Bottom-Up Inclusive Leadership: A Conceptual Model

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**Abstract**

1. *Purpose*

In the organizational literature, researchers have begun to move beyond simply examining the presence of employees’ diverse social identities at work, including but not limited to race, gender, and culture, to understanding how all employees’, regardless of their social identity categorizations can be made to feel included in organizational life (Shore et al., 2011). Existing research suggests that leaders can play a critical role in this process of inclusion (Hollander, 2008) and that positive, interpersonally-oriented leadership (i.e., leader member exchange, transformational leadership) can enhance the relationship between group-level diversity and organizationally desired outcomes, such as decreased turnover and higher team performance (Kearney and Gebert, 2009; Nishii and Mayer, 2009). While strides have been made in the study of inclusive leadership, the majority of the current research focuses on top-down processes and on the influence of senior level leaders on organizational climate and culture for diversity and inclusion. The purpose of the present paper is to highlight the need to also consider bottom-up processes and focus on how first-line supervisors promote inclusion in organizational life and the requisite traits and behaviors that should be considered in selecting and training for these inclusive leaders.

2. *Design/methodology/approach*

The paper introduces a conceptual model that highlights the importance of bottom-up leadership processes, focusing on first-line supervisors, which create a positive climate for inclusion that complements the focus of existing research on top-down leadership processes. The paper contends that inclusive leadership should be a performance dimension for leaders working in a diverse workforce and begins to identify what are inclusive leadership behaviors, using the existing research literature to generate a better understanding of the construct. Finally, the paper reviews the existing research, highlighting the traits or competencies that predict inclusive leadership behaviors and reviews the literature on how to train inclusive leaders.

3. *Research limitations/implications*

The present paper provides a review and a conceptual model, but we will not collect empirical data on inclusive leadership at this stage, thus limiting our contribution. However, conceptual clarification is an important first step; otherwise empirical research may spin its wheels. We believe that this research will have important research and practical implications in helping organizations to consider how to evaluate, staff, and train inclusive leaders, which we believe will become increasing important as the workforce continues to become more diverse and global. This review also sets the stage for future empirical research to validate our propositions.

4. *Originality/value of the paper*

The paper is a qualitative review of the research literature highlighting the need to focus on the “micro” side of inclusive leadership, which has been neglected in the literature. This paper will lead to new avenues of research that can be pursued by organizational scholars to enhance our understanding of the nature of inclusive leadership, the predictors of inclusive leadership, and how to train for inclusive leadership, broadening our understanding to all levels of the organizational hierarchy.

*Keywords*: inclusive leadership, bottom-up processes, selection, training

**Bottom-Up Inclusive Leadership: A Conceptual Model**

Diversity has been defined as “differences between individuals on any attribute that may lead to the perception that another person is different from the self” (van Knippenberg et al., 2004, pg. 1008). The literature on diversity in the workplace has grown exponentially in the last three decades, but findings have largely been inconclusive, with research finding positive, negative, and null effects between diversity and organizational outcomes at both the group and organization levels of analysis (Shore et al., 2009). Given the seemingly inconsistent effects, scholars have increasingly come to recognize that this main effects approach (i.e., diversity → outcome) to studying workplace diversity may be limited (Van Knippenberg and Schippers, 2007). In line with these arguments, the present paper advances diversity and inclusion research by positing that leaders serve as an important moderator of the relationship between workgroup or organizational diversity and outcomes. Thus, we argue that diversity is neither inherently good nor bad, but rather can be conceptualized as a source of latent potential that can either be viewed by the group as a resource or source of conflict and that the leader plays a major role in terms of determining which perspective is taken by the team or organization.

Supporting this argument, Nishii and Mayer (2009) found turnover was mostly likely to occur in in teams where leaders had large variations in the quality of their relationships with their followers and in teams where followers were highly different from each other (i.e., average of age, gender, and race diversity within a team), which the authors posited was evidence of a lack of systematic inclusion by the leader. Similarly, Kearney and Gebert (2009) found that transformational leaders moderated the relationship between team diversity (in age, education, and nationality) and team performance. In fact, the relationship between team diversity and team performance was positive among leaders that were transformational, but was actually negative among leaders low on transformational leadership. Together these studies provide initial support for the perspective that leaders play a critical role in determining the relationship between diversity within a team and team outcomes.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the role that leaders play in creating inclusive environments. First, we provide theoretical arguments for the reasons leaders play a critical role in follower experiences of inclusion and identify the specific *behaviors* that leaders utilize to do so. Second, we introduce an integrative multilevel model linking inclusive leaders, inclusive environments, and organizational criteria, focusing on leaders at lower levels of the organizational hierarchy. Finally, we discuss how organizations can select and train for inclusive leaders. Additionally, throughout the paper, we highlight the role of national culture on each aspect of inclusive leadership.

**Inclusive Leadership Behaviors**

While Nishii and Mayer (2009) and Kearney and Gebert (2009) demonstrate that leaders influence how diversity effects team outcomes, we argue that greater specificity is needed in understanding the process by which leaders engender these effects. For example, while we know that leader member exchange (LMX) differentiation within a team is related to turnover in diverse teams, LMX is generally considered a measure of the quality of the dyadic exchange between the leader and follower and does not give us direct insight into the behaviors the leaders utilized with team members (or characteristics of the leader) that led to these differentiated relationships. We posit that inclusive leadership behaviors are at the heart of these differentiated relationships, with inclusive leaders forming high-quality relationships with *all* (not just some) of their followers. We define inclusive leadership behaviors as leader behaviors directed toward their followers that aim to positively influence follower cognitive perceptions and affective feelings of inclusion (i.e., simultaneous experience of belongingness and uniqueness) at work.

Given that inclusive leadership behaviors are those that produce feelings of inclusion on the part of their followers, it is important to define inclusion and differentiate it from related constructs (i.e., diversity). While the research literature has historically focused on diversity (i.e., differences among individuals), recently organizational scholars have argued that inclusion, having individuals be integrated into critical organizational processes, should be the goal of diversity management practices (Shore et al., 2011). Thus, diversity and inclusion are not isomorphic concepts. For example, an organization could be relatively homogeneous (i.e., low on diversity), but still have many of its members feel excluded and not integrated into critical organizational processes (i.e., low inclusion). Alternatively, an organization could be very heterogeneous (i.e., high on diversity) and yet have all its members feel integrated and included in organizational life (i.e., high inclusion).

