Fostering Team Climate Through Inclusive Leadership: The Role of Team Power Distance and Trust in Leadership

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the impact of inclusive leadership on team climate. Drawing on the social exchange theory, this study propose a theoretical model in which (a) inclusive leadership enhances team climate, (b) the moderating effect of team power distance and trust in leadership in the relationship between inclusive leadership and team climate. Based on a survey of 247 employees nested in 59 teams from multiple manufacturing firms in Nigeria, this study found that inclusive leadership has a positive and direct effect on team climate. Also, this study found that (1) team power distance positively influences the relationship between inclusive leadership and team climate; (2) trust in leader positively influences the relationship between inclusive leadership and team climate. The study concludes with a discussion of the theoretical and practical implications of the findings and provides directions for future research.

Track: Leadership and Leadership Development

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Introduction

This study aims to enhance understanding of the relationship between inclusive leadership and team climate in the context of small manufacturing firms. Specifically, this study seeks to advance extant studies by focusing on the role of team power distance and trust in leader in moderating the relationship between inclusive leadership and team climate. Several studies have addressed the impact of leadership, one of the major investigated research areas in organisational behaviour and its pertinent outcomes such as team performance, motivation, and job performance (Eisenbeiss et al., 2008; Kinnunen, Feldt & Mauno, 2016). Moreover, studies examining the impact of leadership on team climate have increased substantially (see Kinnunen et al., 2016; Sharma & Bhatnagar, 2017; Xue, Bradley & Liang, 2011).

A caring team climate is an invaluable setting relevant for increased performance and team creativity (Ali, Wang & Boekhorst, 2021). According to Xue, Bradley and Liang (2010), team climate refers to an "implicit frame that shapes individual perceptions, attitudes and behaviours within the group context" (p. 300). Furthermore, team climate is regarded as a paramount source of collective influence that impacts the behaviour of team members in the workgroup (Xue et al., 2010). Studies on team climate have recognised leadership as one of the critical starting points for innovation (Ali et al., 2021; Xue et al., 2010). A significant characteristic of these extant studies has been the focus on transformational leadership style to examine the effects on team climate (Kinnunen et al., 2016). In contrast, less is known about the relevance of inclusive leadership behaviours, such as openness, availability, and accessibility, which are crucial for team climate. This study proposes that inclusive leaders will promote team climate. Although inclusive leadership has some forms of comparison with transformational leadership, however, inclusive leadership is a distinct construct because inclusive leaders display openness to subordinates, fairness and equality, and encouragement of diverse contributions (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006; Randel et al., 2018: Ye et al., 2019). Furthermore, the capabilities of leaders to ensure that their workgroup feel a sense of inclusion to contribute to the decision-making process foster belongingness and uniqueness among members of the workgroup (Randel et al., 2018). The focus is on inclusive leadership because it is a specific, promising, and participative form of leadership with several positive outcomes (Ye et al., 2019) and is directly conducive to team climate.

To respond to the research gap on the role of inclusive leadership, this current study addresses the following research questions: How does inclusive leadership impact team climate? And what effect does team power distance and trust in leadership have on the relationship between inclusive leadership and team climate? These study's research questions originate from the need to acknowledge that inclusive leadership is a promising leadership style while at the same time seeking to understand better the team processes and mechanisms that emerge from leadership and lead to an effective team climate.

Using a team-level survey (individuals nested in 59 teams) among 247 employees from manufacturing firms in Nigeria, this present study makes several contributions to the inclusive leadership literature. First, by drifting away from the scholastic routine of exploring transformational leadership as a dominant leadership style and its effects on team climate and having as a focal point the role of inclusive leadership on team climate, this current study contributes to advancing the extant studies on the relationship between leadership and team climate. Second, by drawing on the social exchange theory, and introducing team power distance and trust in leadership as moderators in the model, this study addresses the pertinent question of how inclusive leadership is of more importance to organisations. From a research perspective, this study reinforces existing research on inclusive leadership on the relevance of these moderators that can better facilitate our understanding of how these team-level processes lead to an effective team climate. Third, from a practice perspective, this study provides

insights for organisational managers about inclusive leadership behaviours that show a clear indication that innovative ideas are welcomed and recognised, which would help establish a supportive team climate that is favourably disposed towards creative activities.

The paper is organised as follows. First, the review of the literature and discussion of the theoretical background. Secondly, the study hypothesises the impact of inclusive leadership on team climate and the role of team power distance and trust in leadership in moderating the relationship between inclusive leadership and team climate. Thirdly, the study discusses the research methods, including data collection, measurement, and data analysis. Finally, the paper ends with a conclusion, theoretical and practical implications, and limitations and recommendations for future research.

Theoretical framework

Social exchange theory
According to the social exchange theory (SET), the good treatment exhibited by supervisors towards subordinates creates an obligation to return the goodwill (Yasin et al., 2023). Leaders and their employees engage in exchange activities as leaders ensure that suitable measures are in place to guide their employees to act in accordance with the job regulations and employees gain satisfaction by conforming to the favoured leadership style (Yuan et al., 2022). When leaders base their social relationships with employees on mutual trust and motivation, employees reciprocate the actions of their leaders by being committed to the organisation and delivering its objectives (Ma & Tang, 2022). The supportive environment created by inclusive leaders to appreciate employees' contributions to the workgroup demonstrates that a reciprocal relationship at the team level will be distinct according to the diversity of team members. Extant research has affirmed the relevance of the social exchange theory as a theoretical framework to explain the positive impact of inclusive leadership and team creativity (Choi et al., 2015; Ma & Tang, 2022; Randel et al., 2016; Siyal et al., 2021). Hence, social exchange theory constitutes the theoretical foundation of this study.

