

# Inclusive Leadership, Perceived Organizational Support, and Work Engagement: The Moderating Role of Leadership-Member Exchange Relationship

Hudie Xiang<sup>1,a\*</sup>, Yun Chen<sup>1,b</sup> and Fuqiang Zhao<sup>1,c</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of Management, Wuhan University of Technology, Wuhan, P.R. China, 430070

<sup>a</sup>2504149015@qq.com, <sup>b</sup> 17908016@qq.com, <sup>c</sup>zhaofq@whut.edu.cn

**Keywords:** Inclusive leadership; Work engagement; Perceived organizational support; Leadership-member exchange relationship

**Abstract.** Based on the theory of social exchange, this study explores the influence of inclusive leadership on work engagement. The mediating role of organizational support between inclusive leadership and work engagement and the moderating role of Leadership-member exchange relationship are analyzed deeply and systematically. It is found that the influence of inclusive leadership on work engagement is mediated by perceived organizational support. When leaders adopt an inclusive leadership style, employees will feel organizational support, which will increase their work engagement. Second, the quality of leadership-member exchange relationship will affect the perceived organizational support of employees, and the quality of perceived organizational support among higher quality leadership-member exchange relationship is higher, thus affecting the work engagement of employees.

## Introduction

Work engagement has received great attention both in academic research and management practice, because work engagement can significantly improve organizational performance, thus enabling enterprises to gain competitive advantage [1]. Many scholars have done empirical analysis and meta-analysis on work engagement, and the results show that work engagement has a positive effect on employees [2]. There are many factors that will affect the staff's work input, such as work pressure [3]. Among them, leader's style is a very important variable to influence employee's happiness [4]. With the development of economy, our social structure has been a major adjustment, gradually diversified development trend, our internal staff also shows the characteristics of diversity, the diversity is not only in the aspects of gender, nationality and skin color, but also reflects differences in the values of the employees [5]. As a new style of leadership, inclusive leadership has received wide attention from both academic and theoretical circles. Inclusive leadership can accommodate differences and be well adapted to the current diverse organizational environment [6].

The relationship between inclusive leadership and work engagement has been preliminarily explored at home and abroad, but little is known about their internal mechanisms of action. The impact of leadership style on employees' work engagement is a complex process. The mechanism of action between the two remains to be further in-depth and rich. At the same time, there are moderating variables that influence the relationship between inclusive leadership and employee work engagement, which will further deepen the multi chain mechanism of inclusive leadership on employee engagement. In view of this, according to the perceived organizational support as a mediator, to further explore the mechanism of inclusive leadership on employee engagement, while the leadership-member exchange relationship as a moderator, investigate the influence of contingency.

## Literature Review

**Inclusive Leadership.** Inclusive leadership is one of the core of inclusive management and an important way to realize organizational inclusiveness [7]. Inclusive leadership pays attention to the needs and benefits of employees, and works with employees to accomplish tasks. It can stimulate

the potential and vitality of employees, and the inclusive leadership and employees are interdependent [8]. Domestic and foreign experts have defined the concept of Inclusive leadership from different angles:

Table 1 Definition of Inclusive Leadership

Author	Definition
Nembhard & Edmondson 2006	Encourage and appreciate the contribution of subordinates
Hollander 2009	Between the leader and the subordinate is based on respect, recognition, response and responsibility of the two-way relationship
Carmeli et al. 2010	Leaders and followers show openness, effectiveness, and accessibility in interaction
Minghui Yao, Yuanxu Li 2014	Openness; affinity; tolerance; support;

**Perceived Organizational Support.** Perceived organizational support was raised by Eisenberger, who argues that Perceived organizational support is the perception that employees are concerned about their contribution to the organization and their interests [9]. Ling believes that the perceived organizational support refers to the extent to which employees feel the organization's support for their work, and whether they agree with their interests and values. He divided the perceived organizational support into three dimensions: working support, employee value identification and caring interests [10]. Perceived organizational support can meet the psychological needs of employees. Employees will judge the organization's support according to their feelings [11]. Based on the theory of social exchange, if employees feel the organization's support for their work, then employees will return to the organization, the employees will work harder for the purpose of the organization. This article uses the Eisenberger's point of view to define perceived organizational support.

**Work Engagement.** Kahn is the first person to put forward the concept of work engagement. He believes that employees' work engagement is a combination of employee's self and work role. Work engagement means that employees express themselves at three levels of physiology, emotion and cognition at work [12]. Work engagement generally means that employees are fully committed to work, and employees are willing to sacrifice their own personal time for work and pay extra labor. It reflects the degree of employee's recognition of work. Scholars such as Schaufeli and Bakker believe that work engagement is a positive working state characterized by concentration, vitality and dedication [13]. Although there is no uniform definition of the concept of work engagement, it is generally accepted that work engagement is a combination of work ability and willingness to work [14]. This study draws on the views of scholars such as Schaufeli to define work engagement as an individual's sustained and positive emotional activation state, characterized by vitality, dedication and concentration.