Given the nascence of the literature on inclusion, the majority of research focuses *organizational inclusion* (see Mor Barak, 2000; Pelled et al., 1999; Roberson, 2006), rather than *leader inclusion.* Research on organizational inclusion may be a helpful starting point to identifying inclusive leadership behaviors, but is rather qualified in the sense that leaders, particularly those lower in the organizational hierarchy, may not have direct control over organizational inclusion initiatives (e.g., formal policies and procedures that impact job security). Furthermore, dimensions of inclusion might be similar for both organizations and leaders, but the behaviors and functions representing those dimensions are likely to be distinct at the organization level compared to leader level. For example, fair treatment facilitating inclusion at the organizational level may refer to consistent human resources policies and practices whereas fair inclusion at the leader level may refer to the extent that the leader provides equal opportunity to their followers to be heard during team meetings.

The research on leader inclusion has identified a specific set of behaviors that depart from organizational inclusion, which tend to refer to organizational-level policies and procedures centering on access to information and participation in decision-making. Nembhard and Edmondson (2006) defined leadership inclusiveness as any leader behavior that indicates others’ contributions are invited and appreciated. Tailored to their sample of physicians, their leader inclusion scale assessed three specific types of behaviors: encouraging taking initiative, asking for input from those that belong to diverse groups, and valuing the opinions of everyone equally. These three behaviors are also reflected in the inclusive leadership scale (ILS) developed by Hollander (2009). According to Hollander, leaders engage in several inclusive behaviors that can be grouped into three clusters: (1) support and recognition, (2) communication, action, and fairness, and (3) lack of self-interest and disrespect. Carmeli et al. (2010) focused on inclusive leadership indicators that facilitated psychological safety and also found three dimensions: openness (e.g., being open to hear new ideas and being open to discuss goals), availability (e.g., being ready to listen to requests and being approachable), and accessibility (e.g., encouraging accessibility on emerging problems). Indeed, subsequent studies utilizing this scale found that psychological safety mediated the relationship between leader inclusion and employee involvement in creative work (Carmeli et al., 2010) and unit performance in a hospital setting for low-performing units (Hirak et al., 2012)

*Where Do We Go From Here?*

One key avenue for future research is to identify the entire construct space of inclusive leadership behaviors. Although some convergence is beginning to emerge among the inclusive leadership behaviors identified in the studies reviewed above, a parsimonious yet comprehensive model of inclusive leadership that specifies the dimensionality of inclusive leadership behaviors has yet to emerge. In this respect, the purpose of our paper is to generate a succinct summary of the current standing of inclusive leadership behaviors in the literature that will not only help us identify the commonalities between past studies, but also pinpoint those behaviors that have not been recognized or incorporated thus far.

One potential framework that has been applied to the concept of inclusion in prior research, which we believe will also benefit the study of inclusive leadership behaviors is Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (Shore et al., 2011). Shore and colleagues defined inclusion as the feeling of being accepted that results from the simultaneous satisfaction of the need for belongingness and uniqueness. Their conceptual model introduced several contextual factors contributing to the perceptions of inclusion, with leaders potentially serving as a key contextual factor. They defined leaders facilitating inclusion as those communicating top management values and philosophy, appreciating and inviting the contribution of their followers, establishing fair procedural treatment, enabling access to rewards and opportunities, and creating an organizational culture of inclusion. In this sense, inclusive leaders are those who both view and communicate diversity as a resource (so that they can satisfy their followers’ uniqueness needs) and who make sure that their followers are valued and respected (satisfaction of followers’ belongingness needs). Indeed, we argue that all of the inclusive leadership behaviors that have been discussed earlier can be clustered under these two broad categories.

Another perspective that can help elucidate the domain of inclusive leadership behaviors is the integrated model of leadership (DeRue et al., 2011). According to this model, leadership behaviors can be viewed as belonging to one of three categories: task-oriented, relational-oriented, and change- oriented. Currently, the inclusive leadership behaviors identified in the literature tend to focus mostly on *task-oriented inclusive behaviors.* These behaviors include enabling participation in decision-making, giving access to critical information and resources, delivering rewards and opportunities, providing clear goals, sharing knowledge, asking for individual inputs, and monitoring the process. *Relational-oriented inclusive behaviors* are more person-oriented in nature. Inclusive leadership behaviors that fall under this category include encouraging taking initiative, continual support and recognition of individual contributions, fair treatment, openness, availability, accessibility, and apparent respect for different backgrounds and different opinions. Exploring further relational-oriented behaviors that are specific to inclusive leadership would be informative. In this respect, leadership behaviors such as showing empathy and tolerance (particularly with respect to salient social and demographic categories), bolstering confidence and self-efficacy of followers, and being sensitive to both visible and invisible personal identity characteristics of subordinates may be particularly important for followers’ perceptions of inclusion. *Change-oriented inclusive behaviors* have largely been absent from existing research on inclusive leadership behaviors. Given that leaders are often considered mediators between top level management and followers and that power sharing is an integral part of existing inclusive leadership models (e.g., Hollander, 2009), this aspect of inclusive leadership behavior is ripe for future research. The primary change-oriented inclusive leadership behaviors identified in the literature are removing organizational barriers and communicating organizational values and norms. Nembhard and Edmondson (2006) found that inclusive leadership moderated the relationship between professional status and psychological safety. Specifically, both high and low occupational status individuals felt safe to speak up and voice problems when they perceived high levels of leader inclusion, while only high occupational status individuals feel safe to speak up in the presence of low levels of leader inclusion. Since the extant literature fails to identify inclusive leadership behaviors that are specific to situations with power differences, the change agent role of inclusive leaders requires further exploration.

Table 1 provides an organizing framework for inclusive leadership behaviors, incorporating the insights from Optimal Distinctiveness Theory and the integrated model of leadership. Thus, inclusive leadership behaviors can be either task-, relational-, or change-oriented and be targeted either toward meeting the belongingness or uniqueness needs of their followers. We argue that a deeper understanding of inclusive leadership behaviors will likely require the conceptualization and measurement of all six types of behaviors, some of which have been understudied. Table 1 includes those behaviors that have already been recognized in the literature within our framework as well as those that we have identified in our review as in need of future research. We do note that some inclusive leadership behaviors can target the need for belongingness and uniqueness simultaneously (e.g., asking for individual inputs may signal that followers’ opinions are needed to achieve group goals thus targeting need for belongingness while also indicating that different opinions are appreciated and valued therefore targeting the need for uniqueness), and our framework may simplify the complex manner by which leaders impact follower needs.