Inclusive leadership and team climate

Inclusive leadership, introduced by Nembhard and Edmondson (2006), refers to "words and deeds exhibited by a leader or leaders that indicate an invitation and appreciation for others' contributions" (p. 947). The inclusive leadership literature indicate that inclusive leadership is invaluable in fostering belongingness and uniqueness in the workplace (Randel et al., 2018). Inclusive leadership recognises the differences in opinions of team members in a workgroup and encourages distinct contributions of team members and the exchange of diverse ideas. (Ashikali, Groeneveld & Kuipers, 2021; Randel et al., 2018). Inclusive leadership is distinct from other leadership styles notably, transformational leadership (Ashikali et al., 2021; Ye et al., 2019) because inclusive leaders display openness, accessibility, and availability in their relationship with their subordinates (Jia et al., 2022; Ye et al., 2019). Furthermore, inclusive leaders' capacity to discuss work-related problems with their workers enriches job processes and provide the opportunities to develop new ideas to solve organisational problems (Jia et al., 2022). The positive outcomes of inclusive leadership has been discussed in previous studies including team innovation (Ye et al., 2019), team creativity (Jia et al., 2022), and innovative work behaviour (Javed et al., 2019a; Javed et al., 2019b).

Leadership and team climate have been examined in previous studies, and organisational leadership have been suggested as an important element that influences the perception of climate in organisations (Gil et al., 2005). Team climate is commonly regarded as the normal way that team members describe their team in their organisation (Sun, Xu & Shang, 2014). According to Kinnunen, Feldt & Mauno (2016), team climate refers to "an

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individual's perceptions of his/her proximal work environment" (p. 332). Anderson and West (1998) defined team climate using the following four factor model: vision, participative safety, task orientation, and support for innovation. Vision refers to work groups having plain and attainable objectives that they focus on. Participative safety refers to active participation in work groups relationships and interactions in a climate that is non-threatening. Task orientation refers to a total commitment to excellence in task performance; and support for innovation refers to the "expectation, approval and practical support of attempts to introduce new and improved ways of doing things in the work environment" (West, 1990, p. 38).

Based on distinctive influence of organisational leaders, team members can be made to have explicit understanding of team climate (Sun et al., 2014). Because inclusive leaders maintain a good relationship with their team members, are interested in their welfare, and are available to involve team members in decision-making, and provide the avenue for team autonomy, they are empowering their employees to commit to the task and influence team climate. Leader behaviours help to perpetuate a positive organisational work climate and "a positive climate is reinforced as followers begin to adopt the organization's values, internalizing them as their own" (Kinnunen et al., 2016, p. 333). The features of inclusive leadership behaviours are demonstrated in the four major dimensions of team climate namely; vision, participative safety, task orientation and support for innovation. Therefore, taken together, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Inclusive leadership is positively related to team climate.

The moderating role of team power distance

Power distance is a cultural value concept because the imbalance of status, power, and authority is an intrinsic part of the organisational environment (Cole, Carter & Zhang, 2013). Power distance refers to the extent to which individuals may differ in accepting the legitimacy of unequal distribution of power (Cole et al., 2013; Hu & Judge, 2017). The concept of power distance by Hofstede (1980) focuses on the societal level (Hu et al., 2017), however, studies examining power distance have been tested at other levels of analysis such as individual and teams (Cole et al., 2013; Hu et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2018).

Team power distance has been defined as shared preferences of team members "regarding the degree to which their leader's directives should be respected and shown deference" (Cole, Carter & Zhang, 2013, p. 963). Team power distance does not elucidate on authoritative or submissive behaviours, rather, it focuses on the essential perceptions of leaders' behaviours and the reactions of employees or subordinates (Cole et al., 2013; Hu & Judge, 2017). Additionally, when team members value power distance, there will be an increase in the power distance of the team (Liu et al., 2018). According to Hu and Judge (2017), there is an increased emphasis on leader agency in teams with high-power distance as they envisage their leaders to issue explicit instructions to them, whereas teams with low team power distance display little agentic inclinations as they would rather have leaders collaborate with them, involve them in decision-making, and power sharing.

The study anticipates that team power distance will shape the perception of inclusive leadership behaviours of their leaders and impact on team climate. First, inclusive leaders create an open atmosphere for the exchange of ideas in work teams which brings about confidence and autonomy in work tasks. Second, high power distance team leaders are prone to engaging in autocratic behaviours which reduces communication in the team, intolerance for disagreement and criticism from subordinates which may be seen as disobedience. Third, high power distance team leaders feel that their subordinates are obliged to readily act in accordance with their instructions which will not create an avenue for participation in decision-making

(Cole et al., 2013). On the other hand, low power distance team leaders encourage participation in decision-making from their team members and ensure fair treatment of every team member. A high team power distance creates the impression that the team leader is dominant and expected to provide strong leadership (Hu et al., 2017). In this situations, inclusive leaders with a moderate outlook and are desirous of welcoming contributions from team members might face uncertainty because team members may feel uneasy when they are approached to discuss work issues and propose work ideas.

Fourth, a high team power distance orientation may view inclusive leadership as not ideal, thus incapacitating the impact of inclusive leadership on team climate. Contrastingly, when work teams possess low team power distance orientation, there is a great desire to participate in power sharing. Therefore, the argument is that inclusive leaders are well-suited to engage team members with low team power distance because of their affinity for contribution to the team's task and initiating new ideas. Taken together, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: The positive direct relationship between inclusive leadership and team climate is moderated by team power distance, such that the positive relationship is stronger when team power distance orientation is low than when team power distance orientation is high.

