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Inclusive Leadership as Predictor of Positive Work Behavior: An Empirical Study

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ABSTRACT

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Inclusive leadership is increasingly recognized as a vital factor in promoting and sustaining workplace well-being. While previous research has highlighted its link to positive work behavior, the relationship remains insufficiently explored, with findings that are often inconsistent. Drawing on the framework of Social Cognitive Theory, this study investigates how inclusive leadership, conceptualized through knowledge sharing and skill transfer, influences positive work behavior, specifically cognitive engagement and work motivation. A total of 269 full-time employees from various educational agencies in Malaysia participated in the study by completing a survey questionnaire. The data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with SmartPLS software to examine the proposed hypotheses. The results reveal that inclusive leadership has a significant and positive effect on positive work behavior, establishing it as a critical predictor in organizational settings. These findings suggest that leaders should pay greater attention to fulfilling employees' basic psychological needs, as doing so can foster intrinsic motivation, encourage personal growth, and strengthen commitment. In practice, inclusive leadership not only enhances employees' enthusiasm and energy but also contributes to building a supportive work environment that promotes long-term well-being. Ultimately, this study underscores the importance of adopting inclusive leadership as a strategic approach to cultivate motivated, engaged, and resilient employees.

In today's increasingly dynamic and diverse organizational landscape, inclusive leadership has emerged as a vital leadership approach that emphasizes the principles of equity, respect, and belonging within the workplace (Korkmaz et al., 2022; Li et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2024). This form of leadership refers to a leader's ability to value diversity, ensure fairness, and empower all employees regardless of their backgrounds. In the context of Malaysia's public education organizations, inclusive leadership has been increasingly recognized as a key factor influencing employees' attitudes, engagement, and motivation, thereby contributing to overall institutional performance and effectiveness. Inclusive leadership in Malaysia's public education sector carries significant implications for work motivation, cognitive engagement, and organizational learning. Leaders who embody inclusivity are able to create work environments that encourage educators and administrative staff to think critically, share ideas, and participate actively in continuous improvement processes. This is particularly important in educational institutions entrusted with shaping future generations of citizens grounded in principles of inclusivity and mutual respect. By recognizing diverse perspectives and fostering psychological safety, inclusive leaders can enhance job satisfaction, innovation, and overall organizational performance (Shore et al., 2018; Qasim et al., 2022; Popoola & Fagbola, 2023).

Previous studies have also shown that inclusive leadership promotes positive work behaviors (Ackaradejruangsri et al., 2023; Kanya & Johan, 2025), particularly through strengthening cognitive engagement and work motivation. Cognitive engagement refers to the level of mental effort and intellectual involvement invested in learning, problem-solving, and task execution (Shamim et al., 2025; Fischer et al., 2020), while work motivation reflects the internal and external drives that sustain goal-directed and persistent effort (Vo et al., 2022). Both elements serve as important indicators of leadership effectiveness and organizational vitality. Despite the growing global attention toward inclusive leadership, research within the context of Malaysia's public education sector remains limited (Fischer et al., 2020; Shafaei & Nejati, 2024; Shamim et al., 2025). Leadership culture in this sector continues to be heavily influenced by traditional hierarchical norms and collectivist values, making inclusive approaches challenging to implement comprehensively. Contextual differences such as strong bureaucratic systems, policy-driven operations, and the integration of multicultural values make this environment both unique and underexplored in existing literature (Kuknor et al., 2025; Mohase et al., 2025). Examining inclusive leadership in this context provides an opportunity to expand current theoretical understanding and generate new insights into how inclusive practices can be effectively implemented in government-led educational institutions. Furthermore, most prior studies on inclusive leadership have been conducted in the private sector or Western organizational contexts, which differ significantly from public institutions in terms of structure, hierarchy, and culture (Kuknor et al., 2025; Vo et al., 2022). In Malaysia, public education agencies operate within a governance system that emphasizes hierarchy, policy compliance, and multicultural harmony. This creates unique leadership dynamics where leaders must balance policy demands with the need to promote inclusivity, fairness, and employee voice. Unlike corporate organizations that often enjoy greater flexibility and autonomy, leaders in public education agencies must navigate bureaucratic constraints and multigenerational workforce expectations (Elrehail et al., 2020; Randel et al., 2018). Therefore, inclusive leadership plays a crucial role in fostering engagement, trust, and collaboration within a system that values diversity yet functions under formal administrative control.

From this perspective, the present study is novel in two ways. First, it expands the scope of inclusive leadership theory by contextualizing it within a public sector education environment, offering insights into how inclusive behaviors manifest in a government-driven, multicultural, and policy-regulated setting. Second, it advances theoretical understanding by identifying context-specific attributes and taxonomies that contribute to the development of a more applicative and culturally grounded framework of inclusive leadership. By doing so, this study not only fills an empirical gap but also contributes conceptually to the leadership literature by linking inclusive leadership with cognitive engagement and motivation within the unique Malaysian public sector context. Ultimately, this research aims to strengthen understanding of how inclusive leadership can serve as an effective predictor of positive work behavior