A second area in need of additional research is the enactment of inclusive leadership behaviors with different groups. For example, it is currently unknown if the set of inclusive leadership behaviors will increase followers’ perceptions of inclusion to the same extent for differentially diverse groups (i.e., a group diverse in the sexual orientation versus a group diverse in race/ethnicity). It would be reasonable to expect that the experience of inclusion and the meaning attached to different leadership behaviors varies by the characteristic (of the individual or team) under examination. Therefore, it is also unknown whether the inclusive leadership behaviors chosen to by the leader will be the same across these two groups and whether individuals within these two groups would have different preferences regarding the specific inclusive leadership behaviors enacted by the leader. Additionally, the literature generally has not distinguished between the inclusive leadership behaviors enacted by leader and the impact of those behaviors on their followers for majority versus minority group members.

Future research should also highlight the uniqueness of inclusive leadership behaviors from existing models of leadership behaviors. The current list of inclusive leadership behaviors appears to partially overlap with behaviors identified previously as transformational (i.e., valuing individual opinions, asking for individual input for work-related decisions, and recognizing contributions; e.g., Bass, 1985) or ethical leadership (i.e., shared accountability, respect and concern for others, fair procedural treatment, and effective; e.g., Resick et al., 2011). Presence of overlapping behaviors across different leadership styles does not indicate that inclusive leadership behaviors are redundant as it is reasonable to expect some leadership behaviors to co-occur whereas other do not. Greer et al. (2012) examined the role of visionary leader behavior (i.e., articulating future-orientation) and leader categorization tendencies (i.e., proneness to categorize followers according to the ethnic group they belong to) on team performance and team communication for ethnically diverse teams. In this sense, visionary leader behavior corresponds to the idealized influence dimension of transformational leadership whereas lack of leader categorization tendencies can be considered central to leader inclusion. Greer et al. found that team performance and communication of ethnically diverse teams were highest when leaders enacted visionary behavior and avoided social categorization, suggesting that these two types of leader behaviors are not isomorphic. Therefore, distinguishing inclusive leadership from other leadership styles and establishing its incremental validity for predicting organizational criteria remains a major task for future research.

*The Role of Culture*

In our review of the literature, the majority of studies on leader inclusion have been conducted in the United States, leaving open the impact of national culture on inclusive leadership behaviors. Given that inclusive leadership behaviors are those that meet either (or both) the belongingness and uniqueness needs of subordinates, we posit that culture-level variables such as individualism-collectivism may influence employee’s perception of and desire for these behaviors (Hofstede, 1983). For example, in collectivistic contexts, inclusive leadership behaviors that influence belongingness needs may be more salient and preferred than those that influence uniqueness needs, while in individualistic cultures, inclusive leadership behaviors that influence uniqueness needs may be more important to satisfying the expectations of employees than those that seek to influence belongingness needs. Additionally, future research on inclusive leadership behaviors should examine whether the behaviors utilized by leaders to foster inclusion varies across cultures or varies by the group the leader is targeting even within a culture (i.e., different inclusive behaviors are used with women versus disabled workers).

**A Conceptual Model Linking Inclusive Leaders, Inclusive Environments, and Outcomes**

After articulating what are inclusive leadership behaviors in the previous section, we now turn to elucidating the importance and value of inclusive leaders. First, we review existing models linking leaders to inclusive environments, which mostly focus on top management teams in organizations and top-down processes. Then, we introduce a new, integrative, multilevel model that incorporates both top-down and bottom-up leadership processes, highlighting the role of inclusive leaders at lower levels of the organizational hierarchy.

*Top-down vs. Bottom-Up Processes*

Existing diversity research has argued persuasively that support from top management teams is integral to effectively managing diversity and creating inclusive environments (Cox and Blake, 1991; Nishii and Ozbilgin, 2007). These models generally focus on top-down processes, as they argue that the top management team sets the tone for the diversity management strategy of the entire organization. Figure 1 synthesizes existing research on the contextual factors moderating the relationship between organizational diversity and organizational performance. Current research has generally focused on top management support of diversity and organizational climate for diversity or inclusion as moderators of this relationship, though we argue that an organizational founder’s attitude and beliefs regarding diversity is also important, as these philosophies toward diversity management are likely deeply ingrained in the culture of the organization and difficult to change.

Although we do not argue against the importance of top-down processes focusing on senior leaders within an organization, we argue that the literature has not paid sufficient attention to bottom-up processes focusing on the role of lower-level, particularly first-line, inclusive leaders. There are several reasons why an emphasis on lower-level inclusive leaders is needed. First, first-line leaders interact with subordinates on a daily basis. Their actions and behaviors are likely to have a greater impact on employees relative to the top management team, whom employees may view as distal and removed from their day-to-day life. Second, first-line leaders are those who enforce and interpret the policies and procedures put in place by senior leaders, and thus their actions can serve to legitimize or undermine existing organizational initiatives. Third, top management team support of diversity may be a logical predictor of organizational performance, but the bandwidth-fidelity dilemma argues that inclusive leaders are likely to be better predictors of group and individual-level performance, which are often also of interest to organizational scholars. Finally, given arguments that “people make the place” (Schneider, 1987), it remains to be explored whether a critical mass of inclusive leaders within an organization at lower levels of the organizational hierarchy is sufficient to cause climate or culture shifts toward greater organizational endorsement of diversity and inclusion.

*An Integrative Model*

Given that inclusion can be conceptualized at multiple levels of analysis, Figure 2 presents an integrative multilevel model linking inclusive leaders, inclusive environments (i.e., climates), and organizational criteria. Supplementing the prevalent top-down processes focusing on top management support of inclusion (at the organization level of analysis), the present model highlights the role of inclusive leaders at the group and individual levels of analysis. Specifically, our model posits that possessing an inclusive leader or a positive workgroup climate toward inclusion moderates the relationship between workgroup diversity and workgroup performance. Additionally, perceiving that your leader is inclusive likely also moderates the relationship between an employee’s personal identity and their experience of psychological safety, such that inclusive leaders attenuate the anticipated negative relationship between follower personal identity (particularly low status identity characteristics) and experience of psychological safety, which is then positively related to both employee performance and experience of inclusion (i.e., belongingness and uniqueness).