The moderating role of trust in leadership

According to Ötken & Cenkci (2012), trust is a key area of research and has been recognised as a paramount feature of various leadership theories (e.g., transformational leadership and leader-member exchange). Rousseau et al. (1998) provided a widely accepted definition of trust as "a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another" (p. 395). Ötken & Cenkci (2012) posited that trust is an important concept for effective leadership and is crucial for the goodwill of an organisation.

Trust in leader depicts the reaction of subordinates on the motivation from their leader (Chan & Mak, 2014). Inclusive leadership acknowledge the view that treating others fairly prompt employees' trust in leadership. The reciprocal high-quality interaction between leaders and subordinates establishes a high level of trust that predicts subordinates' behaviour (Chan & Mak, 2014; Ötken & Cenkci, 2012; Yuan et al., 2022). The establishment of an open atmosphere whereby inclusive leaders facilitate knowledge exchange and creative ideas fosters a team climate that support leaders and develop high-quality mutual relationships with team members (Jia et al., 2022; Ye et al., 2019; Yuan et al., 2022). Trust enhances employees' productivity and devotion to their job (Zhou, Gul & Tufail, 2022).

Drawing on the social exchange theory, the impact of inclusive leadership on team climate can be described in which trust in leader serve as a moderator (Ötken & Cenkci, 2012; Rousseau et al., 1998). The social exchange theory explains the processes in which inclusive leadership behaviours of openness, accessibility, and availability creates a positive perception in the minds of subordinates, which will eventually bring about an inclination to reciprocate the leader's goodwill (Aboramadan et al., 2022). First, inclusive leaders are attentive to the needs of their subordinates by encouraging them to share their knowledge and ideas which strengthens knowledge sharing and signify constant communication to create an environment that shapes the team's climate (Qiu & Liu, 2017). Second, inclusive leaders emphasise fairness and justice by treating everyone equally and supporting their team members with essential resources and provision of autonomy (Hirak et al., 2012; Zhong et al., 2022). Third, inclusive leadership encourages team members to work for the general interests of the workgroup which facilitates team efficiency, diminishes workplace conflicts, and promote team climate (Qiu &

Liu, 2017). Fourth, team members have a strong reliance on their team leaders and are prepared to repay the benevolence by contributing in ways that are useful to the team (Javed et al., 2019a; Mitchell et al., 2015; Zhong et al., 2022). Fifth, inclusive leaders gravitate towards unbiased decisions which increase their trustworthiness (Javed et al., 2019a).

This study considers the moderating role of trust in leader in the relationship between inclusive leadership and team climate because trust is an indispensable factor in the day-to-day activities of an organisation. When there is a presence of high trust in leadership, it helps in shaping the perception of team climate in organisations. In summary, this study argues that leaders provide guidance for employees (Ötken & Cenkci, 2012) and interpersonal relationships are crucial to determining the extent of trust in organisation. Therefore, based on the above arguments, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: The positive direct relationship between inclusive leadership and team climate is moderated by trust in leadership, such that the positive relationship is stronger when trust in leadership is high than when trust in leadership is low.

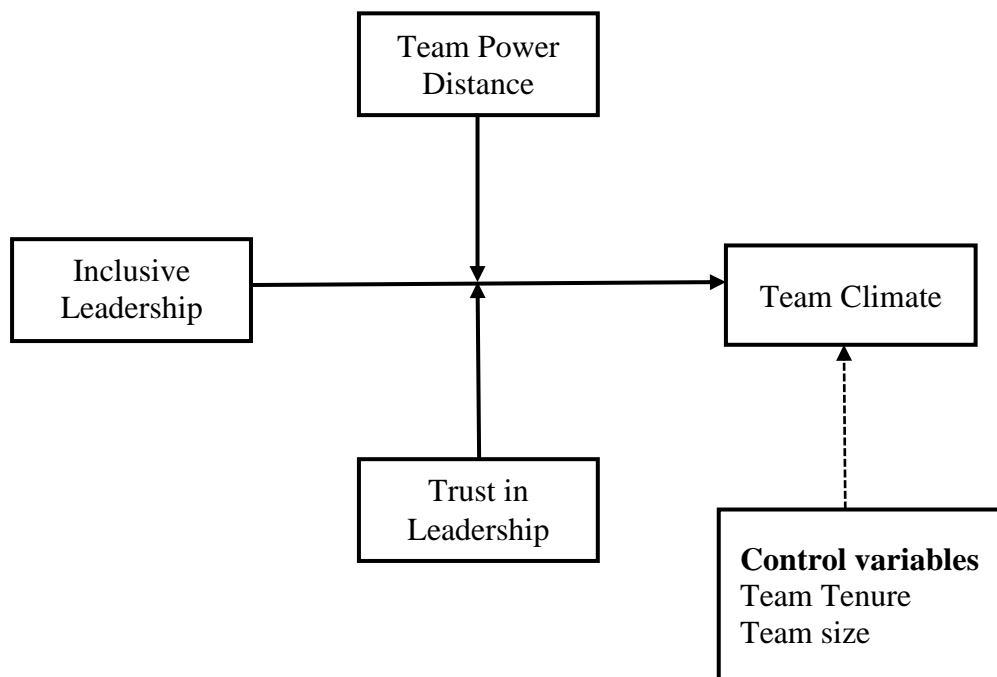The conceptual model hypothesized in this study is shown in Figure 1

Figure 1: Research Model

Methodology

Research setting

Nigeria was selected as the research setting for our study based on two crucial factors. First, Nigeria is widely known to be the most populous African country, with an estimated population of over 200 million people. Moreover, Nigeria has a large youth population on the African continent (The World Bank, 2022). Second, in addition to the fact that Nigeria has the largest GDP in Africa - est. US$440.83 billion (Trading Economics, 2021), the Covid-19 pandemic caused a recession in the country's economy in 2020, and the World Bank forecasted an average growth of 3.2% from 2022-2024 (The World Bank, 2022). Based on the overview and situation of Nigeria, the country presents a solid context to study how inclusive leadership influences team climate in the largest Sub-Saharan African economy.

