



16 - 18 October 2026

Milan , Italy

Inclusive Leadership and DEI Perceptions in Hybrid Teams: The Mediating Roles of Psychological Safety and Social Isolation

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Abstract

Recently, the organization has placed more emphasis on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) at the top of its list, and more employees now work remotely in hybrid models. Limited research has been conducted on the factors that affect employees' sense of belonging in hybrid teams in the non-Western world. Based on Social Identity Theory, this paper examines how inclusive leadership influences employees' sense of belonging and explores the mediating roles of psychological safety and social isolation. Data were collected from 401 employees across all sectors who have implemented a hybrid-team model in Chengdu, China, and then analysed using PLS-SEM. Thus, it has been determined that inclusive leadership promotes DEI perception for employees. The two intermediate paths in this model are psychological safety and social isolation, and among them, social isolation is a negative factor with a relatively large effect. Based on the above theoretical foundation, this study will examine the relationship between inclusive leadership and DEI perceptions in hybrid teams in China via psychological and relational paths. The results also show that the combined mode of working may have created an invisible type of exclusion due to less social contact. Therefore, in practice, the study proposes that inclusive leadership should foster an environment of psychological safety and improve communication and sense of belonging among all employees in a hybrid work model.

Keywords: Inclusive Leadership, DEI Perceptions, Psychological Safety, Social Isolation, Hybrid Teams