To our knowledge, no research directly examines the role of leaders in creating a climate supportive of diversity and inclusion. However, given leaders’ prominent roles in organizational sense-making, we argue that leader inclusion should be positively related to climate for diversity and inclusion. Past research has, however, begun to establish the importance of inclusive environments on employee well-being and performance (e.g., McKay et al., 2008; Mor Barak and Levin, 2010). Future research should examine the relationship between inclusive leaders and inclusive climates more closely and examine their joint effects on organizational and workgroup-level phenomena. Currently, it is unclear whether inclusive leaders and inclusive environments augment each other or compensate for each other (e.g., an inclusive leader is not necessary in a setting where a workgroup is perceived as inclusive due to inclusive co-workers) in predicting organizational outcomes.

*The Role of Culture*

Our model of inclusive leadership behaviors does not explicitly model the role of national culture. However, we fully acknowledge that all behavior occurs within a context, and that culture likely moderates the relationship between inclusive leadership behaviors and some of the organizational criteria identified in our model (i.e., group and individual attitudes, performance, and perception of climate). Specifically, we hypothesize that two cultural variables, individual-collectivism and power distance (Hofstede, 1983), will moderate the relationship between inclusive leadership behaviors and group and individual outcomes.

We argue that there are competing hypotheses regarding the moderating role of individualism-collectivism on inclusive leadership-criteria relationships (i.e., different expectations regarding the form of the moderating effect). On one hand, we expect that inclusive leadership behaviors to be more important in collectivistic relative to individualistic cultures where the group is generally elevated above the individual, and thus perceptions of failing to belong and be included may be particularly damaging for individuals and groups in this context. In contrast, an alternative hypothesis is that in individualistic cultures, the focus on the individual may highlight and exacerbate differences between individuals and groups compared to collectivistic cultures, where identification with a group may highlight perceptions of homogeneity; therefore there is an increased likelihood of conflict based on perceptions of differences in individualistic cultures and inclusive leaders may have a greater effect under these circumstances in mitigating divergent perspectives.

We also posit that power distance moderates the relationship between inclusive leadership behaviors and organizational criteria. In high power distance cultures, individuals expect power to be differentially and unequally distributed across the organizational hierarchy. Therefore, in high power distance cultures, inclusive leadership behaviors may only be weakly (or possibly even negatively) related to organizational outcomes, as inclusive leaders may violate expectations and prototypes of how an effective leader should behave within that culture by sharing rather than amassing personal power. We suggest that within these contexts, it may be beneficial for leaders to highlight and draw upon organizational culture rather than national culture in promoting and articulating the value of inclusion. Future research should seek to empirically evaluate these propositions as well as investigate the possible moderating effects of other cultural dimensions (e.g., tightness-looseness; Gelfand et al., 2011).

**Selecting Inclusive Leaders**

After articulating the role of inclusive leaders within organizational life in the previous section, below we review the characteristics that set apart inclusive leaders from those who do not focus on inclusion or who actively exclude others. There are two approaches to selecting for inclusive leaders. The first is to directly sample the behavior of interest (i.e., the inclusive leadership behaviors previously reviewed) via work samples or assessment centers, as samples of behavior are generally considered to be stronger predictors of subsequent behavior than signs (Wernimont & Campbell, 1968). However, this sample approach may not always be feasible if selecting for entry level leaders who have never had the opportunity to use these behaviors before or for individuals who have had little experience in diverse or heterogeneous groups. The second approach is to focus on signs, or the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other individual difference characteristics (KSAOs) linked to inclusive leadership behaviors, as the basis for selection decisions. We posit that individuals who are open, proactive, low on social dominance orientation, authentic, politically skilled, and possess positive attitudes toward diversity and inclusion are more likely to be inclusive leaders.

*Attitude toward Diversity and Inclusion*

Based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), inclusive leadership behaviors are predicted most proximally by leaders’ intentions to engage in inclusive leadership behaviors, which are in turn predicted by attitude toward inclusive leadership behaviors, norms in the organization or work group regarding inclusive leadership behaviors, and perceptions of control over engaging in inclusive leadership behaviors. Here we focus on the attitude-behavior relationship. While a narrow emphasis on attitude toward inclusive leadership behavior likely best predicts enactment of that specific behavior, it is likely that attitude toward inclusive leadership behaviors is related to the leader’s attitude toward diversity and inclusion generally. Thus, attitude toward diversity and inclusion should be a strong predictor of inclusive leadership behaviors and engagement in other diversity and inclusion-related activities and behaviors. Similarly, Avery (2011) theorized that diversity beliefs will be related to employee endorsement of diversity, which will then predict diversity activism behaviors.

*Openness to Experience*

Openness to experience appears to be characterized by two facets: intellect, characterized by cognitive exploration and interest in new ideas, and openness toward aesthetics, imagination, and fantasy (DeYoung et al., 2007). Similarly, Connelly et al. (in press) found that there are four pure facets of openness: nontraditionalism and introspection, which appear to fall under the domain of intellect, and aestheticism and openness to sensations, which appear to fall under the second domain. We believe that individuals high on openness, particularly the intellect facets, will be more likely to lead using inclusive leadership behaviors as these individuals will likely hold more positive attitudes toward differences, think more deeply about social conventions and norms, and be more open to interacting with individuals of different backgrounds. In support of this idea, Flynn (2005) found that White individuals who were high on openness were less likely to be prejudiced and less likely to make stereotyped judgments toward Black individuals, and Cokley et al. (2010) found that students high on openness held more positive views toward racial and gender diversity and were more comfortable in interracial interactions.