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Inclusive Leadership

Over the past decade, inclusive leadership models have received increasing attention among management and leadership scholars (Detert et al., 2007; Mohase et al., 2025) and have also emerged as a prominent topic in practical discussions related to organizational governance (Kanungo & Mendonca, 1996). Inclusive leadership refers to an approach that encourages the active participation of all organizational members, regardless of their background, identity, or social status. According to Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1986), individuals acquire behaviors by observing and imitating role models in their environment. Therefore, leaders not only serve as role models but also play important roles as mentors, facilitators, and advocates for their employees. In the organizational context, inclusive leadership comprises two essential elements: knowledge sharing and skill transfer. Knowledge sharing is commonly defined as the process through which leaders convey, disseminate, or share information, skills, experiences, insights, and expertise with organizational members, particularly subordinates or colleagues. This can occur formally (e.g., through training sessions, presentations, or workshops) or informally (e.g., through coaching, everyday conversations, or on-the-job mentoring). Meanwhile, skill transfer refers to the process by which leaders actively support team members in acquiring, mastering, and applying specific skills through guidance, training, mentoring, or experiential learning. Through these mechanisms, employees experience inclusive values as demonstrated through the actions, decisions, and interaction styles of their leaders. From a leadership perspective, the concept of inclusive leadership is closely associated with ethical values, particularly accountability, integrity, and transparency in decision-making. Core characteristics of this leadership style include fair treatment, the fostering of shared values, and respect for individual diversity and contributions. Inclusive leaders foster a work environment that supports psychological well-being and encourages positive work behavior. This includes demonstrating behaviors aligned with moral norms through open communication, reinforcement of positive values, and support for individual development within the organization (Alhalbusi et al., 2023; Brown & Treviño, 2006; Platania et al., 2025). Consequently, inclusive leaders tend to make decisions transparently, consider multiple perspectives, and show genuine concern for the well-being of organizational members. This leadership approach not only strengthens trust and mutual respect but also contributes to the development of an inclusive, equitable, and sustainable organizational culture. Such a culture fosters the formation of positive social exchange relationships, which in turn enhances

desirable positive work behavior, including engagement, collaboration, and continuous learning (Alhaidan, 2024; Mohase et al., 2025).

Cognitive Engagement

In an organizational context, cognitive engagement refers to the degree of mental and psychological investment that an employee commits to performing work-related tasks. The concept was originally prominent in educational literature, where it denoted the extent to which students actively engage in deep cognitive processes to understand complex ideas and master the content presented (Huang et al., 2022; Oduro Owusu & Gil, 2025). Cognitive engagement involves deliberate thinking, including problem-solving, positive coping, a desire to learn, and self-monitoring throughout the decision-making process (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Oduro Owusu & Gil, 2025). In the workplace, this form of engagement is reflected in employees' initiatives to comprehend tasks thoroughly, develop creative solutions, and continuously enhance their skills through lifelong learning. It aligns with the characteristics of intrinsic motivation, whereby individuals are driven by internal satisfaction, intellectual curiosity, and a strong commitment to work quality (Bogatyreva et al., 2022; Radović & Seidel, 2025; Zimmerman, 1990). For instance, in a digital work environment, high cognitive engagement may be demonstrated by employees who seek additional information, actively participate in online training, or proactively complete assignments. Cognitive engagement is also closely linked to behavioral engagement, which refers to the employee's level of attentiveness, visible effort, and participation in both formal and informal workplace activities (Fischer et al., 2020; Radović & Seidel, 2025; Shamim et al., 2025). Theoretically, high cognitive engagement contributes significantly to cognitive well-being, defined as the optimal capacity for deep thinking, adaptability, and sound decision-making. This is essential for ensuring that employees remain productive, flexible, and resilient in challenging organizational environments. Accordingly, organizations that foster cognitive engagement through inclusive leadership, accessible learning opportunities, constructive feedback, and a culture that supports intellectual expression are better positioned to create a work environment that not only enhances performance but also promotes holistic employee well-being.

Work Motivation

Work motivation refers to the internal drive that compels individuals to complete work tasks and has been identified as a critical element in ensuring employee engagement and effectiveness within organizations (Kamberi, 2025; Vo et al., 2022). It is defined as a set of driving forces arising from a combination of internal individual factors and environmental influences, which guide work-related behavior and determine its direction, intensity, and duration (Shkoler & Kimura, 2020; Forson et al., 2021). From the perspective of occupational psychology, work motivation is a dynamic process that reflects how individuals interpret tasks and goals within the framework of their roles. It functions not only as a catalyst for action but also as an adaptive mechanism in response to evolving job demands (Kamberi, 2025; Vo et al., 2022). This process influences not only productivity and performance levels but also shapes organizational culture through communication, consistency, and emotional engagement among employees. In this context, Rajak and Pandey (2017) argue that motivation is a key determinant of employee attitudes toward their work, which directly impacts organizational success or

failure. In essence, work motivation is more than a managerial concept; it serves as a strategic tool for ensuring long-term organizational competitiveness. In an era marked by market volatility and rapid technological advancement, organizations must view work motivation as a core component of human capital development, one that involves fostering a work environment that promotes autonomy, continuous growth, and strong interpersonal relationships.