## Hypotheses Development

**Inclusive Leadership and Work Engagement.** Inclusive leadership has the characteristics of accessibility and openness, and leader in the work will take the initiative to provide assistance and support for subordinates, based on the principle of reciprocity, when the subordinates feel these help and support later, subordinates will work in the performance of more active (Carmeli et al., 2010; Hirak et al., 2012). Nembhard & Edmondson (2006) research on inclusive leadership for the work of the medical team found that inclusive leadership can promote the involvement of the medical team in quality improvement efforts [15]. Palmon and Ziv (2010) found that there was a positive relationship between inclusive leadership and employee work engagement in innovative scenarios

[16]. Peng (2017) adopt questionnaire investigation method, take 239 employee data of Jiangsu Province as the sample, the research has found that there is a significant positive correlation between inclusive leadership and employee work engagement [17]. Inclusive leadership tends to take a more tolerant attitude when employees encounter difficulties, and will provide help and support for employees at work. According to social exchange theory, when employees feel these help, employees will work harder to return the support of the leadership. We therefore make the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Inclusive leadership is positively related to employee work engagement.

**Perceived Organizational Support and Work Engagement.** According to the theory of social exchange, if the organization provides support for the employee, then the employee will produce a sense of obligation for the organization, which will increase the employee's work engagement, to achieve the objectives of the organization [9]. Liang and Zhang (2015) explored the knowledge employee relationship between perceived organizational support and work engagement, the results show that organizational support has a direct impact not only on the employee work engagement, but also indirectly through psychological capital [18]. Rich et al found that when organizations value employee contributions and concerns about employee benefits, employees will feel that the organization is trustworthy and that employees will have higher work engagement [19]. Employees with high perceived organizational support can obtain more recognition from the organization. They feel the organization's attention to them. So they will be more involved in the work to repay the organization. We therefore propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Perceived organizational support is positively related to work engagement.

**Inclusive Leadership and Perceived Organizational Support.** Organizational support is the degree to which employees perceive the organization's concern for its contribution and welfare [9]. Leadership's attitude towards subordinates and the degree of support to subordinates can have a significant impact on employee perceived organizational support [20]. Research has found that leadership's help and support to employees can effectively enhance their perceived organizational support (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Inclusive leadership takes care of employees at work and provides support to employees. Then employees perceive organizational support from their leaders. We therefore propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Inclusive leadership is positively related to perceived organizational support.

**The Mediating Role of Perceived Organizational Support.** Inclusive leadership gives care and support to the work and well-being of employees. According to social exchange theory, when employees feel the organization's support for their work and the recognition of their work outcomes, employees will feel a sense of belonging and return to the organization, and will work harder for the purpose of the organization [10]. Therefore, employees with high organizational support will be highly engaged in their work. However, employees with low organizational support have lower work engagement. Based on the above analysis, we propose the following hypotheses, based on Hypothesis 1, Hypothesis 2, and Hypothesis 3:

Hypothesis 4: Perceived organizational support mediates the relationship between Inclusive leadership and Work engagement.

**Moderating Role of Leadership-Member Exchange Relationship.** The effectiveness of leadership depends not only on the leader himself, but also on the followers. Social exchange theory shows that Leadership-member exchange relationship can reflect the emotional intimacy between leaders and subordinates [21]. Compared to low quality Leadership-member exchange relationship of employees, high quality Leadership-member exchange relationship of subordinates easier to experience leadership from the heart of their understanding and support of their work, more able to perceive the support of the organization (Lord & Brown, 2001) [22]. Employees with high quality Leadership-member exchange relationship can communicate with leaders effectively, and leaders can clearly understand the needs of their subordinates and help leaders to support their work. Therefore, employees with high quality Leadership-member exchange relationship can feel more organizational support. We therefore propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5: Leadership-member exchange relationship moderate the relationship between

inclusive leadership and perceived organizational support, and the relationship between inclusive leadership and perceived organizational support is stronger when high quality Leadership-member exchange relationship.