*Social Dominance Orientation*

Social dominance orientation is the degree to which an individual endorses inequality between social groups, preferring institutionalized hierarchy to an egalitarian social structure (Pratto et al., 1994). Social dominance orientation is arguably one of the strongest and most consistent predictors of prejudice and discriminatory behaviors in the research literature (Sibley et al., 2006). Given that inclusive leadership behaviors include relational behaviors such as providing opportunities to share and voice opinions and concerns and change-oriented behaviors such as taking an active role to challenge the status quo and removing organizational barriers, we believe that individuals high on social dominance orientation who endorse status differential between groups will be unlikely to enact these behaviors. In support of our argument, previous research has found that social dominance orientation is negatively related to empathy, tolerance, altruism, support of LGBT-supportive and affirmative action policies, and positive intergroup attitudes (Cokley et al., 2010; Pratto et al., 1994; Sibley et al., 2006).

*Proactive Personality*

Proactive personality is defined as one’s propensity to initiate change in their environment (Fuller & Marler, 2009). Proactive individuals are more likely to identify opportunities to improve their environment and take steps, not only to prevent problems, but to initiate change. Since one type of inclusive leadership behaviors is change-oriented, leaders with a proactive personality will be more likely to demonstrate these status quo challenging behaviors with regards to inclusion. Individuals high on proactive personality feel psychologically empowered and hold a flexible, expansive view toward their work roles (Fuller and Marler, 2009), suggesting that these individuals will be more likely to emerge as and be effective change agents. Prieto and Phipps (2009) posit that proactive leaders, by virtue of their motivation to enact meaningful change, will be more apt to recognize the value of diversity and seek to create a climate supportive of diversity in order to facilitate performance.

*Authenticity*

Authenticity refers to being true to oneself. Recently, scholars have explored the role of authenticity in leadership, arguing that authentic leaders possess keen self-awareness and behave in a way that is congruent with their centrally-held values and attitudes, resulting in positive outcomes for the leader and their followers (e.g., Ilies et al., 2005). We argue authentic leaders whose positive attitudes toward diversity and inclusion are central to their self-concept are more likely to also be inclusive leaders. Since the behaviors of authentic leaders are attuned to their values and beliefs, these authentic leaders will likely be consistently inclusive across groups and situations and need little external reinforcement to engage in inclusive leadership behaviors. Others will perceive these inclusive, authentic leaders’ actions to be genuine and sincere rather than simply motivated by political correctness or organizational pressures, which will likely result in more positive follower outcomes.

*Political Skill*

Political skill refers to an individual’s ability to understand the politics and relationships within an organization in order to effectively influence others to achieve personal or organizational goals (Ferris et al., 2005). While political skill in it of itself will not necessarily predict frequency of inclusive leadership behaviors (given political skill does not predict the *content* of the domain of desired influence), we argue that political skill may influence the *effectiveness* of inclusive leadership behaviors. Politically skilled individuals are socially astute and wield interpersonal influence adeptly, likely demonstrating superior communication and listening skills. This suggests they are able to appropriately match their behaviors to the situation at hand to influence others; thus, politically skilled leaders may be able to better recognize when and with whom different inclusive behaviors are most appropriate to facilitate followers’ experiences of inclusion and may be more adept at initiating and garnering support for change within an organization.

*Where Do We Go From Here?*

In our review above, we identified several KSAOs that we posit are associated with inclusive leadership behaviors. These traits appear to fall into two categories. The first category involves traits that predict endorsement of diversity (i.e., attitude toward diversity and inclusion, openness to experience, social dominance orientation). Drawing upon the theory of planned behavior, leaders who endorse diversity and inclusion should more frequently engage in inclusive leadership behaviors. The second category involves traits associated with potential differential effectiveness of inclusive leadership behaviors (i.e., authenticity, political skill). These traits do not necessarily predict that leaders will engage in more inclusive leadership behaviors, but rather will likely moderate the relationship between inclusive leadership behaviors and organizational criteria (e.g., follower well-being and performance). For example, the relationship between inclusive leadership behaviors and follower well-being may be stronger for authentic leaders than inauthentic leaders, as these leaders are viewed to genuinely value diversity and inclusion, and the relationship between inclusive leadership behaviors and follower performance may be stronger for politically skilled leaders, who know how to tailor their influence strategy to the particular situation or follower at hand. Future research should seek to empirically evaluate links between these KSAOs and inclusive leadership.

*The Role of Culture*

We posit that the relationship between KSAOs and utilization of inclusive leadership behaviors is moderated by national culture. In the absence of external constraints, we maintain that positive attitudes toward diversity and inclusion and traits that predict such are the most proximal cross-situational predictors of inclusive behaviors. However, culture may impact the expression of inclusive leader behavior, attenuating the relationship between KSAOs and these behaviors. Specifically, culture may constrain or enhance the expression of inclusive leadership behaviors. For example, in high power distance cultures, an inclusive leader may inhibit his or her natural tendencies toward inclusion in order to be viewed as an effective leader, decreasing the relationship between positive attitudes toward diversity and inclusion and inclusive behaviors. Conversely, in a culture where exclusionary behaviors are deemed socially unacceptable, even leaders who do not possess strong positive attitudes toward diversity and inclusion may engage in inclusive behaviors to avoid social sanctions. Future research should examine the extent to which culture moderates the strength of the relationship between KSAOs and inclusive leadership behaviors or whether a different set of traits predict these behaviors in different cultural contexts.

**Training Inclusive Leaders**

An alternative approach to selecting for inclusive leaders would be to train inclusive leadership behaviors. This approach may be necessary if the base rate of these behaviors in the population of interest in low. However, we fully acknowledge that organizations may be interested in using these two approaches (i.e., selection and training) in a complementary fashion to meet their needs for inclusive leaders. To our knowledge, there is no research directly addressing the development of inclusive leaders. Therefore, best practices for how to train inclusive leaders remain as an important research question. Since literature on diversity training has identified how organizations can structure training and development programs to take advantage of differences between employees, this literature can also contribute to our knowledge of how to develop leaders to enact and sustain inclusion.

Diversity training programs are one of the major organizational diversity initiatives utilized by organizations; around 68% of US organizations offer diversity training (Society for Human Resources Management, 2010). Despite their popularity, diversity training programs vary greatly in terms of their objectives, implementation, and duration and their effectiveness have yet to be established empirically (King et al., 2010). A detailed review of diversity training literature is beyond the scope of this paper (for comprehensive reviews, see Ferdman and Brody, 1996; Kulik and Roberson, 2008), but an understanding of their strengths and weaknesses is informative in developing effective training programs for inclusive leaders. First, we summarize the content and best practices associated with diversity programs generally, then we provide recommendations for structuring training programs for inclusive leaders specifically, and finally we address how to evaluate the effectiveness of inclusive leadership training programs.

