The mediating effect of psychological empowerment on the relationship between inclusive leadership and artificial intelligence anxiety

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine the mediating effect of psychological empowerment on the relationship between inclusive leadership and artificial intelligence anxiety. Drawing from the frameworks of leader-member exchange, affective events theory and optimal distinctiveness theory, the research hypothesized that inclusive leadership might play a crucial role in alleviating employees' artificial intelligence anxiety. To test the hypothesis, data were collected via a survey of 337 participants. The findings revealed a significant and negative association between inclusive leadership and artificial intelligence anxiety, suggesting that as leaders adopt a more inclusive approach, employees experience lower levels of artificial intelligence anxiety. Importantly, psychological empowerment was identified as a partial mediator, meaning it partially explained the connection between inclusive leadership and reduced artificial intelligence anxiety. This implies that inclusive leadership can foster a sense of psychological empowerment among employees, thereby diminishing concerns related to artificial intelligence anxiety. The study's findings emphasize the importance of inclusive leadership practices in shaping a work environment that supports employees' psychological well-being and reduces anxiety about emerging artificial intelligence technologies.

Keywords: Inclusive Leadership; Psychological Empowerment; Artificial Intelligence Anxiety

JEL Codes: L20, M10, M12

1. Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving business circumstances, organizations must increasingly prioritize resilience and the pursuit of sustainable competitive advantage. A range of factors including technological, behavioral, economic and political dimensions play significant roles in shaping organizational structure, function and adaptability. Within this context, artificial intelligence is recognized as a key transformative element that is reshaping not only business processes but also broader organizational dynamics. The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence has profound implications for the workplace, business operations, organizational structures and traditional working methods. The influence of artificial intelligence development extends beyond procedural aspects, as it redefines relationships and behavioral norms within organizations. In other words, artificial intelligence affects organizations holistically, influencing internal processes while also reshaping the social capital that exists at every level, from top management to front-line employees, thereby driving shifts in both operational and relational dimensions across corporate hierarchies.

The social capital within organizations is often regarded as one of their most valuable assets, given the unique and irreplaceable contributions of employees who work towards achieving the company's success, competitive edge and longevity (Liukkonen, Virtanen, Kivimäki, Pentti and Vahtera, 2004). Considering this, organizations should focus on fostering motivation, positive psychological states and a conducive working environment for their workforce. Enhanced motivation and positive psychological conditions within the workplace can directly

contribute to improved competitive performance outcomes for organizations (Al-Rfou and Trawneh, 2009). Furthermore, motivated employees are less likely to exhibit undesirable behaviors, such as high turnover intentions, disengagement or counterproductive work behaviors. Thus, organizations can retain their most valuable assets within the workplace and leverage their employees' contributions by some behavioral and organizational interventions.

The psychological and motivational dimensions of social capital are critical for organizations to thrive in today's unpredictable and fast-evolving environment. Various economic, political, demographic and technological factors can influence employees in this context. Among technological factors, artificial intelligence has emerged as a pivotal force, drawing significant attention from employees as they adapt to new artificial intelligence-driven work methods. The rapid progression of artificial intelligence has intensified concerns among professionals while driving increased investments and research in this field. Artificial intelligence is conceptualized as a technology designed to enhance human life by increasing comfort and ease by supporting individuals in achieving greater efficiency and effectiveness in certain tasks (Gansser and Reich, 2021; Mughal, Wahid, Khattak, 2021). In this regard, artificial intelligence can provide new working methods, reduce organizational errors, effectively solve complex challenges and relieve employees from monotonous tasks, thereby allowing for a more dynamic and productive work environment (Bhalerao, Kumar, Kumar and Pujari, 2022).