Participants and procedure

The study samples were from 17 small manufacturing organisations in Nigeria, with industries widely distributed into textile, furniture, bakery, and palm oil production firms. Data was collected from the team members and surveyed with measures of inclusive leadership, team climate, trust in leadership, team size, and provided personal data. The team members received instruction about the purpose of the internet-based research via telephone, e-mail, and social media handle (LinkedIn) after they indicated interest in participating in the study. The participants were guaranteed anonymity and absolute confidentiality of the data obtained from them and were encouraged to participate in the research without compulsion, as participation was voluntary. The survey was launched by giving the team members a weblink and a randomly generated team code. The generated code aims to match the team members' responses with their respective teams.

The research participants were considered because they are employees (team members) who work in functional areas such as marketing, finance, sales, administration, operations, and R&D. The participants engage in team activities and are well-informed about the key constructs in the study's model, such as inclusive leadership and team climate. Before the main data collection, a pilot study was conducted to check the satisfactory level of the survey questionnaire. The pilot questionnaire was discussed with a group Head of Marketing of a major company in Nigeria, in addition to 3 academics and 2 doctoral students from the management field. Following that, the survey questionnaire was tested among 27 team members and comments were received for improvements, which helped modify the research instrument.

Sample

A total of 400 employees nested in 59 teams were contacted to participate in the research using a link to Qualtrics. Finally, 247 team members completed the survey giving a response rate of 61.75%. Additionally, common method bias is recognised to be a source of risk since respondents completed the survey from each manufacturing firm. Therefore, as recommended by Podsakoff et al., (2003) that Harman's single factor test can be employed to address common method bias, the variables (inclusive leadership, power distance, trust in leadership, and team climate) were loaded onto one common factor using SPSS. Mehmood et al. (2021) and Liu & DeFrank (2013) suggest that the single factor accounted for should be lower than 50% of the variance. In this study, it emerged that the highest variance explained by a single factor was 34.3%, therefore showing no common method bias in the study's data.

Measures

Inclusive leadership was measured with a modified version of the 9-item developed by Carmeli et al. (2010). Sample items included 'My leader is open to hearing new ideas' and 'My leader is open to discuss the desired goals and new ways to achieve them'. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Cronbach's α of this scale was .934.

Team climate was measured with a modified version of 14-item Team Climate Inventory (TCI) developed and tested by Kivimaki & Elovainio (1999). Sample items included 'My team agrees with the objectives' and 'My team's objectives are clearly understood'. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Cronbach's α of this scale was .908.

Team power distance was measured with a modified 6-item scale developed by Dorfman & Howell (1988). Sample items included 'Leaders should make most decisions without consulting team members' and 'It is frequently necessary for a leader to use authority and power when dealing with team members'. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Cronbach's α of this scale was .834.

Trust in leadership was measured with a modified version of the 5-item scale developed by Leung & Morris (2001). Sample items included 'I feel a strong loyalty to my team leader', 'I believe that my leader treats team members fairly'. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Never*) to 5 (*Always*). Cronbach's α of this scale was .898.

Control variables: Team size was controlled by asking team members to provide information about the size of their team because extant studies have shown that team size influences the team performance (Eisenbeiss et al., 2008; Jiang & Chen, 2018). Also, the study controlled for team members' team tenure, i.e., the number of months/years working as a team (Cha, Kim, Lee & Bachrach, 2015) due to the impact on how team members interact with each other.

Data aggregation

Since the study variables were assessed by the team members which focus on their shared perceptions, the individuals' perceptions of inclusive leadership, team power distance, trust in leadership, and team climate were aggregated to the team level (Chan, 1998). To justify the appropriateness of aggregation of variables, the intraclass correlations (ICC1) – this explains the level of variance that is attributed to the team, and the reliability of the means (ICC2), and within-group agreement (r_{wg}) was calculated (Bliese, 2000; James, Demaree & Wolf, 1984; LeBreton & Senter, 2008). LeBreton & Senter (2008) recommended these values for $r_{wg(j)}$: 0.00-0.30 (lack of agreement), 0.31-0.50 (weak agreement), 0.51-0.70 (moderate agreement), 0.71-0.91 (strong agreement) and 0.91-1.00 (very strong agreement). In this study, the following values were generated for ICC1, ICC2 and $r_{wg(j)}$ for the variables: inclusive leadership (ICC1 = 0.16, ICC2 = 0.45, r_{wg} = 0.98), team power distance (ICC1 = 0.33, ICC2 = 0.67, r_{wg} = 0.83), trust in leadership (ICC1 = 0.30, ICC2 = 0.64, r_{wg} = 0.90), and team climate (ICC1 = 0.24, ICC2 = 0.57, r_{wg} = 0.82). These values originate from the small teams' size in the study sample (with an average team size of 4.2 members). Bliese (2000) recommended a value of 0.05 for ICC(1) whereas ICC2 is largely determined by the team size from each team (Ali, Wang & Boekhorst, 2021; Bliese, 2000) and studies have indicated that ICC2 values above 0.25 are desirable (Ali et al., 2021), hence low to moderate ICC2 values, between-team variability (significant F test statistics), significant high value of within-group agreement (r_{wg} above 0.70) provide a strong justification for data aggregation (Ali et al., 2021; Chiu et al.,

2016; Shin et al., 2016). Taken together, the results support the aggregation of the measures of inclusive leadership, team power distance, trust in leadership, and team climate to the team level.