Jayne and Dipboye (2004) suggested that diversity training programs usually have two general objectives. The first is to communicate diversity goals and diversity-based practices and procedures of the organization by highlighting their benefits and their strategic importance. The second is to change organizational members’ diversity-related behaviors either directly by improving or developing certain skills and competencies (i.e., *diversity skills training)* or indirectly by reducing stereotype use and discriminatory attitudes (i.e., *diversity awareness training*). Diversity skills training capitalize on role modeling and focus exclusively on development of critical skills and competencies by enabling the participants to set behavioral goals and practice appropriate behaviors (King et al., 2010). Diversity awareness training emphasize differences and generally incorporate presentation and discussion of statistics on diversity characteristics and group exercises on individual differences, prejudice, and biases (e.g., Sanchez and Medkik, 2004). Although research on the effectiveness of diversity programs is scarce, past research suggests that diversity skills training programs are more effective than diversity awareness training programs (Kulik and Roberson, 2008). The literature has consistently highlighted negative reactions associated with awareness training and their failure to generate desirable results (e.g., Cavaleros et al., 2002; Chorobat-Mason, 2004).

Several best practices have been suggested to improve the effectiveness of diversity training programs, which can be summarized in three themes. First, diversity training programs should be based on a thorough needs analysis. Needs analysis is important not only to assess the appropriateness of training, but also to pinpoint skills and competencies in need of improvement and to identify person, job, and organizational factors that can constrain the program’s effectiveness. For example, organizational-level analysis might show whether policies and procedures as well as the organizational climate are compatible with the objectives of the diversity training program. Job-level analysis can indicate if the knowledge and the skills that are targeted by the diversity training program correspond to those KSAOs required for the jobs in order to ensure transfer. Person-level analysis can determine whether a given individual needs diversity training (Roberson et al., 2003). Such detailed analysis can also inform us about potential participants’ readiness and motivation to learn, which are important to reap benefits from training (Noe andSchmitt, 1986). Second, diversity training programs should be incorporated into existing organizational diversity initiatives rather than acting as an isolated component. In this respect, they need to reflect the organizational climate, have a visible link to the organizational strategy, and receive continual managerial support (Ferdman and Brody, 1996). Third, an effective diversity program should feature post-training performance standards and a continual monitoring process. In other words, training participants should know that behavioral indicators of diversity management competency will be rewarded on the job (i.e., assessed as part of their job performance) and they will receive frequent and structured feedback on those behaviors to ensure transfer of training and reduce negative reactions associated with diversity training (King et al., 2010).

Although inclusive leadership training programs may differ from diversity training programs on some aspects (e.g., participants are leaders), we would expect their objectives to be similar to those of various diversity training programs (i.e., awareness and skill development). Below we propose a preliminary multiple-step program for training inclusive leaders. We strongly believe that effective inclusive leadership training programs are those that inform their trainees about organizational inclusion goals, make them aware of their attitudes toward inclusion, and most importantly help them build and develop critical skills and behaviors (see Table 2).

Leaders attending inclusive leadership training programs should first have an overall understanding of the diversity and inclusion climate and policies and procedures of their organization and also an understanding of the climate for inclusion of their specific department or workgroup because we expect inclusive leaders to be change agents and mediators between top management and employees (e.g., Hollander, 2009; Mor Barak, 2000). Without sufficient knowledge on organizational procedures and practices, inclusive leaders may not be able to promote a culture of inclusion and they may fail to address status concerns of their followers.

Leaders should also explore attitudes like prejudice and stereotypes before moving to skill development. One way to prepare participants for skills training is to utilize the *awareness* component of inclusive leadership training programs to attempt to bring all participants to a comparable level in attitudes toward diversity and inclusion. Roberson and colleagues (2003) suggested that participants with strong positive attitudes toward diversity are likely to benefit from diversity awareness training whereas those with strong negative attitudes toward diversity may resist such trainings. Therefore, it is crucial to only enroll participants who are ready to participate in diversity training. However, given the lack of empirical research on the relationship between readiness and diversity training effectiveness, we also encourage researchers and diversity practitioners to investigate whether there are aptitude-treatment interactions (Snow, 1989), such that training content or methods could be tailored to individuals based on their KSAOs.

Combs (2002) recently proposed that diversity training should first seek to increase individuals’ diversity self-efficacy prior to skill development. We believe that the awareness component of inclusive leadership training programs will need to ensure that trainees have a high level of confidence in managing diversity if we want them to enact these behaviors on the job. In terms of content, sharing personal and mastery experiences and integrating modeling and observational learning experiences are helpful to develop confidence in managing diversity (Combs, 2002). Awareness training for inclusive leaders can also be coupled with self-regulation training so that leaders can learn how to monitor and control stereotype use (Kulik and Roberson, 2008). The major pitfall of current diversity awareness training programs is that they highlight stereotypes and discrimination without instructing trainees what to do about them (Carnevale and Stone, 1994). In order to reduce reliance on stereotypes, leaders should know how to recognize them and how to control their impact on thoughts and behaviors. Therefore, incorporating self-regulation training in the awareness phase is an important task for developing inclusive leaders.

Some researchers have also suggested that incorporating tenets of contact hypothesis, which argues that intergroup contact can reduce stereotype use (Allport, 1954), into diversity awareness programs can be highly effective (Kulik and Roberson, 2008; Paluck, 2006). Prerequisites for effective intergroup contact include diverse groups having perceptions of equal status, managerial support, having common goals, and valuing cooperation rather than competition (Kulik and Roberson, 2008). On the basis of the recommendations suggested by Paluck (2006), we believe that inclusive leadership training programs should train leaders to value differences, find a common ground, and to emphasize differences in their followers in terms of expertise rather than identity. This awareness component of the training program should also emphasize that leaders need to constantly remind their followers of the common goals they share and the importance of cooperation to achieve those goals (Pittinsky, 2010). Overall, we believe that the awareness component of inclusive leadership training should emphasize diversity self-efficacy, self-regulation, and effective intergroup contact.