Inclusive Leadership and Positive Work Behaviour

In recent years, inclusive leadership has gained increasing attention as a leadership approach that values diversity, fairness, and belonging within organizations (Platania et al., 2025; Qasim et al., 2022; Shore et al., 2018). Inclusive leaders actively recognize employees' individual contributions, encourage participation in decision-making, and promote a psychologically safe environment where employees feel respected and empowered to express themselves (Ackaradejruangsri et al., 2023). This leadership style has been associated with a range of positive behavioral outcomes, including innovation, engagement, and prosocial work behaviors (Wu & Li, 2023; Kanya & Johan, 2025). Despite the growing body of research on inclusive leadership, most existing studies are concentrated in private or Western organizational contexts, such as corporate or healthcare settings, where organizational culture and power structures differ significantly from the public sector educational institutions in developing countries. Studies by Ackaradejruangsri et al. (2023), Wu and Li (2023), and Kanya and Johan (2025) collectively demonstrate that inclusive leadership promotes helping behavior, knowledge sharing, and innovation among employees. However, these findings have been derived largely from non-educational contexts healthcare in Pakistan, service industries in China, and private universities in Indonesia where organizational autonomy and performance pressures differ from the hierarchical and policy-driven nature of public educational institutions in Malaysia.

Ackaradejruangsri et al. (2023) conducted interviews with 12 young Thai leaders to classify the crucial attributes of young inclusive Thai leaders. Their findings confirm the importance of inclusivity in emotionally demanding workplaces but do not explore cognitive or motivational dimensions of employee behavior. Similarly, Wu and Li (2023) examined 531 leader-employee dyads from the Chinese service sector and found that inclusive leadership positively predicts innovative behavior. While this expands the behavioral scope of inclusivity, the study is limited by its cross-sectional design and private-sector focus. Kanya and Johan (2025) examined 221 employees from a private university in West Java province, Indonesia, revealing that inclusive leadership fosters collaboration, skill development, and performance improvement. Although this research adds valuable insights into educational settings, the context of private universities with more flexibility and less bureaucratic control differs fundamentally from that of public education agencies, where leadership practices are often constrained by formal structures, administrative hierarchies, and collective decision-making norms.

The relationship between inclusive leadership and positive work behavior can be comprehensively understood through Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) (Bandura, 1986), which emphasizes the reciprocal interaction between environmental, cognitive, and behavioral factors. Inclusive leadership, as an environmental stimulus, shapes employees' cognition (through knowledge sharing and skill transfer) and behavior (through engagement and work motivation). When leaders promote inclusivity by encouraging open communication, valuing

diversity, and empowering employees they create an environment that enhances cognitive engagement and stimulates intrinsic motivation.

According to SCT, individuals observe and internalize leaders' behaviors and subsequently replicate these inclusive practices in their work interactions. Thus, inclusive leadership does not merely influence employees directly but also shapes their cognitive and motivational processes, leading to sustained positive work behaviors such as collaboration, commitment, and innovation. Based on this theoretical framework and empirical evidence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Knowledge sharing is positively associated with cognitive engagement

H2: Knowledge sharing is positively associated with work motivation

H3: Skill transfer is positively associated with cognitive engagement

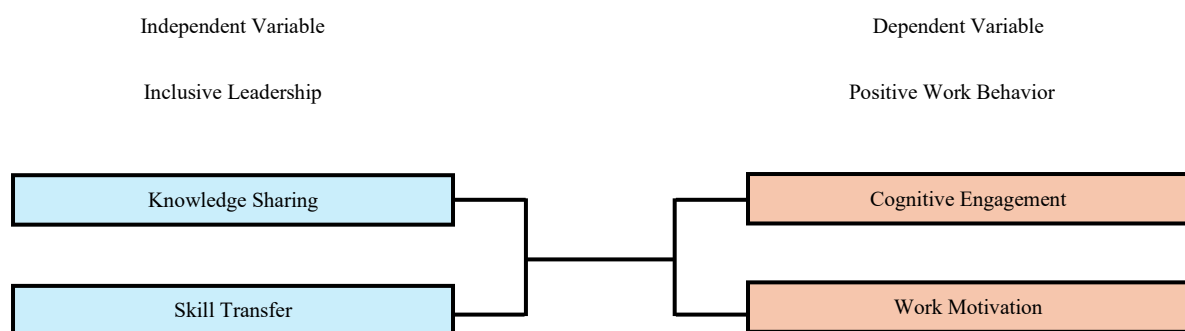
H4: Skill transfer is positively associated with work motivation

Research Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was developed based on a comprehensive review of existing literature on leadership and organizational behavior. As illustrated in [Figure 1](#), the model proposes that inclusive leadership, which comprises knowledge sharing and skill transfer, serves as the independent variable, while positive work behavior, which includes cognitive engagement and work motivation, functions as the dependent variable. Specifically, the framework suggests that inclusive leadership acts as a predictor of positive work behavior among employees. Specifically, the framework proposes that inclusive leadership acts as a key predictor of employees' positive work behavior, highlighting the role of inclusive leadership practices in fostering motivation and engagement within organizational settings.

Figure 1

Research Framework



Method

Context of the Study

This study focuses on a key government agency in Malaysia that plays a strategic role in planning, implementing and monitoring the country's higher education policy. The agency aims to position Malaysia as a talent hub and centre of knowledge excellence at the regional and global levels. In line with this aspiration, the agency is committed to strengthening a sustainable and inclusive higher education ecosystem, with an emphasis on talent

empowerment and the development and dissemination of knowledge to support the country's progress and the well-being of society holistically.