### The Construction of a Research Model

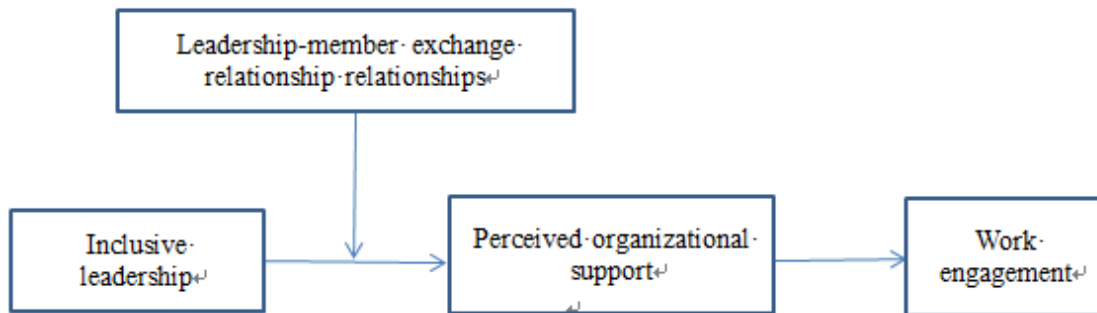


Figure 1. The concept of full relationship model

Existing researches presented the relationship between inclusive leadership, perceived organizational support, work engagement and Leadership-member exchange relationship as showed in the above conceptual model. Perceived organizational support mediates inclusive leadership and work engagement. According to social exchange theory, when employees perceive organizational support, employees increase their work engagement in order to reward the organization. Leaders, as representatives of organizations, and when leaders adopt an inclusive leadership style, employees perceive organizational support from leaders, and employees work hard to achieve organizational goals. The quality of leadership-member exchange relationship will facilitate perceived organizational support. Employees with high quality leadership-member exchange relationship have more perceived organizational support.

### Conclusion

This study examines the mediating role of Perceived organizational support in inclusive leadership and employee work engagement, and identifies moderator roles in leadership-member exchange relationships. Using the theory of social exchange, this paper explores the inner mechanism between inclusive leadership and work engagement. Finally, we get the hypothesis that Inclusive leadership has a positive effect on work engagement through perceived organizational support, and high quality Leadership-member exchange relationship promotes this positive relationship. Through research, we know that an inclusive leadership style is conducive to organizational performance.

This paper takes the Leadership-member exchange relationship as moderator. In the future, other variables can be considered as moderator variables, such as collectivism. Although inclusive leadership is used as independent variable and work engagement as dependent variable, the causal relationship between them may be the opposite. Future research may consider work engagement as independent variables and inclusive leadership as a dependent variable to examine the relationship between them.

There is not much research on inclusive leadership, and the future will be able to explore the impact of more inclusive leadership on employee behavior. In the future, inclusive leadership can be compared with other leadership styles to explore which leadership styles are better suited to the organization.

## References

- [1]L.J. Wang: An empirical study on the relationship among job satisfaction, work engagement and job performance-Take S enterprise in Sanming City, Fujian Province as an example (MS., Beijing Forestry University, China 2013), p.82. (In Chinese)
- [2]Bakker A B, Xanthopoulou D: *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 94 (2009) No.6, p.1562.
- [3]X.Y. Hu: A Study about the Effect of Bank Employees'Work Stress on the Job Engagement-With Organizational Justice as Moderator (MS.,ShangDong University, China 2015), p.94. (In Chinese)
- [4]Goody J, Connelly S, Griffith J, et al: *Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 21 (2010) No.6, p.979-1004.
- [5]Harrison D A, Price K H, Bell M P: *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 41 (1998) No.41, p.96-107.
- [6]Y. Zhu, S.T. Qian: *Foreign Economy and Management*, Vol. 36 (2014) No.2, p.55-64. (In Chinese)
- [7]Tang N, Jiang Y, Chen C, et al: *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 26 (2015) No.6, p.856-874.
- [8]Hantula D A: *Psychological Record*, Vol. 59 (2012) No.4, p.701-703.
- [9]Eisenberger R, Stinglhamber F: *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 71 (2011) No.3, p.500-507.
- [10]W.Q. Ling, H.J. Yang and L.L. Fang: *Journal of Psychology*, Vol. 38 (2006) No.2, p.281-287. (In Chinese)
- [11]Z.B. Li, Q.L. LI and Y.H. Tian: *Soft Science*, Vol. 27 (2013) No.6, p.103-107. (In Chinese)
- [12]Kahn, W. A: *Human Relations*, (1992) No.45, p.321-349.
- [13]Schaufeli W B, Bakker A B: *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 25 (2004) No.3, p.293-315.
- [14]Z. Wang: *Advances in Psychological Science*, Vol. 20 (2012) No.10, p.17-23. (In Chinese)
- [15]Edmondson A C: *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 27 (2009) No.7, p.941-966.
- [16]Abraham Carmeli, Roni ReiterPalmon and Enbal Ziv.: *Creativity Research Journal*, Vol. 22 (2010) No.3, p.250-260.
- [17]W. Peng, Q.W. Zhu and K.Q. Chen: *Journal of Management*, Vol. 14 (2017) No.5, p.686-694. (In Chinese)
- [18]Q.G. Liang, W. Zhang: *Operation and Management*, (2015) No.9, p.135-137. (In Chinese)
- [19]Rich, B. L., Lepine, J. A., & Crawford, E. R: *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 53 (2010) No.3, p.617-635.
- [20]R. Li, W.Q. Ling and S.S. Liu: *Journal of Psychology*, Vol. 41 (2009) No.12, p.1189-1202. (In Chinese)
- [21]Liao, H., Liu, D., & Loi, R: *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 53 (2010) No.5, p.1090-1109.
- [22]Lord R G, Brown D J: *Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 12 (2001) No.2, p.133-152.