Results

Descriptive statistics and factor analysis
Descriptive statistics, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and reliability analysis were generated using IBM SPSS Statistics v. 28. The Cronbach alpha for the study measures ranges from 0.834 to 0.934, thus higher than 0.7 threshold. The factor loading of the measurement items had a minimum value of 0.6. Mahmud, Soetanto & Jack (2020) suggest that higher factor loadings are necessary for the study's items. Also, factor loadings below 0.7 should be eliminated to increase composite reliability and average variance extracted (AVE) values (Hair, Howard, & Nitzl, 2020). Hence, factor loadings less than 0.70 for items in team power distance, and team climate respectively were removed. The composite reliability coefficients range from 0.888 to 0.945, which is above the recommended threshold of 0.60 by Fornell and Larcker (1981). Additionally, the AVE ranges from 0.608 to 0.718, which is above the recommended threshold of 0.50 by Fornell and Larcker (1981).

Moreover, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted using IBM AMOS v. 26 to test the model fit and determine the discriminant validity of the study variables (inclusive leadership, power distance, trust in leadership, and team climate). Some of the indices used to assess how the measurement model fits the data include the Comparative Fit Index (CFI); Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI); Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) and Standardized Root Mean Squared Residual (SRMR). Values above 0.90 for CFI and TLI, and 0.05 or below for RMSEA, χ^2/df less than 3 and 0.08 for SRMR indicate an acceptable fitting model (See Hu & Bentler, 1999). Moreover, the presence of the three indices indicates there is an acceptable model fit.

The results as reported showed that the four-factor model which included inclusive leadership, power distance, trust in leadership, and team climate showed a good model fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 588.297$, df = 291, χ^2/df = 2.022, CFI = 0.93, TLI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.06, SRMR = 0.05) than other alternative models such as the three-factor model ($\chi^2 = 955.145$, df = 294, χ^2/df = 3.249, CFI = 0.84, TLI = 0.82, RMSEA = 0.10, SRMR = 0.09); two-factor model ($\chi^2 = 1725.289$; df = 298, χ^2/df = 5.790, CFI = 0.65, TLI = 0.62, RMSEA = 0.14, SRMR = 0.13); or one-factor model ($\chi^2 = 2443.258$; df = 299, χ^2/df = 8.17, CFI = 0.48, TLI = 0.44, RMSEA = 0.17, SRMR = 0.16). Hence, the results demonstrate that there is satisfactory discriminant validity in the study model.

Data analysis
The variance inflation factor (VIF) was checked to detect any multicollinearity of variables issues. The VIF values are lower than 2.5. According to Hair et al. (2014), a VIF value above 4.0 indicates multicollinearity problems in the analysis. Therefore, it is established that there are no multicollinearity concerns and proceeded to test the study's major hypotheses. The direct and interaction effects were tested using SmartPLS 4.0 to examine the data via partial least square structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM). Nguyen et al. (2018) argued that PLS-SEM allows scholars to analyse the measurement and structural model concurrently, and permits the analysis of moderator and mediator variables. Hair, Ringle & Sarstedt (2011) asserted that PLS-SEM is relevant for complex models and analysis of multiple hypotheses with a small sample size (Soetanto et al., 2022; Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011). Furthermore, Soetanto et al. (2022, p. 5) suggested the following advantages of PLS-SEM: "(1) PLS does not make assumptions

about the data distribution to estimate model parameters, (2) the independence of observations, and (3) variable metrics."

Hypotheses testing

Main effect
As Table 3 indicates, hypothesis 1 proposed that inclusive leadership has a positive and direct effect on team climate. After controlling for team tenure and team size, the findings show that inclusive leadership positively and significantly predicts team climate ($\beta = 0.524$, $p = 0.000$). Hence, hypothesis 1 is supported. As argued by Jia et al. (2022), inclusive leaders facilitate good interpersonal relationships with their subordinates and provide them with support mechanism to aid their productivity.

Test of moderation effects
Hypothesis 2 and 3 proposed the moderating role of team power distance and trust in leader on the relationship between inclusive leadership and team climate. In Table 3, the interaction terms were displayed and indicates that team power distance moderates the relationship between inclusive leadership and team climate ($\beta = 0.230$, $p = 0.002$). The results of the bootstrapping analysis indicates that the direct effect of inclusive leadership on team climate was positive and significant when team power distance orientation is low. Also, trust in leader moderates the relationship between inclusive leadership and team climate ($\beta = 0.144$, $p = 0.024$). This demonstrates that the direct effect of inclusive leadership on team climate was positive and significant when trust in leadership is high.

      Figure 2 depicts the role of team power distance in moderating the relationship between inclusive leadership and team climate using a simple slope analysis (Aiken & West, 1991). As displayed in figure 2, the interaction effect on team climate was stronger in low team power distance compared with high power team distance. Furthermore, figure 3 display the pattern of interaction of trust in leadership between inclusive leadership and team climate. The finding indicates that the interaction effect was stronger in high trust in leadership than under low trust in leadership.