While artificial intelligence enhances productivity, drives economic growth and generates valuable knowledge for organizations (Arakpogun, Elsahn, Olan and Elsahn, 2021), it also brings forth employee concerns and apprehensions (Johnson and Verdicchio, 2017; Li and Huang, 2020). In this regard, Green (2020) argues that artificial intelligence may lead to job losses, raise transparency and privacy issues, facilitate unethical practices and widen socio-economic disparities. In other words, the development and deployment of artificial intelligence can impact employees by integrating intelligent agents into organizational processes and implementing specialized know-how to boost efficiency and productivity (Olan, Arakpogun, Suklan, Nakpodia, Damij and Jayawickrama, 2022). Similarly, these aspects of artificial intelligence can cause job displacement, security challenges, ethical concerns, potential human rights violations, administrative complexities and the erosion of organizational trust, climate, or culture (De Sio, 2024; Kaya, Aydin, Schepman, Rodway, Yetişensoy and Demir Kaya, 2024; Plikas, Trakadas and Kenourgios, 2023). Employees' anxiety regarding artificial intelligence is closely linked to these unintended impacts within corporate environments.

Although artificial intelligence anxiety is a psychological issue rooted in employees' emotions and cognitive experiences, this anxiety can potentially be alleviated through both behavioral and organizational interventions. For instance, fostering psychological safety (Newman, Donohue and Eva, 2017), promoting emotional labor strategies (Humphrey, Ashforth and Diefendorff, 2015), enhancing psychological capital (Newman, Ucbasaran, Zhu and Hirst, 2014) or supporting employee well-being (Keeman, Näswall, Malinen and Kuntz, 2017) are effective ways to mitigate such workplace anxieties. Additionally, organizational factors including leadership styles (Nanjundeswaraswamy and Swamy, 2014), organizational culture (De Witte and Van Muijen, 1999), organizational climate (Schneider, Ehrhart and Macey, 2013), organizational trust (Mühl, 2014) or organizational support (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002) can also significantly reduce artificial intelligence anxiety by offering meaningful support to employees. Among these, leadership style is particularly influential in alleviating artificial intelligence anxiety, as effective leadership can shape a supportive and reassuring workplace atmosphere.

Leadership style is one of the most essential subjects in the organizations to explore and lead the business directions in unpredictable circumstances. Leaders can be recognized as the authoritative source of the corporations by holding the power of distribution of business resources. In addition, leaders are the focal point of organizational processes and transactions

by giving decisions and providing guidance to obtain competitive advantage. Although there are several kinds of leadership styles such as authentic leadership (Luthans and Avolio, 2003), transformational leadership (Bass, 2006), transactional leadership (Bass, Avolio, Jung and Berson, 2003), bureaucratic leadership (Riccucci and Saidel, 1997) or servant leadership (Russell, 2001) that can reduce the organizational anxieties, inclusive leadership can also diminish the employees' decisions against artificial intelligence.

Inclusive leaders give significant value to their subordinates, acknowledge the diversities of the employees and respect the different kind of employee perspectives and philosophies in the workplace (Nishii and Leroy, 2022). Moreover, inclusive leaders provide visible commitment, accept and try to correct mistakes. With this kind of behavior, employees can feel the support and safety that can eliminate the anxieties in the workplace. Additionally, inclusive leaders are aware of bias and they ensure a meritocracy in the businesses. Being curious about others by listening without judgement and feeling empathy is another vital role of inclusive leaders (Bourke, Titus and Espedido, 2020).

Eventually, noted roles of inclusive leaders can result in effective collaboration, team cohesion and safety in the workplace. Recent studies revealed that the inclusive leadership is an essential element that influence the employees' point of view against inclusiveness and role model inclusive activities (Fagan, Wells, Guenther and Matkin, 2022; Shore and Chung, 2023) This kind of the inclusiveness feeling in the team and more generally in the organization can considerably affect the employees in a positive way. In other words, professionals in the workplace can feel that they are a part of a bigger team; their ideas, beliefs and perceptions are important and respected by the leaders and organization itself. Schultz (1958) conceptualized inclusion as a fundamental human need in interpersonal relationships. He argued that individuals express their needs and desires through communication and they experience reduced anxiety when they feel a sense of belonging within a group. Moreover, Schultz suggested that people feel more secure and less anxious when their desire for inclusion for a group or a team. Drawing on these insights, inclusive leadership has the potential to alleviate workplace anxieties, including concerns related to artificial intelligence, by fostering a sense of belonging and inclusion. This effect is supported by theories such as leader-member exchange, affective events theory and optimal distinctiveness, all of which highlight the importance of interpersonal connections and group dynamics in reducing anxiety within organizations.

