter, that their perspectives are taken seriously, and that they can approach leaders when assistance or clarification is needed. Inclusive leadership can reduce uncertainty surrounding interpersonal interactions and improve employees' sense of belonging within the organizational environment. Such conditions may enhance willingness to devote personal resources to work tasks

because employees experience lower relational risk and stronger expectations that their effort will be acknowledged. This interpretation is consistent with research showing that inclusive leadership contributes to organizational learning behavior through openness, participation, and the exchange of knowledge (Nejati & Shafaei, 2023). It is also compatible with evidence from hybrid workplaces indicating that inclusive leadership and work engagement contribute to adaptive employee functioning under changing work conditions (Katsaros, 2025). Thus, inclusive leadership may support work engagement because it strengthens the psychological conditions under which employees can become actively and meaningfully involved in organizational life.

The second major finding was that psychological safety had a significant positive effect on work engagement. Employees who felt able to speak openly, acknowledge mistakes, request assistance, question existing practices, and express alternative perspectives without fear of negative interpersonal consequences were more engaged in their work. This result is consistent with research showing that psychological safety is an important pathway through which constructive leadership contributes to employee involvement and positive work-related functioning. Kyambade and colleagues found that psychological safety mediated the relationship between socially responsible leadership and job engagement, indicating that employees become more engaged when leadership practices create an environment in which interpersonal risk is reduced (Kyambade et al., 2024). Vakira and colleagues likewise demonstrated that psychological safety played an important role in translating inclusive leadership into employee engagement (Vakira et al., 2022). The findings of Siyal further support this interpretation by demonstrating that psychological safety is closely connected to engagement in the context of inclusive leadership (Siyal, 2023).

Psychological safety may strengthen engagement because employees working in safe environments devote fewer psychological resources to self-protection, impression management, and avoidance. When employees fear criticism or punishment, cognitive attention may be directed toward controlling what they say, concealing uncertainty, or avoiding mistakes rather than fully engaging with their tasks. By contrast, psychologically safe environments allow employees to invest more energy in learning, experimentation, collaboration, and problem solving. Evidence that psychological safety mediates relationships between constructive leadership and employee outcomes in

Japanese organizations further indicates that interpersonal safety can function as an important psychological resource within work settings (Matsuo et al., 2024). The relationship observed in the present study is therefore theoretically plausible because engagement is likely to emerge when employees feel sufficiently secure to dedicate themselves to work without excessive concern about interpersonal repercussions.

Another important result was the significant direct relationship between inclusive leadership and employee creativity. Even after accounting for work engagement, inclusive leadership continued to predict higher creativity. This finding is consistent with a growing body of research demonstrating that inclusive leadership can encourage employees to generate, articulate, and develop novel ideas. Fu and colleagues found that inclusive leadership fostered employee creativity in the healthcare sector, with psychological safety serving as an important explanatory mechanism (Fu et al., 2022). Li and Tang similarly demonstrated that inclusive leadership contributed to innovative performance through psychological safety at multiple levels of analysis (Li & Tang, 2022). Wu and Li reported that inclusive leadership could facilitate innovative behavior by reducing relational silence, thereby increasing employees' willingness to express ideas rather than withholding them (Wu & Li, 2023). More recently, Mehmood and colleagues showed that inclusive leadership was associated with creative self-efficacy and challenge-oriented organizational citizenship behavior, indicating that inclusive leaders can strengthen both confidence in creative capability and willingness to constructively challenge established practices (Mehmood et al., 2025).

The direct influence of inclusive leadership on creativity may be explained by the informational and interpersonal opportunities created by inclusive leaders. Creativity often requires employees to combine diverse perspectives, question routines, seek information, and communicate ideas that may initially appear uncertain or unconventional. Leaders who actively invite employee input can increase opportunities for such behaviors and signal that proposing alternatives is legitimate. Inclusive leadership can also facilitate knowledge exchange and reduce hierarchical barriers that otherwise restrict communication. Findings from organizational learning research indicate that inclusive leadership supports learning-related behavior, which is closely connected to experimentation and idea development (Nejati & Shafaei, 2023). Evidence from fintech organizations also suggests that the practical implementation

of inclusive leadership principles can shape whether employees experience meaningful participation and inclusion in organizational decision-making (Budreikaite et al., 2024). The present findings therefore suggest that inclusive leadership contributes to creativity not only indirectly by motivating employees but also directly by creating an interactional environment favorable to idea generation and expression.

The positive relationship between psychological safety and employee creativity was another central finding. Employees who perceived a higher level of psychological safety reported greater creative behavior, even after work engagement was included in the structural model. This result aligns strongly with previous studies emphasizing that creativity and innovation require interpersonal risk-taking. Fu and colleagues demonstrated that psychological safety was an important mechanism connecting inclusive leadership to employee creativity (Fu et al., 2022). Chen and colleagues found that psychological safety contributed to innovative behavior among physical education teachers in the context of moral leadership (Chen et al., 2022). Similarly, Mo and colleagues reported that psychological safety formed part of the sequential process through which inclusive leadership influenced teachers' innovative behavior (Mo et al., 2023). These studies support the present finding that employees are more willing to engage in creative behavior when they believe that experimentation, questioning, and unconventional contributions will not result in interpersonal punishment.