Table 1: Constructs reliability and validity

Constructs	Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
Inclusive Leadership (IL)			.934	.945	.656
	IL1	0.748			
	IL2	0.759			
	IL3	0.773			
	IL4	0.858			
	IL5	0.824			
	IL6	0.873			
	IL7	0.821			
	IL8	0.818			
	IL9	0.808			
Team Power Distance (TPD)			.834	.888	.666
	PD1	0.887			
	PD2	0.849			
	PD4	0.769			
	PD6	0.751			
Trust in Leadership (TL)			.898	.926	.718
	TL1	0.884			
	TL2	0.872			
	TL3	0.901			
	TL4	0.914			
	TL5	0.632			
Team Climate (TC)			.908	.925	.608
	TC3	0.733			
	TC4	0.800			
	TC5	0.842			
	TC6	0.798			
	TC7	0.769			
	TC8	0.817			
	TC9	0.741			
	TC14	0.730			

Note: Constructs' reliability and validity; CR = Composite reliability; AVE = Average variance extracted

Table 2: Descriptive statistics and correlations

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Inclusive Leadership	4.21	.739	(.934)				
2. Team Power Distance	3.05	1.127	-.056	(.834)			
3. Trust in Leader	8.69	1.120	.390**	-.123	(.898)		
4. Team climate	4.43	.525	.440**	-.158*	.345**	(.908)	
5. Team tenure	2.05	.357	.068	.062	.091	-.025	
6. Team size	3.59	1.397	.148*	.116	-.081	.034	.065

$N = 247$; Cronbach's α are in parentheses, 2-tailed test. $*p < 0.05$, $**p < 0.01$.

Table 3: Path model analysis (Direct and Moderating Effects)

Direct and Interaction Effects	Path Coefficients	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P-value	Decision
H1 IL -> TC	0.524	0.063	8.292	0.000	Supported
H2 TPD x IL -> TC	0.230	0.074	3.123	0.002	Supported
H3 TL x IL -> TC	0.144	0.064	2.256	0.024	Supported
Controls					
Team size	-0.029	0.058	0.504	0.614	n/a
Team tenure	-0.069	0.054	1.279	0.201	n/a

Note(s): N= 247; $*p < 0.05$; n/a = not applicable; Bootstrapping based on $n = 5,000$ subsamples; IL = Inclusive Leadership; TPD = Team Power Distance; TL = Trust in Leadership; TC = Team Climate.
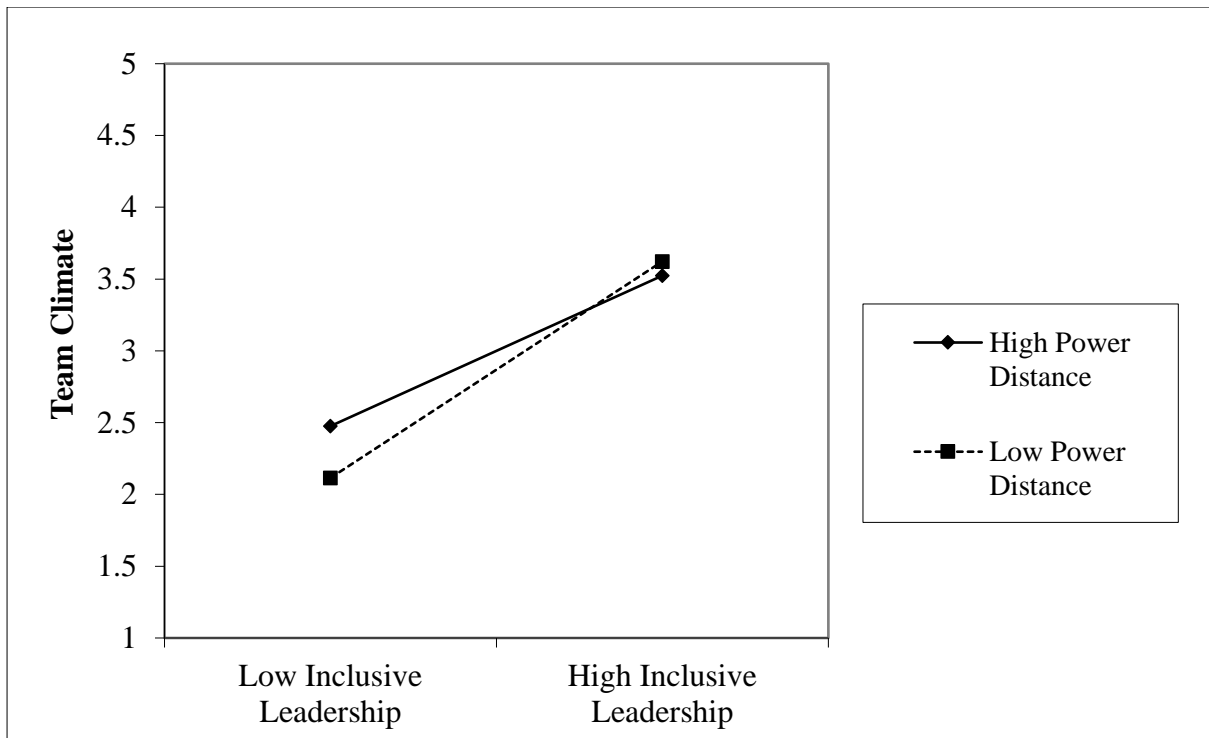
Figure 2: The interaction of inclusive leadership and team power distance on team climate
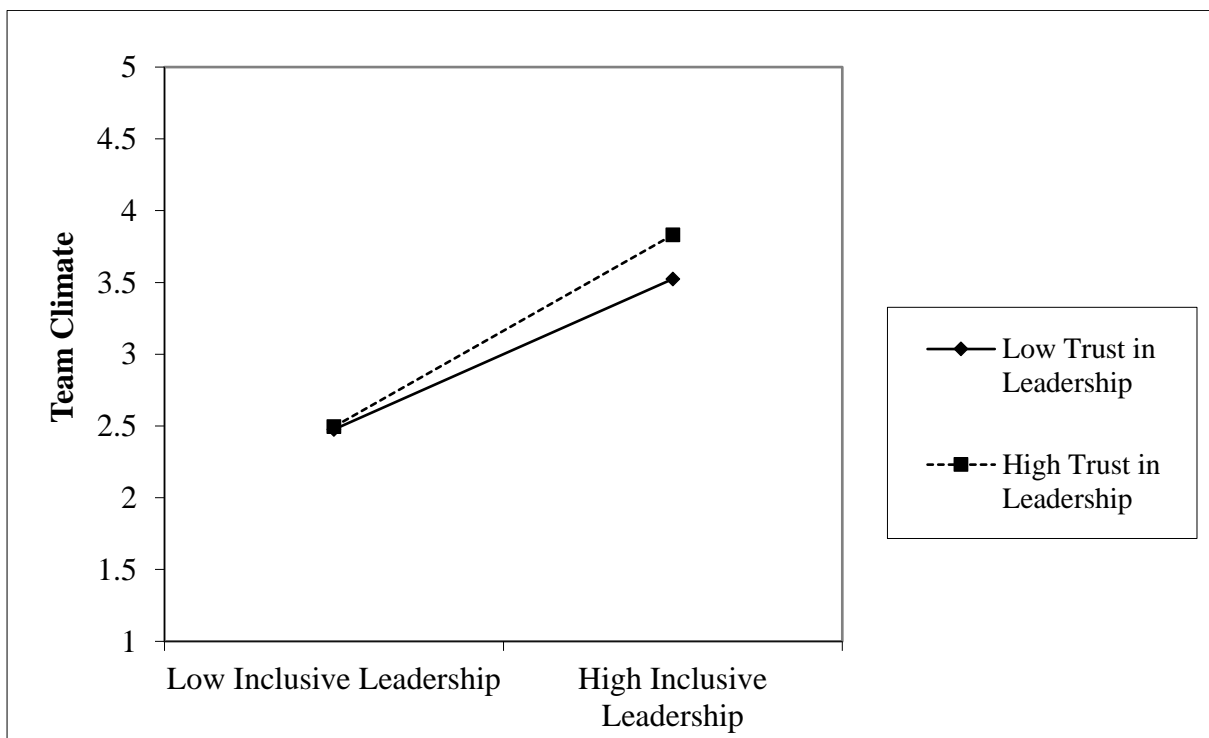