While inclusive leadership has the potential to reduce artificial intelligence anxiety, certain behavioral and psychological factors can act as mediators in this relationship. Among these mediators, employee-related cognitive variables such as psychological safety, psychological capital or psychological empowerment play crucial roles in shaping the connection between inclusive leadership and artificial intelligence anxiety. Psychological empowerment is defined as an employee's cognitive state where they feel psychologically enabled, experiencing positive perceptions of personal control and a proactive stance toward workplace challenges (Oladipo, 2009). This empowered state fosters a sense of agency, providing employees with access to both tangible and intangible resources that strengthen their decision-making abilities. Moreover, psychologically empowered employees tend to demonstrate greater trust in colleagues and exhibit confidence in their actions within the workplace, creating a supportive environment that further mitigates anxiety (Zimmerman, 1995).

By fostering psychological empowerment, inclusive leadership encourages employees to feel secure and capable, enhancing their adaptability to change and reducing concerns related to artificial intelligence. Employees empowered in this way can more readily approach new technological advancements, perceiving them as opportunities rather than threats. In summary, psychological empowerment can act as a mediating factor between inclusive leadership and artificial intelligence anxiety by cultivating a supportive psychological and cognitive environment. This strengthened state reduces employees' apprehensions surrounding artificial

intelligence, fostering resilience and a positive outlook toward technological change. Consequently, psychological empowerment can play a mediating role in the relationship between inclusive leadership and artificial intelligence anxiety.

2. Theoretical foundation and development of hypotheses

2.1 The relationship between inclusive leadership and artificial intelligence anxiety

Artificial intelligence anxiety can be defined as concerns about the rapid development and application of noted technology. Rapid and unforeseen impact on both employees and society in general make the individuals anxious about new technologies (Brynjolfsson and McAfee, 2014). Although artificial intelligence technology has some benefits such as creating new job opportunities, making processes easier and more effective, saving time and money; adoption to these new powerful developments create new challenges and preparations for employees. Ancestor of artificial intelligence technology has its origins from the invention of computers. While first computers were developed, computer anxiety has received significant attention in literature (Esterhuyse, Scholtz and Venter, 2016; Heinssen, Glas and Knight, 1987; Igbaria, Schiffman and Wieckowski, 1994). Similar aspects such as robot anxiety or internet anxiety has been focused by the researchers to understand employee decisions and behaviors in the past (Chou, 2003; Cohen and Waugh, 1989). In parallel with these concerns, the underlying reason behind artificial intelligence can be investigated. In the workplace, employees can encounter technophobia, fear or anxieties against new technologies. Due to new unpredictable future outcomes, individuals can face technophobia which results in negative attitudes towards computer-related developments. Negative behaviors and beliefs can originate negative intention to prevent from usage of artificial intelligence in which results to anxiety to lose work, fear to adapt to new business processes, performance losses etc. In this manner, the anxiety to use information technologies is more likely to inhibit adoption in result (Wang and Wang, 2022).

Wang and Wang (2022) identified sub-dimensions of artificial intelligence anxiety as job replacement anxiety, sociotechnical blindness anxiety, artificial intelligence configuration anxiety and artificial intelligence learning anxiety. Specifically, job replacement anxiety reflects employees' fears of losing their jobs as artificial intelligence takes on complex, time-intensive tasks. Sociotechnical blindness anxiety refers to concerns about the lack of understanding and possible misinterpretations of artificial intelligence’s capabilities, while configuration anxiety involves fears that artificial intelligence could replicate human tasks so completely that employees may feel obsolete. Lastly, learning anxiety addresses the difficulties employees may face in adapting to new artificial intelligence advancements. These anxieties highlight unintended consequences of significant artificial intelligence investments and advancements in modern businesses.