The relationship between psychological safety and creativity can be understood in terms of the uncertainty inherent in creative work. Novel ideas are not guaranteed to succeed, and employees who introduce them expose themselves to evaluation by supervisors and colleagues. In an unsafe environment, employees may therefore choose conformity over originality because withholding an idea carries fewer immediate interpersonal risks than proposing one that might be criticized. Psychological safety changes this calculation by reducing the anticipated social cost of experimentation. Research examining leadership and psychological safety has emphasized that leader behavior is central to creating such conditions (Forte et al., 2024). More broadly, studies examining leadership and innovation show that supportive leadership styles facilitate innovative behavior partly through psychological processes that encourage employees to express themselves and take initiative (Malodia & Goyal, 2023; Patel & Bakari, 2022). The present results reinforce the view that psychological

safety is not merely a wellbeing variable but a critical condition for the expression of creativity.

Work engagement was the strongest direct predictor of employee creativity in the model. This finding indicates that employees who were more vigorous, dedicated, and absorbed in their work were substantially more likely to report creative behavior. The strength of this relationship is theoretically meaningful because creativity requires sustained cognitive and motivational investment. Employees must notice problems, generate alternatives, refine ideas, tolerate uncertainty, and often persist despite initial resistance or failure. Highly engaged employees are more likely to possess the motivational intensity required for these processes. The result is consistent with research demonstrating that engagement can translate favorable leadership conditions into innovative behavior. AlMunthiri and colleagues found that work engagement played a key role in explaining how inclusive leadership promotes innovative behaviors, alongside psychological safety (AlMunthiri et al., 2024). Research concerning younger employees in hybrid workplaces has also linked creativity and work engagement to adaptive performance, highlighting the importance of engagement in dynamic organizational environments (Katsaros, 2025).

The finding that work engagement mediated the relationship between inclusive leadership and employee creativity provides further support for a motivational explanation of leadership effects. Inclusive leadership had both a direct effect on creativity and an indirect effect through engagement. This suggests that inclusive leaders may increase creativity partly by making employees more willing to invest themselves in their work. The partial nature of mediation is important because it indicates that engagement does not fully account for the relationship. Inclusive leadership may also influence creativity through other mechanisms such as psychological safety, creative self-efficacy, trust, learning behavior, voice, or reduced relational silence. Previous research supports several of these possibilities. Mehmood and colleagues identified creative self-efficacy as an important outcome of inclusive leadership (Mehmood et al., 2025), while Wu and Li emphasized relational silence as a mechanism linking inclusive leadership with innovative behavior (Wu & Li, 2023). Zhao and Ren further demonstrated that inclusive leadership interacts with inclusive human resource practices and psychological fit mechanisms in explaining employee creativity (Zhao & Ren, 2025). The present findings therefore position work engagement as one important, but

not exclusive, mechanism through which inclusive leadership contributes to creativity.

Work engagement also significantly mediated the relationship between psychological safety and employee creativity. This result suggests that psychological safety promotes creativity partly because employees who feel interpersonally safe become more actively involved in their work. When employees do not need to devote substantial cognitive energy to avoiding embarrassment, concealing uncertainty, or monitoring interpersonal threats, they may redirect those resources toward task involvement, experimentation, and idea development. This interpretation is consistent with evidence that psychological safety enhances engagement under supportive leadership conditions (Kyambade et al., 2024; Siyal, 2023). It is also consistent with research showing that psychological safety operates as an important mechanism linking leadership with innovation-related outcomes (Chen et al., 2022; Li & Tang, 2022). The partial mediation observed in the present study indicates that psychological safety also influences creativity directly, likely because employees who perceive a safer interpersonal environment are more willing to voice novel ideas regardless of their general level of engagement.

The total effects observed in the model showed that psychological safety had a somewhat stronger overall association with employee creativity than inclusive leadership. This finding suggests that while leadership behavior is important, employees' immediate subjective experience of interpersonal safety may be especially consequential for creativity. Inclusive leadership can contribute to this environment, but psychological safety reflects a broader employee perception of whether interpersonal risk-taking is actually acceptable within the workplace. This distinction may explain why psychological safety retained a substantial direct effect. The result is consistent with prior evidence showing that psychological safety plays a central role across multiple leadership models and organizational outcomes (Forte et al., 2024; Matsuo et al., 2024). It also reinforces the importance of examining employees' experienced climate rather than assuming that supportive leader behavior automatically produces safe interpersonal conditions.