In the context of an ever-changing and dynamic technological landscape, the higher education sector plays a vital role in producing highly skilled, innovative and competitive graduates. Such graduates are needed not only to meet the needs of the current labor market, but also to proactively contribute to national development. To realize this goal, leadership in higher education organizations recognizes that high-performance human resource management is at the heart of institutional success. In this regard, the level of cognitive engagement and work motivation of employees is seen as a critical outcome that reflects the effectiveness of leadership, as well as contributing to the improvement of individual competence in the organization.

Therefore, to ensure the organization's ability to produce resilient and competent human capital, this agency requires a form of leadership that is not only efficient, but also strategic in addressing current and future challenges. Leadership that is authoritative, adaptive and far-sighted is crucial to encourage comprehensive engagement among staff and ensure organizational excellence in fulfilling national mandates and global demands.

Research Design

This study was conducted at a key agency that plays a strategic role in strengthening the Malaysia higher education ecosystem. The agency is committed to producing graduates and skilled and semi-skilled workers who are able to meet the needs of the industry and the needs of society holistically. As a leader in quality and innovation-oriented higher education, this agency emphasizes the empowerment of human capital, research and innovation as pillars of the country's competitiveness at the global and local level. Therefore, the selection of this agency as the study location is appropriate because of its comprehensive function in shaping the national higher education landscape.

The study design used a cross-sectional approach by distributing questionnaires to respondents in the organizations involved. This survey approach allows for the systematic collection of quantitative data, allowing researchers to obtain relevant, accurate and reliable information. It also minimizes the possibility of bias or sampling error. As emphasized by Creswell (2015) and Sekaran and Bougie (2016), the use of systematic and objective data collection methods is very important to ensure the validity and reliability of research findings. The data collection process began with the construction of questionnaire items that were designed based on the latest literature on the concept of leadership. This step ensured that the construction of the research instrument was based on valid empirical evidence and in line with the context and objectives of the study. The selection of appropriate items was important because it determined the extent to which the instrument could accurately measure the targeted construct.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the questionnaire instrument, the translation process was carried out in two language versions, namely Malay and English, using the back-translation approach as recommended by Wright (1996). To ensure the accuracy of meaning and context in both versions, the researcher involved two experienced lecturers in the field of human resource management to translate and review the content of the instrument. This process was critical to avoid any distortion of meaning that could affect the respondents' understanding of

the questionnaire items. Furthermore, the accuracy of the translation played an important role in ensuring that all respondents, regardless of their language and cultural background, could understand the questions clearly. Therefore, the careful implementation of this procedure helped to increase the reliability of the data and reduce the possibility of confusion or misinterpretation when answering the questionnaire.

Sampling

This study was conducted in accordance with the research ethics guidelines as outlined in the Principles of the Declaration of Helsinki for research involving human subjects, which has also received approval from the USM/JEPeM/PP/23090675. Written informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to their participation in this study. This process was implemented to ensure that each participant understood the purpose, procedures, potential risks and their right to withdraw at any time without any implications.

The unit of analysis of the study consisted of employees currently serving in the organization under study, covering various categories of positions and departments. This study used a sampling technique aimed at distributing 360 questionnaires to employees from various levels of positions. The selection of this technique was based on practical and ethical considerations, since the organization's management was unable to provide a complete list of employees due to confidentiality reasons and the need to protect the organization's reputation and corporate image. Therefore, a more selective and controlled sampling approach was taken to ensure appropriate representativeness without revealing sensitive organizational information. Of the total number distributed, 269 questionnaires were returned and completed, giving a response rate of 74.73%. All respondents participated in the study voluntarily without any coercion from management, demonstrating full compliance with ethical principles in social research.

To assess the possibility of response bias, the data obtained were analyzed using Harman's Single Factor Test, as proposed by Podsakoff et al. (2003). This test was used to measure the extent to which a single factor contributes to the variance in the data collected, thus assessing the risk of common method bias that may affect the internal validity of the study. The results of the analysis showed that only 40% of the variance was explained by a single factor, which is below the critical threshold of 50%. This indicates that the influence of bias is minimal and insignificant, and does not have a major impact on the bias of the study findings. Therefore, the data obtained are considered valid and reliable for further analysis.

Instruments

The research instrument consists of three main parts. The first part involves leadership, which is measured through two dimensions, namely knowledge sharing and skill transfer. The second part is cognitive engagement. The third part is work motivation. Nine items were adapted from Carmeli et al. (2010) for leadership inclusive assessment. Inclusive leadership is defined as the ability of leaders in organizations to help and guide employees to improve performance, develop skills, and achieve professional goals. Sample items include: "leaders suggest new methods to complete tasks honestly", "leaders offer accurate sources of information" and "collaborative work environment".

Six items were adapted from Shum et al. (2024) to measure cognitive engagement. In the organizational context, cognitive engagement refers to the mental effort, attention, and deep thought that an individual invests in learning, problem-solving, or completing a task. It involves actively processing information, understanding ideas, and making good use of acquired knowledge. Sample items include “connect what I’m learning to things I already know”, “think deeply about what I learn” and “apply what I’ve learned to new situations or tasks”.

Work motivation was measured using five items adapted from Lobaton Gonzales et al. (2024). Work motivation refers to the internal and external drives that drive an individual to perform work tasks diligently, consistently, and effectively to achieve personal and organizational goals (Lobaton Gonzales et al., 2024). Sample items include compassion, (b) mindfulness, (c) and meaningful work.