Once leader participants have a clear understanding of organizational inclusion goals and feel efficacious in managing differences and monitoring their own stereotypes as well as others’, the next step is to develop specific skills and behaviors that facilitate inclusion. We expect this skills development phase to be the most important component of inclusive leadership training programs because this phase does not only highlight the *why* and *how to* be inclusive (i.e., objective didactic learning), but also *what to do* to be inclusive (i.e., experiential learning through active participation). The selection of targeted skills and behaviors will largely depend on the pre-training needs analysis. However, we believe that many of the inclusive behaviors we identified earlier in our review (see Table 1), such as enabling participative decision making, giving access to critical information and resources, asking for individual input, communicating organizational values and norms, removing organizational barriers perceived by the followers, enacting fair treatment, and bolstering confidence in followers, should be the focus of any inclusive leadership training program. Whenever possible, this phase should establish a close link between those skills and behaviors and positive consequences of enacting them on the job. Ferdman and Brody (1996) recommended role playing, analyzing organizational case studies, and observing and analyzing interactions to practice skills and behaviors during training. These exercises should also be developmental in nature rather than punitive to increase participants’ motivation to learn (Wiethoff, 2004).

Effective inclusive leadership training should help participants develop critical skills such as behavioral scripting and building task-focused interactions. In a study of behavioral scripting, Avery and colleagues (2009) assigned participants to either the scripted group (as either the interviewer or applicant role) or the unscripted group (have a casual conversation with their partner). As rated by independent judges, there were no significant difference in levels of discomfort between Black-White partners and same race partners in the scripted group, while Black-White partners were rated to display higher levels of discomfort compared to same-race partners in the unscripted group. Interestingly, further analyses showed that the effect of scripting was significant only for White participants as Black participants’ level of discomfort did not differ between unscripted and scripted role conditions. The authors recommended that diversity skill training focus on behavioral scripting rather than only emphasizing awareness to reduce anxiety from uncertainty in initial interracial interactions and increase participants’ diversity self-efficacy. Similarly, Babbitt and Sommers (2011) showed how interaction context influences interracial interactions. When given a task focus (highlighting group performance to receive a desirable outcome) rather than a social focus (highlighting social interaction based on mutual impressions), interracial dyads showed more coordination in their behavior and reported less concerns about prejudice. Black participants also reported less cognitive function depletion and White participants reported less implicit bias concerns. Although both of these studies focused solely on interracial interaction, task-focus and behavioral scripting are likely to remain critical skills inclusive leaders can use to establish effective communication among with individuals of diverse backgrounds.

For inclusive leadership training programs to be effective, both pre-training and post-training standards need to be clearly established. Needs analysis is critical both for identifying which skills and behaviors will be trained and assessing the readiness and the motivation to participate in these programs. Wiethoff (2004) utilized the Theory of Planned Behavior to argue that trainees would be more motivated to participate if they have a positive attitude toward attending such programs and if they perceive themselves as having relevant resources and external support. Therefore, a thorough needs analysis should identify potential ways to emphasize perceived utility of inclusive leadership training programs, communicate top managerial support to its participants, and ensure that participants have the cognitive resources, time, and energy to participate. However, motivation to participate does not automatically translate into readiness to participate. Once program participants are identified, their readiness to assume inclusive leader roles and participate in the training program should be assessed. If there are readiness gaps, organizations need to identify how to address those gaps before training.

The post-training phase is as critical as the training itself because it determines the success of the training program and its transfer. According to the model of training transfer, trainee characteristics, training design, and the work environment all play significant roles in determining the transfer of the skills and behaviors to the job (Baldwin and Ford, 1988). This model of transfer process suggests that personality, ability, and motivation of the trainee, training content and its sequencing, environmental support, and opportunities to use the skills and behaviors will impact the generalization and maintenance of skills and behaviors practiced in the training program. Therefore, in order to ensure transfer of newly learned inclusive leadership behaviors, organizations should take into account the self-efficacy and self-regulation of the participants, provide continual support and feedback for enacting the desired inclusive behaviors, and offer opportunities for leaders to display inclusive behaviors on the job.

The training literature is replete with studies focusing on training evaluation and there seems to be a shift from Kirkpatrick’s (1996) hierarchical model of reactions-learning-behavior-results to an extended model of effectiveness emphasizing cognitive outcomes, skill-based outcomes, affective outcomes, results, and return on investment (Kraiger et al., 1993). We believe each of these outcomes is important in establishing the effectiveness of inclusive leadership training programs. Measuring cognitive outcomes of inclusive leadership training might be important for the first component of training that deals with dissemination of organizational inclusion goals and the benefits of inclusion. Skill-based evaluation refers to the acquisition of skills and behaviors and their transfer. This can be done through observing the skills and behaviors both through work samples and on the job, particularly as reported by subordinates who are the intended recipients of these inclusive leadership behaviors. Affective outcomes are generally measured through participant reactions to training due to their ease and availability. However, among the four Kirkpatrick evaluation criteria, reactions have been shown to be a less effective evaluation criterion compared to learning, behavioral, and results criteria of training effectiveness (Arthur et al., 2003). Therefore, expanding the array of affective outcomes and including outcomes such as tolerance for diversity, attitude toward inclusion, and motivation to engage in inclusive behaviors may be more informative than focusing solely on reactions to training programs. As another effectiveness criterion, results highlight the importance of measuring both individual and organizational outcomes (i.e., multiple levels of analysis). These outcomes can range from both leaders’ and followers’ improved job attitudes and performance to reduced turnover intentions and actual turnover. We especially emphasize that these outcomes should be measured using reports of both trainees and their subordinates. Return on investment (ROI) is an important outcome of training and its measurement, whenever possible, is important because it determines the future investment decisions of the organizations in training programs (Bartel, 2000). ROI refers to the comparison of training benefits to both direct and indirect costs of training. For inclusive leadership training programs, direct costs may vary from time and scheduling costs associated with having leaders as participants to costs of materials and supplies related to the program itself. Therefore, establishing the economic value of this type of training program relative to training costs may increase the visibility and recognition of the importance of inclusive leadership training programs as well as offer evidence in support of their continual funding (Phillips and Phillips, 2003). In addition to evaluating a broad-range of relevant outcomes to determine the effectiveness of the training program, organizations should also be cognizant of the fact that timing in the measurement of criteria variables (e.g., transfer of inclusive leadership behaviors to the job, improvement in subordinate attitudes, etc.) is crucial and the effects of inclusive leadership training programs may not be realized in a short time frame due to the nature of the criterion variables (e.g., attitudinal and behavioral change).