The findings should also be considered within the broader literature on leadership and innovation. Contemporary leadership research increasingly emphasizes that no single leadership behavior is sufficient to explain creative or innovative outcomes. Systematic reviews have highlighted the diversity of leadership approaches associated with

innovation and the importance of contextual and psychological mechanisms (Elkhwesky et al., 2022; Guchait et al., 2023). Research on continuous improvement and innovation similarly indicates that leadership effects frequently operate through combinations of mediation and moderation (Nasir et al., 2023). Studies of innovative behavior in multinational organizations have also shown that employee innovation is influenced by integrated individual and organizational factors rather than isolated predictors (Jin et al., 2022). The present results contribute to this literature by demonstrating that inclusive leadership, psychological safety, and work engagement function as a connected system in the prediction of employee creativity.

5 Conclusion

The findings are also consistent with current perspectives emphasizing the importance of inclusive and adaptive forms of leadership in rapidly changing workplaces. Leadership challenges associated with technological change, workforce diversity, hybrid work, and organizational uncertainty require leaders to support participation and responsiveness rather than rely exclusively on authority or control (Sekiguchi & Cuyper, 2022). Research on creative organization development has similarly emphasized the central role of leadership in establishing environments capable of supporting creativity and adaptation (Titrek et al., 2025). The positive effects observed in the present study also correspond with findings showing that inclusive leadership can generate creative outcomes in specialized contexts, including environmentally oriented creativity in sustainable supply chains (Rasheed et al., 2026). In addition, research on organizational fairness, identity, empowerment, and corporate social responsibility demonstrates that creativity is responsive to broader psychological and organizational conditions (Mai et al., 2025). Taken together, these findings suggest that employee creativity is most likely to flourish when organizations integrate inclusive leadership with supportive climates and mechanisms that strengthen employee involvement.

The present study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the cross-sectional design does not permit definitive conclusions regarding causal direction among inclusive leadership, psychological safety, work engagement, and employee creativity. Although the proposed paths were theoretically grounded, reciprocal relationships are possible. For example, highly engaged and creative employees may

evaluate their leaders and work environments more positively. Second, all principal variables were measured using self-report questionnaires, which may increase the possibility of common method variance, social desirability, and perceptual bias. Employee creativity in particular may be assessed differently when evaluated by supervisors, colleagues, or objective innovation indicators. Third, although the sample included employees from different Canadian occupational sectors, the use of convenience and purposive sampling limits population-level generalizability. Employees who voluntarily participated in an online organizational survey may differ from employees who did not participate. Fourth, the study examined work engagement as the principal mediator and did not simultaneously test other potentially relevant mechanisms such as creative self-efficacy, organizational identification, leader trust, knowledge sharing, autonomy, relational silence, or organizational learning. Finally, organizational-level characteristics, including organizational size, industry culture, remote or hybrid work arrangements, team composition, and formal innovation practices, were not modeled as contextual variables and could influence the observed relationships.

Future studies should address these limitations by using longitudinal, time-lagged, or experimental designs capable of clarifying temporal ordering and strengthening causal inference. Researchers could collect inclusive leadership and psychological safety at an initial time point, work engagement at a subsequent time point, and supervisor-rated creativity later in order to reduce common method bias and provide a stronger test of mediation. Multi-source designs incorporating employee, supervisor, and team-level assessments would also be valuable. Future research could examine alternative and sequential mechanisms, including psychological safety followed by work engagement, or compare engagement with creative self-efficacy, trust in leadership, organizational identification, learning behavior, and employee voice. Multilevel models could determine whether team-level inclusive leadership and collective psychological safety exert additional effects beyond individual perceptions. Comparative studies across provinces, industries, public and private organizations, and different national contexts would also clarify the generalizability of the model. Finally, future studies could examine moderators such as hybrid work intensity, organizational tenure, job complexity, autonomy, diversity climate, innovation climate, or generational differences to identify the conditions under which inclusive leadership and

psychological safety have particularly strong or weak effects on creativity.

From a practical perspective, organizations seeking to enhance employee creativity should develop leadership practices that systematically increase inclusion, psychological safety, and engagement rather than treating creativity as an individual trait alone. Leadership development programs should train managers to actively invite employee input, remain accessible for consultation, respond constructively to dissent, acknowledge uncertainty, and demonstrate that differing perspectives are legitimate. Organizations should also establish explicit norms that allow employees to raise concerns, report mistakes, seek help, and propose unconventional ideas without fear of humiliation or retaliation. Managers can strengthen engagement by connecting employees' work to meaningful goals, providing sufficient autonomy, recognizing contributions, ensuring appropriate resources, and creating opportunities for employees to use and develop their capabilities. Team meetings, innovation forums, suggestion systems, and structured reflection practices can be designed so that employee ideas are not only requested but also seriously evaluated and followed up. Human resource systems should reinforce these leadership behaviors through management selection, performance evaluation, leadership training, and employee climate assessments. By simultaneously strengthening inclusive leadership, interpersonal safety, and meaningful work engagement, organizations may create a more sustainable environment for continuous creativity and innovation.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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