All items are rated on a seven-point response scale, ranging from “strongly disagree/strongly dissatisfied” (1) to “strongly agree/strongly satisfied” (7). This measurement scale was chosen because it maximizes optimal reliability in assessing respondent responses and produces more neutral and improved responses (Cox, 1980).

Procedure

In the first stage, the study data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software, which aims to assess the level of data quality. In the second stage, this study was analyzed based on the SmartPLS software package which aims to evaluate the structural model and test the study hypothesis (Hair et al., 2017). At this stage, the measurement model has gone through three important phases, namely a) assessing the level of validity and reliability of the instrument (Gefen & Straub, 2005), assessing the direct effect model (such as the level of significance of the study hypothesis based on a t value >1.96) and b) assessing the R^2 criterion based on the criteria of .26 = robust, .13 = moderate and .02 = weak (Cohen, 1992) as well as estimating the f^2 value based on the criteria of .35 = robust, .15 = moderate, .02 = weak and c) assessing the blindfolding test (Q^2) based on criteria greater than zero, which means that the study variable is able to achieve a high level of predictive accuracy (Hair et al., 2017).

Results

Assessment for Measurement Model

As shown in Table 1, the analysis of convergent validity revealed that all constructs exhibited outer loading values exceeding .70, consistent with the guidelines proposed by Henseler et al. (2009) and Hair et al. (2017). These results indicate strong correlations between the items and their respective constructs, thereby affirming satisfactory convergent validity. Additionally, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct surpassed the threshold of .5 (Hair et al., 2017), suggesting that more than 50% of the variance was accounted for by the associated indicators. This further confirms the adequacy of convergent validity. Moreover, all constructs demonstrated composite reliability values greater than .8, indicating a high level of internal consistency (Hair et al., 2017). This supports the conclusion that the items reliably and consistently measure their respective constructs.

Table 1*Convergent Validity Analysis*

Constructs	Outer Loading	CR	AVE	α
Knowledge Sharing				
KWSG1	.92	.96	.82	.94
KWSG2	.90			
KWSG3	.93			
KWSG4	.91			
KWSG5	.86			
Skill Transfer				
SLTR1	.92	.96	.87	.95
SLTR2	.94			
SLTR3	.92			
SLTR4	.95			
Cognitive Engagement				
CGET1	.94	.98	.90	.97
CGET2	.95			
CGET3	.93			
CGET4	.95			
CGET5	.94			
CGET6	.95			
Work Motivation		.97	.90	.97
WKMT1	.95			
WKMT2	.95			
WKMT3	.95			
WKMT4	.95			
WKMT5	.93			

Table 2 presents the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio values, which were used to assess the discriminant validity of the constructs. The results indicated that all HTMT values were below the recommended threshold of .85, as suggested by Hair et al. (2017), thereby supporting the presence of acceptable discriminant validity. These findings demonstrate that each construct represents a distinct dimension of the variables examined in the study.

Table 2*Discriminant Validity Using HTMT Analysis*

Constructs	Knowledge Sharing	Skill Transfer	Cognitive Engagement
Knowledge Sharing			
Skill Transfer	.67		
Cognitive Engagement	.85	.87	
Work Motivation	.86	.87	.88

Table 3 presents the outcomes of the cross-loading analysis, demonstrating that each indicator loaded more highly on its corresponding construct than on any other constructs. This result provides evidence of adequate discriminant validity, in accordance with the criteria outlined by Hair et al. (2017).

Table 3*Cross Loading*

Knowledge Sharing	Skill Transfer	Cognitive Engagement	Work Motivation
.92	.77	.74	.74
.90	.75	.73	.74
.93	.78	.74	.75
.91	.80	.74	.75
.86	.86	.75	.75
.80	.92	.78	.78
.83	.94	.79	.80
.81	.92	.76	.76
.82	.95	.80	.81
.80	.80	.91	.95
.78	.80	.91	.95
.78	.79	.94	.95
.78	.79	.94	.95
.78	.80	.95	.95
.78	.80	.95	.95
.76	.81	.93	.93
.76	.81	.93	.93
.77	.79	.95	.91
.78	.79	.94	.92
.76	.78	.95	.91

The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) evaluates the extent of discrepancy between the observed and model-implied correlation matrices, reflecting the average difference between expected and actual correlations. Hu and Bentler (1999) suggest that SRMR values below .10 or .08 are indicative of an acceptable model fit. Henseler et al. (2015) proposed SRMR as a goodness-of-fit measure for PLS-SEM to reduce the risk of model misspecification. As reported in Table 4, the SRMR value of .08 demonstrates an adequate model fit.

Table 4*Model Fit Analysis*

Model Fit	Saturated model	Estimated model
SRMR	.03	.08
d_UIS	0.2	1.6
d_G	n/a	n/a
Chi-square	infinite	infinite
NFI	n/a	n/a