From an organizational behavior perspective, it is essential to address and mitigate these detrimental apprehensions, as they can impact employee attitudes and behaviors negatively. Behavioral and organizational interventions are needed to consider alleviating such concerns, with leadership styles being particularly influential. Leaders, with their decision-making authority and peer-to-peer influence, play a key role in shaping employees' perspectives on artificial intelligence. While various leadership styles can reduce workplace anxiety, inclusive leadership is particularly effective in countering artificial intelligence anxiety, as it fosters a sense of inclusion, mutual respect and collaboration. Inclusive leaders prioritize unity and a

supportive work environment, helping employees feel valued and secure despite rapid technological changes.

Inclusive leadership is defined as a "set of leader behaviors focused on facilitating group members' feelings of belonging while allowing them to retain their individuality as they contribute to group processes and outcomes" (Randel et al., 2018, p.191). Inclusive leaders prioritize team inclusiveness and ensure that employees feel integrated and valued within the group (Ashikali, 2023). This concept, first introduced by Nembhard and Edmondson (2006), highlights inclusive leadership as an embodiment of invitation, appreciation and inclusion in the workplace, where every voice is essential and diversity is respected. Inclusive environments encourage open discussions, inclusive decision-making and shared beliefs, creating a space where positive organizational potentials like psychological safety can emerge (Nembhard and Edmondson, 2006). Inclusive leaders demonstrate support for employees during times of crisis, acknowledge and address inequalities, respect diversity and reduce workplace pressure through validation and approvals, effectively minimizing anxieties and negative organizational behaviors (Hollander, 2012; Robenson, 2006). By fostering trust, empathy and fair judgment, inclusive leaders offer psychological support that positively impacts employees' cognitive well-being. Consequently, employees are likely to experience reduced artificial intelligence anxiety along with heightened feelings of safety, satisfaction and motivation.

While investigating the possible effects of inclusive leadership on artificial intelligence anxiety, it is vital to mention the theories that this research is based on. Firstly, the relationship between leader and his/her subordinates are the main fulcrum of this study. In this manner according to leader-member exchange theory, there is a dyadic relationship between two parties where leader and members have expectations. The leader-member exchange theory conceptualizes the employee-supervisor relationship as a process of reciprocal benefit. Originally introduced by Dansereau, Graen and Haga (1975), this theory posits that the quality of the supervisor-employee relationship significantly influences factors such as employee performance, motivation, creativity, job satisfaction and commitment to the organization. According to Casimir, Ngee Keith, Yuan Wang and Ooi (2014), a high-quality leader-member exchange positively impacts job performance. Within this framework, perceived supervisory support reflects the value, comfort and peace provided to the employee and the contributions made on their behalf (Eisenberger, Malone and Presson, 2016). Thus, the support perceived by employees from their supervisors enhances their sense of security and satisfaction, thereby positively affecting both job performance and organizational commitment.

Secondly, this study also examines affective events theory, which posits that emotional and psychological experiences significantly influence workplace behaviors (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996; Weiss and Beal, 2005b). Affective events theory suggests that employees' work attitudes, behaviors and cognitive processes collectively contribute to shaping commitment, satisfaction and motivation. The theory highlights two core components: workplace events and emotional responses (Cropanzano, Dasborough and Weiss, 2017). Workplace events trigger emotional reactions, such as feelings of security or career success and these responses can evolve in positive or negative directions based on the nature of the events. According to affective events theory, these emotional reactions influence both short-term behaviors and long-term attitudes, potentially reducing feelings of alienation or enhancing job satisfaction as outcomes.

Lastly, optimal distinctiveness theory was firstly express by Brewer (1991). It explores how individuals make a balance between their needs for group membership and personal distinctiveness. Optimal distinctiveness theory advises that people are motivated to join groups that allow them to feel bonded to other group members while sustaining their individuality. When the demand for belonging is robust, personal uniqueness may feel diminished. Contrarywise, if the desire for uniqueness dominates, individuals may experience social

isolation. Therefore, individuals gravitate toward groups that satisfy both inclusion and distinctiveness needs, creating more fulfilling group affiliations. This theory is especially relevant in diverse settings, influencing choices about group membership, loyalty and intergroup relationships.