Figure 3: The interaction of inclusive leadership and trust in leader on team climate

Discussion

The aim of this current study is to develop a comprehensive understanding of how inclusive leadership influences team climate and the moderating role of team power distance and trust in leadership. Using data collected from small manufacturing industries in Nigeria – the biggest economy in Africa, the findings establish the direct and positive relationship between inclusive leadership and team climate, and found support for the interactive effects of team power distance and trust in leader on the inclusive leadership-team climate link. Considering the above, the implications of our research are provided below.

Theoretical implications

This study suggests several theoretical implications. First, this study enhances the inclusive leadership literature by incorporating inclusive leadership and team climate into a cohesive framework. Extant studies have examined the role of team climate in the workplace (teams) or organisation (Eisenbeiss et al., 2008; Kinnunen et al., 2016; Xue et al., 2011), whilst giving limited attention to inclusive leadership. This research findings empirically support the positive impact of inclusive leadership on team climate. Also, the study emphasised that inclusive leadership is a promising leadership style that helps organisational leaders foster team climate in organisations. Furthermore, by focusing on a sample of small manufacturing firms in Nigeria, the study findings substantiate the generality of the effectiveness of inclusive leadership (Ye et al., 2019) in the Nigerian context.

Second, the study findings contribute to the literature on inclusive leadership. Previous studies have focused on the relationship between the dominant leadership styles – transformational leadership on team climate (e.g., Cheng et al., 2016; Kinnunen et al., 2016; Sun et al., 2014), which has limited understanding in the leadership literature of an emerging relational leadership style that is conducive for team climate. This research extends Chiu et al.'s (2021) work in examining the leadership style that is better suited to facilitate team climate. The focus on inclusive leadership depicts a considerable boost to the literature by providing an enriching understanding of a distinctive leadership style that is beneficial for team climate. An inclusive leader is presumed to support individuals to fully contribute to the team, help subordinates to share creative ideas, and promote inclusion among group members (Randel et al., 2018). This study extends extant knowledge on inclusive leadership by asserting that inclusive leadership can bolster the social exchange between leaders and employees in the organisation through team processes. Moreover, the team processes play a crucial role in promoting team climate. Based on social exchange theory, this study contributes to knowledge on this subject matter by examining empirically the role of team power distance and trust in leadership towards inclusive leadership and team climate, which manifest team members perception of trust in leadership and power distance in the organisation. The research findings support the pivotal role of social exchange in determining team climate.