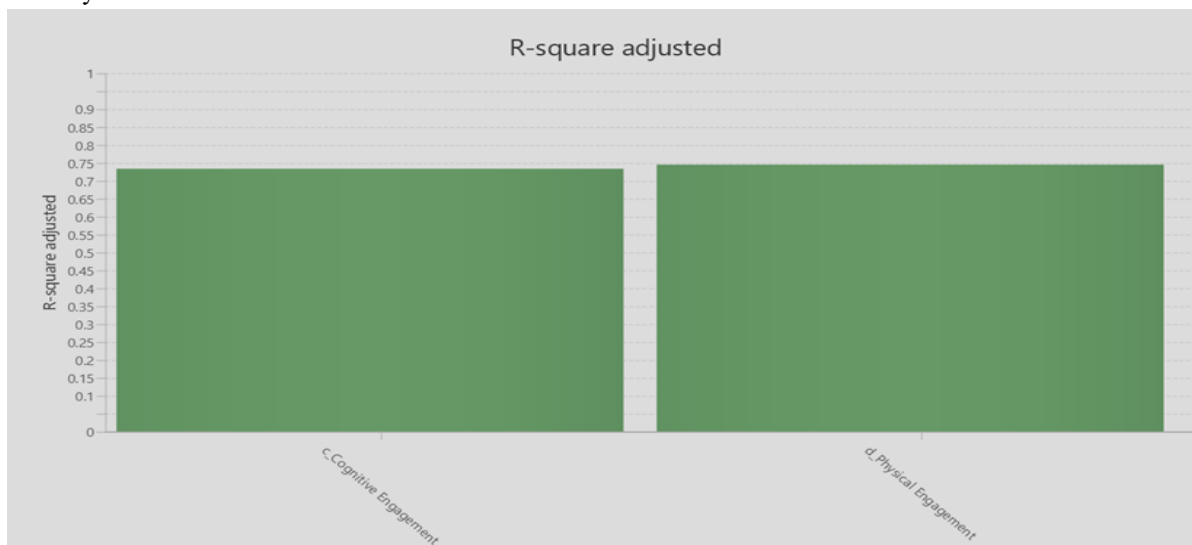
Table 5 presents the variant inflation factor (VIF) and descriptive constructs analyses. The mean values ranged from 5.22 to 5.76, indicating that knowledge sharing, skill transfer cognitive engagement and work motivation between high (4.0) and very high (7.0). Next, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) analysis, conducted to evaluate potential collinearity among constructs, revealed that all VIF values were below the threshold of 5.0, indicating the absence of significant multicollinearity concerns (Hair et al., 2017). This result affirms the statistical robustness of the research model, thereby supporting the reliability of the conclusions drawn regarding the relationships among constructs.

Table 5*VIF And Descriptive Statistics*

Constructs	Knowledge Sharing	Skill Transfer	Cognitive Engagement	Work Motivation	Mean	Std. Dev
Knowledge Sharing			4.23	4.23	5.46	.92
Skill Transfer			4.23	4.23	5.76	.67
Cognitive Engagement					5.43	.87
Work Motivation					5.22	.81

Assessment of Structural Model

The coefficient of determination (R^2) measures the model's overall predictive accuracy, indicating the extent to which exogenous variables explain variance in endogenous variables. According to Cohen (1992), R^2 values can be classified as large (.26), medium (.13), and small (.02). Figure 2 presents the structural model test results, with R^2 values of .73 for cognitive engagement (large) .74 for work motivation (large).

Figure 2 R^2 Analysis

The assessment of effect size (f^2) determines the change in R^2 values when exogenous constructs are removed from the model, thereby providing a deeper understanding of the extent to which each construct influences the endogenous variables. According to Cohen (1992), f^2 values are categorized into three levels: small (.02), medium (.15), and large (.35). Table 6 presents the results of the effect size analysis for this study's model. The analysis revealed that knowledge sharing on cognitive engagement recorded an f^2 value of .11, which falls between .02 and .15, indicating a small effect. Meanwhile, skill transfer on cognitive engagement obtained an f^2 value of .25, which is greater than .15 but less than .35, signifying a medium effect. For knowledge sharing on work motivation, the f^2 value of .12 also lies between .02 and .15, suggesting a medium effect. Lastly, cognitive engagement on skill transfer recorded an f^2 value of .25, which exceeds .15 but is below .35, indicating a medium effect as well. Overall, these findings suggest that the constructs skill transfer and cognitive engagement exert a stronger influence compared to other constructs in the proposed model.

Table 6*f² Analysis*

Construct	Knowledge Sharing	Skill Transfer	Cognitive Engagement	Work Motivation
Knowledge Sharing			.11	.12
Skill Transfer			.25	.25
Cognitive Engagement				
Work Motivation				

The blindfolding procedure (Q^2) was applied to assess the predictive relevance of the model. This technique systematically omits data points from the indicators of endogenous constructs to evaluate the model's predictive capability. According to Hair et al. (2017), Q^2 values greater than zero indicate that the model has sufficient predictive relevance for a particular endogenous construct. As shown in Table 7, the Q^2 values obtained were .00 for knowledge sharing, .00 for skill transfer, .65 for cognitive engagement, and .66 for work motivation. The results indicate that while the model does not exhibit predictive relevance for knowledge sharing and skill transfer (since their Q^2 values are equal to zero), it demonstrates strong predictive relevance for cognitive engagement and work motivation, as their Q^2 values are substantially above zero. These findings partially support the model's predictive capability, suggesting that it performs well in explaining the variance in cognitive engagement and work motivation but less effectively predicts knowledge sharing and skill transfer.