*The Role of Culture*

The training model we articulated above (see Table 2) is intended as a general roadmap for the training of inclusive leaders. We believe that the process by which effective inclusive leadership training occurs holds across cultures and contexts. However, the difficulty in changing each component may vary by culture. For example, in “tight” or restrictive cultures, where there are strong social norms and little tolerance from deviation from these standards, it may be more difficult to improve attitudes toward diversity and inclusion if deviations from the norm are perceived as undesirable (Gelfand et al., 2011). Similarly, in collectivistic cultures, organizational reward structures may emphasize individual performance and behaviors, and inclusive leadership behaviors which also emphasize the importance of relational and change-oriented aspects of influence may not be reinforced and therefore may not be sustained over time. Future research should continue to explore the impact of context on the effectiveness of inclusive leadership training.

**Conclusion**

The present paper puts forth the argument that inclusive leaders play a critical role in creating and maintaining inclusive environments, allowing diverse individuals, groups, and organizations to capitalize on the unique skills and perspectives of members (or the self) to benefit performance at multiple levels of analysis. We explore four inter-related questions: (1) What are inclusive leadership behaviors? (2) Why are inclusive leaders important in organizational life? (3) What are the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics predictive of inclusive leaders? and (4) How do we train inclusive leadership behaviors? Our conclusion is that inclusive leadership behaviors reflect task, relational, and change-oriented behaviors designed to influence followers’ need to belong and need to be unique, serves as a key moderator of the relationship between diversity within a group and performance, are enacted by leaders who possess positive attitudes toward and endorsement of diversity and inclusion, and can be successfully trained after a thorough needs analysis is conducted and effectively maintained with appropriate organizational reward and feedback structures. Given the importance of inclusive leaders, we hope that the propositions set forth in this paper serve as the basis of future empirical and theoretical work on this construct.

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Table 1. Inclusive Leadership Behaviors Based On Optimal Distinctiveness Theory and the Integrated Model of Leadership Frameworks

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Task-Oriented Behaviors | Relational-Oriented Behaviors | Change-Oriented Behaviors |
| Behaviors that target  follower need for  belongingness | * providing clear goals for the group * keeping employees informed of group goals and objectives * providing continual feedback * showing openness to discuss goals * encouraging accessibility on emergent problems * monitoring the process * **sharing critical work-related information and resources** | * providing opportunities to share and voice opinions and concerns * **avoiding categorizing individuals on the basis of diversity characteristics** * **displaying value and respect toward different backgrounds and opinions** * **self-monitoring to reduce and control stereotypes and discrimination** * **showing acceptance and tolerance for individual differences** | * removing organizational barriers * communicating organizational values and norms * applying rules in a consistent and fair fashion * **taking active role to challenge status quo** |
| Behaviors that target  follower need for  uniqueness | * asking for individual inputs * showing openness to hear new ideas * **providing clear individual goals to achieve group-level goals** | * showing continual support and recognition of individual contributions * encouraging the individual to take initiative * **bolstering individual confidence and identity** * **displaying sensitivity to personal identity characteristics** | * communicating diversity as a resource * **promoting culture of organizational inclusion** |

*Note:* Behaviors displayed in **bold** refer to our suggestions for inclusive leadership behaviors.

Table 2. Proposed structure for inclusive leadership training

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Pre-training phase** | * Needs Assessment   + Determining whether training is the solution   + Determining whether organizational culture supports the inclusive leadership training   + Identifying skills and behaviors to be trained   + Determining the objectives of the training program as well as its content and participants   + Assessing readiness and motivation of the participants   + Identifying person, job and organizational factors that can inhibit the effectiveness of the program   + Establishing effectiveness criteria |
| **Training phase** | *Component 1: Training on organizational culture*   * Aim: Communication of organizational inclusion goals * Emphasis: Understanding of organizational inclusion policies, procedures and practices; understanding of hierarchy and political status in the organization |
| *Component 2: Awareness training*   * Aim: Exploration of attitudes toward diversity and inclusion * Emphasis: Developing self-efficacy on managing diversity and enacting inclusive behaviors; developing self-regulation for monitoring stereotype use; establishing intergroup contact |
| *Component 3: Skills training*   * Aim: Training and developing skills and behaviors for inclusion. * Emphasis: Practicing inclusive skills and behaviors; establishing clear links between training and on-the-job opportunities to use those skills and behaviors. |
| **Post training phase** | * Establishing training transfer   + Ensuring continual managerial support and feedback   + Creating opportunities to enact inclusive behaviors   + Monitoring the process * Evaluation of training   + Assessing cognitive outcomes, skill-based outcomes, affective outcomes, results, and return on investment   + Relying on multiple sources to establish effectiveness |

Figure 1. Moderators of the Relationship between Organizational Diversity and Organizational Performance

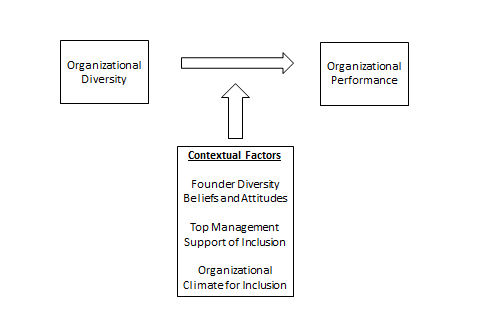
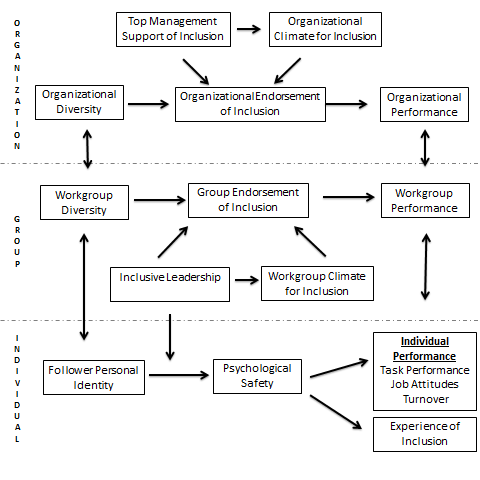


Figure 2. An Integrative Multilevel Model of Inclusion at Work



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