Third, this study has implications for understanding the influence of inclusive leadership. Inclusive leaders had a direct influence on team climate. Essentially, this is important that inclusive leaders foster team climate to enable team members unite in their perceptions of behaviours that are relevant to the work processes of the team. This finding aligns with the recent viewpoint on the contextual influence of inclusive leadership at different levels of organisations (e.g., organisational climate) to encourage inclusion (Randel et al., 2018).

Fourth, the study reveals the moderating role of team power distance and trust in leadership, thus demonstrably underscore the relevance of team processes to expound how inclusive leadership influences team climate. Even though, existing studies has acknowledged several team processes (e.g., social identity) that are critical for better knowledge of team

climate (Cheng et al., 2016; Xue et al., 2010), the mechanisms that can be applied by team leaders for climates are understudied (Chiu et al., 2021).

Fifth, this research provides additional understanding in theorising and testing the moderating role of team power distance and trust in leadership. Empirical studies on inclusive leadership in small manufacturing firms are limited. Following the studies of Hu et al. (2017) and Cole et al. (2013), the importance of team power distance on team members' relations with their leaders can determine organisational outcomes. Hence, team power distance is an important research context in organisations that deserves awareness in the inclusive leadership literature. This study reveals the interesting empirical finding, that team power distance is a relevant subject that strengthens the positive relationship between inclusive leadership and team climate. Thus, this finding contributes to inclusive leadership and team climate literature on the effect of team power distance in organisations. Also, consistent with other leadership theories, employees with trust in leader expect the support of their leaders in job demands for work fulfilment (Chan & Mak, 2014; Fan et al., 2021).

Managerial implications
The study results present several insights and practical implications. First, the findings suggest that inclusive leadership play a paramount role in understanding team climate among small manufacturing firms. Furthermore, the findings provide evidence that inclusive leadership should be of utmost importance for organisational leaders to engage with teams to promote openness, availability, and accessibility to foster a climate for creativity and innovation. Specifically, this study suggests that the combination of inclusive leadership, team power distance, and trust in leadership is essential to promoting team climate. Hence, it is recommended that organisational leaders should supervise teams with low power distance to lessen unfavourable consequences and encourage a positive team climate.

Secondly, organisations can create different assessment mechanisms e.g., webinars, and inclusion training theatres, that focus on pertinent inclusive leadership matters, and to choose competent managers with inclusive leadership attributes such as openness, availability, and accessibility, for the purpose of monitoring inclusion and effectiveness of inclusive leadership in the manufacturing industry. Training sessions on how to foster belongingness and uniqueness among employees may also be applicable. Particularly, organisations can emphasise the group assessment of inclusive leadership behaviours in feedback, observation, performance data, and benchmarks of leaders. Organisational leaders should exhibit inclusive leader behaviours such as encouraging diverse contributions, ensuring justice and equity, supporting their team members, therefore creating an environment that welcomes the expression of opinions (Randel et al., 2018).

Third, manufacturing businesses should endeavour to create an outstanding social exchange relationships to directly strengthen team climate, for instance, establishing an organisational culture that facilitate inclusion in diverse cultural contexts. This study reveals that employees working in the manufacturing firms were born in the 1980s and 1990s and constituting 91.9% of the entire survey respondents. These respondents are aware of the need to participate in shared decision-making to integrate the diverse viewpoints presented and feel a sense of inclusion in the team (Randel et al., 2018). Hence, leaders should improve the work of the team by appreciating uniqueness of team members, ensuring participation in team deliberations, and promoting trust in leadership within the team and organisation.

Lastly, this study discerned that team members with low power distance orientation to inclusive leadership gravitate towards power sharing, and participation in decision-making. This study reveals that inclusive leaders are best suited to engage with team members because of the open atmosphere to express to communicate their thoughts, and the willingness to discuss work-related problems with their subordinates. It is advisable that leaders should develop a

good interpersonal relationship with team members and welcome diverse approaches from them without the fear of retribution. This study suggests that a low team power distance orientation is crucial to enhancing social exchange relationships between inclusive leaders and team members.

Limitations and recommendation for future research

The study has the following limitations which provides direction for future research. First, cross-sectional multiple source data was collected from employees nested in teams using the survey approach and this may lead to common method bias. To reduce the impact of common method bias, future research is recommended to obtain data from team members and leaders of the same team using longitudinal or experimental approaches to illustrate the causal effect of inclusive leadership and team climate.

Second, the study sample was restricted to small manufacturing industries (textile, furniture, bakery, and palm oil production firms) which may suggest questions around generalisability of the study findings. Therefore, future research is recommended to examine the causal effects of the variables in large and medium manufacturing industries. Mahmud et al. (2020) suggested that there are several sectors in the manufacturing industry that have diverse features. Therefore, this study recommends that other sectors in the manufacturing industry can be considered to provide an understanding of the effect of inclusive leadership on team climate. Third, our research data was obtained from the sub-Saharan African context (Nigeria). The collectivistic and high-power distance culture in Nigeria makes the employees to likely have high trust in their leaders. Therefore, future studies may replicate the study theoretical model in various sectors/industries in developed and developing countries contexts or emerging economies.

Conclusions

This study has as a focal point inclusive leaders and the fundamental mechanisms that enhance team climate in the Nigerian context. Drawing on the social exchange theory, the findings indicate that inclusive leadership can promote a strong team climate for employees, as progressive leadership interventions can be instrumental in achieving inclusion and diversity in organisations. Moreover, it underscores the essential role of team power distance and trust in leadership in this process. Finally, the study provides directions for future research to improve the understanding of team climate in developing/emerging market economies.

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