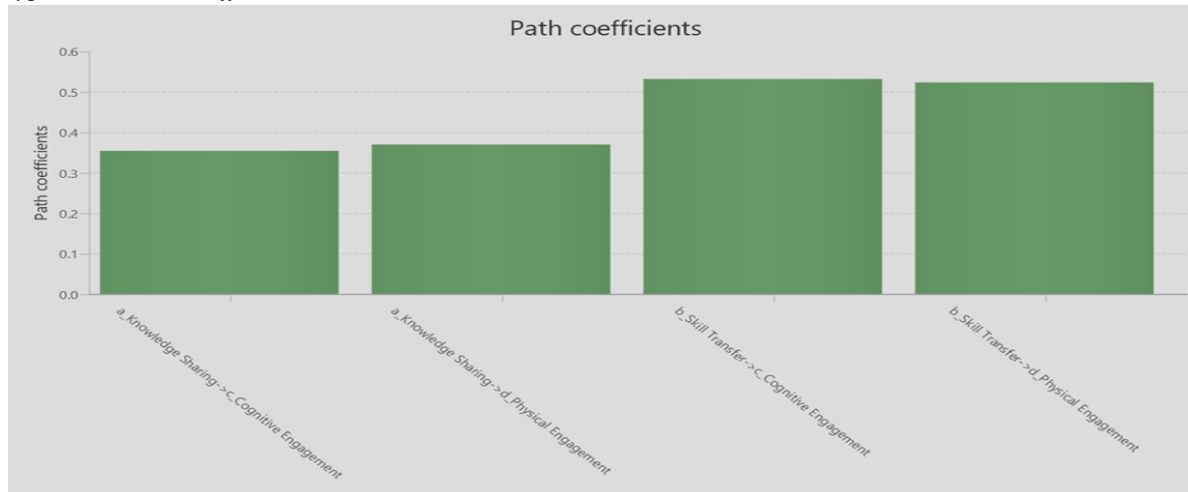
Table 7*Q² Analysis*

Constructs	SSO	SSE	$Q^2 (=1-SSE/SSO)$
Knowledge Sharing	1345.00	1345.00	.00
Skill Transfer	1076.00	1076.00	.00
Cognitive Engagement	1614.00	558.07	.65
Work Motivation	1345.00	450.68	.66

Bootstrapping was used for hypothesis testing to assess statistical significance. Table 8 presents the results: (1) knowledge sharing was positively and significantly associated with cognitive engagement (H1, $\beta = .354$; $t = 4.62$; $p = .00$), (2) knowledge sharing had a positive and significant impact on work motivation (H2, $\beta = .36$; $t = 4.89$; $p = .00$), (3) skill transfer had a positive and significant effect on cognitive engagement (H3, $\beta = .531$; $t = 6.85$; $p = .00$) and (4) skill transfer had a positive and significant effect on cognitive engagement (H4, $\beta = .523$; $t = 7.00$; $p = .00$). These findings confirm that hypotheses H1, H2, H3, and H4 are supported. Next, Figure 3 indicates the hypothesis path coefficient.

Table 8*Hypothesis Analysis*

Relationship/ Hypothesis	β	t	p
Knowledge Sharing -> Cognitive Engagement	.35	4.62	.00
Knowledge Sharing -> Work Motivation	.36	4.89	.00
Skill Transfer -> Cognitive Engagement	.53	6.85	.00
Skill Transfer -> Work Motivation	.52	7.00	.00

Figure 3*Hypothesis Path Coefficient*

Discussion

This study aims to examine the relationship between inclusive leadership and positive work behavior in educational organizations, emphasizing the roles of knowledge sharing, skill transfer, cognitive engagement, and work motivation. The findings reveal four key outcomes. First, knowledge sharing is significantly and positively associated with cognitive engagement. Second, knowledge sharing also demonstrates a significant positive relationship with work motivation. Third, skill transfer shows a positive correlation with cognitive engagement. Lastly, skill transfer is significantly and positively associated with work motivation. Collectively, these findings confirm that inclusive leadership has a substantial positive impact on positive work behavior among employees in educational institutions.

Empirically, these findings are consistent with prior studies that have highlighted the critical role of inclusive leadership in promoting employee engagement, learning, and motivation (Ackaradejruangsri et al., 2023; Kanya & Johan, 2025; Qasim et al., 2022). Inclusive leaders, through open communication and equitable treatment, create psychologically safe environments that encourage knowledge sharing and active participation. This aligns with the findings of Ackaradejruangsri et al. (2023) and Shafaei and Nejati (2024), who found that inclusive leadership fosters cognitive engagement by allowing employees to express their individuality while maintaining a sense of belonging. Similarly, the positive association between skill transfer and cognitive engagement supports the argument by Wu and Li (2023) and Elrehail et al. (2020) that the development of shared skills and collaborative learning enhances deep thinking and problem-solving among employees. Furthermore, the relationship between knowledge sharing and work motivation echoes the findings of Vo et al. (2022), who argue that inclusive work environments stimulate intrinsic motivation by recognizing employees' contributions and promoting fairness. In line with Popoola and Fagbola (2023), the present findings suggest that inclusive leadership strengthens work motivation by fulfilling employees' psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, key determinants of sustained motivation and organizational commitment.

Theoretically, these findings can be interpreted through the lens of Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) (Bandura, 1986), which posits that human behavior results from the reciprocal interaction of environmental, cognitive, and behavioral factors. In this study's context, inclusive leadership functions as a positive environmental stimulus that shapes employees' cognition (through knowledge sharing and skill transfer) and subsequently influences their behavior (through engagement and motivation). Inclusive leaders serve as role models who demonstrate openness, empathy, and respect, thereby encouraging employees to emulate these behaviors in their interactions and work practices. This dynamic reinforces the self-regulatory processes central to SCT, whereby individuals internalize observed behaviors and translate them into proactive and motivated actions at work. From a contextual perspective, the findings hold significant implications for the public education sector in Malaysia, where hierarchical structures and traditional leadership norms often dominate organizational culture. The results suggest that adopting inclusive leadership practices particularly those promoting open knowledge exchange and skill development, can help overcome bureaucratic barriers, enhance employee engagement, and improve institutional performance. This supports the argument of Randel et al. (2018) that inclusivity is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic necessity for organizational adaptability and innovation, especially in complex and culturally diverse environments. Overall, the empirical and theoretical insights of this study contribute to expanding the existing body of leadership literature by demonstrating that inclusive leadership, when operationalized through knowledge sharing and skill transfer, plays a pivotal role in fostering cognitive engagement and work motivation. This underscores the importance of embedding inclusivity principles into leadership development frameworks, particularly within public sector educational institutions aiming to cultivate empowered, motivated, and high-performing workforces.

Theoretical Implications

This study produced four main findings that strengthen the theoretical framework of inclusive leadership. First, knowledge sharing is significantly and positively associated with cognitive engagement. Second, knowledge sharing also exhibits a significant positive relationship with work motivation. Third, skill transfer is positively correlated with cognitive engagement. Fourth, skill transfer likewise demonstrates a significant positive association with work motivation. Based on the analysis, the study confirms that inclusive leadership has a significant positive impact on work behavior. These findings align with Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), which emphasizes that human learning occurs through the observation of others' behaviors and results from dynamic interactions among personal factors, behavior, and the environment. According to this theory, individuals do not simply respond passively to external stimuli but actively evaluate and interpret social information to guide their actions. A key concept in SCT is observational learning, whereby individuals acquire new behaviors by observing and imitating models without needing to experience the consequences directly. These implications, supported by the study's findings, underscore the dynamic relationship between inclusive leadership and positive work behavior, contributing meaningfully to the literature on inclusive organizational leadership.

Practical Implications

This research provides practical guidance for employers and employees seeking to enhance management skills, particularly within the context of government administrative offices. Inclusive leadership not only emphasizes involvement in decision-making but also requires mastery of comprehensive management competencies. Therefore, senior management is advised to focus on the following five key aspects: First, leaders should develop clear, precise, and effective verbal and written communication skills. Professional development in interpersonal communication can strengthen leaders' ability to convey work expectations, provide constructive feedback, and effectively understand employees' needs and concerns. Second, leaders are encouraged to adopt a leadership approach that inspires, supports employee potential, and empowers them. This includes offering continuous learning opportunities, structured coaching, and cultivating a collaborative and respectful work culture. Third, time management skills must be enhanced to ensure that all tasks and projects are completed according to schedule. Targeted training in priority management and time planning can reduce work-related stress and improve organizational efficiency and productivity. Fourth, leaders need to be proficient in decision-making and problem-solving, especially in complex and challenging situations. An analytical and data-driven approach, accompanied by strategic risk assessment, can lead to more effective and impactful decisions. Fifth, in the digital era, leaders must be proficient in relevant technologies related to management tasks. This includes the use of project management tools, data analysis software, and digital communication applications that can enhance work efficiency and streamline daily operations. In sum, strengthening these five competencies will reinforce the effective implementation of inclusive leadership and contribute to a more responsive, efficient, and people-oriented public sector organization.

Limitations and Future Research Recommendations

This study has several conceptual and methodological limitations. First, the cross-sectional method only describes the respondents' general perceptions of the relationship between the study variables. Second, this study does not measure the relationship between the dimensions of the independent variable and the dependent variable. Third, the purposive sampling technique is unable to control the study respondents' biased responses. Fourth, this study was only conducted in an education-based agency. The above limitations may reduce the ability to generalize the findings of this study to other organizations. This study presents several suggestions for improvement to strengthen improvements. First, important respondent characteristics such as gender, age and service group need to be taken into account in the study because they can predict the similarities and differences in respondents' perceptions of the study model. Second, it is appropriate to apply a comparative method to measure the effectiveness of inclusive leadership as an effective predictor variable in public and private organizations. Third, a larger sample size should be taken because it can represent the study population. Fourth, specific dimensions of inclusive leadership such as instrumental support, professional development support, evaluative support and emotional support need to be emphasized as these elements have been hot topics of discussion in the literature on organizational leadership. Finally, specific positive work behavior, characteristics such as incidental and essential tasks need to be explored which are important outcomes of the relationship between inclusive leadership and positive work behavior. Therefore, the above recommendations need to be given due consideration to improve future research.

Conclusion

This study confirms the significant role of inclusive leadership as a key predictor of positive work behavior within educational agencies in Malaysia. It develops a conceptual framework grounded in the literature and inclusive leadership theory, with a specific emphasis on knowledge transfer and skill transfer as catalysts for changes in positive work behavior. The confirmatory factor analysis conducted demonstrates a high level of validity and reliability of the measurement instruments, thereby ensuring the accuracy of the data and the validity of the study's findings. The findings reveal that inclusive leadership, operating through mechanisms of knowledge and skill transfer, has a substantial impact on the effectiveness of positive work behavior. This study thus highlights the importance of reinforcing inclusive leadership practices as a strategic approach to empowering employees and enhancing overall organizational performance.

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