Consequently, inclusive leaders prepare a suitable working ambience where employees can speak openly, express their thoughts and beliefs by feeling included in a whole group and satisfying their individual needs. The quality of the relationship between the inclusive leader and his/her subordinates plays a crucial role in supporting employees emotionally and psychologically. In other words, given emotional and behavioral support can produce a positive atmosphere in the cognitive world of the employees. To illustrate, Liao, Shaw and Liu (2023) revealed that inclusive leadership is negatively associated with work procrastination where work engagement is positively affected in the workplace. In a similar way, Yasin, Jan, Huseynova and Atif (2023) found that inclusive leadership has a positive impact on organizational commitment whereas reduce the turnover intention. On the other hand, Shafaei, Nejati, Omari and Sharafizad (2024) showed that inclusive leadership is negatively associated with workplace bullying where it increases the psychological safety environment in the workplace. Based on the above discussions and the previous studies that investigated inclusive leadership, the first hypothesis of this study has been formed as follows.

H_1: Inclusive leadership is negatively associated with artificial intelligence anxiety.

While employees, who has an inclusive leadership support, can have less anxiety of artificial intelligence, several other organizational, behavioral or cognitive variables can influence this association. The relationship between inclusive leadership and artificial intelligence anxiety can be influenced by a mediating variable associated with the individual's psychological state in the workplace. In other words, the positive or negative condition of employees in terms of emotional and cognitive manner is a crucial factor to investigate the relationship between inclusive leadership and artificial intelligence anxiety. To understand this connection in deep, one of the most important psychological variables can be manifested as psychological empowerment. Psychological empowerment makes employees feel meaning, competence, self-determination and impact in the workplace. Therefore, it can be thought that if employees, who work in a challenging and unpredictable environment, have psychological empowerment feeling, they may have less artificial intelligence anxiety.

2.2 The mediating role of psychological empowerment in the relationship between inclusive leadership and artificial intelligence anxiety

Empowerment generally refers to granting someone the authority or autonomy to perform certain actions, where power and authorization enable constructive behaviors in the workplace. Employee empowerment fosters freedom in decision-making and allows employees to act independently, which can cultivate a sense of security during critical decision-making processes. Since organizational resources are limited, employees' decisions should focus on effectiveness and efficiency to meet organizational goals.

Empowerment, when viewed from a more specific perspective, originates from the cognitive domain of employees, particularly as psychological empowerment. This concept encompasses various positive psychological aspects, such as perceived control, proactive engagement in organizational processes, a deep understanding of the organizational socio-political and economic environment and alignment with long- and short-term company objectives (Amabile, 1983; Amabile, 1996; Oladipo, 2009; Reiter-Palmon and Illies, 2004; Shalley, Zhou, Oldham,

2004; Utman, 1997). Conger and Kanungo (1988) define psychological empowerment as the process of enhancing positive feelings by identifying and eliminating restrictive organizational practices. Building on this, Thomas and Velthouse (1990) described psychological empowerment through four task assessments: competence, choice, impact and meaningfulness, which collectively boost task motivation. These dimensions are further illustrated by Spreitzer (1995), who identified meaning (finding purpose in work), competence (performing tasks successfully), choice (freedom in carrying out responsibilities) and impact (making a difference through work outcomes) as foundational to psychological empowerment.

Psychological empowerment yields positive outcomes such as increased creativity, motivation, effectiveness, efficiency and team cohesion within businesses. According to Robbins, Crino and Fredendall (2002), psychological empowerment influences individuals' behaviors and attitudes, enhancing traits like patriotism, self-esteem, self-efficacy and self-awareness, as well as fostering impact, competence, meaning and self-determination within their cognitive processes. They argue that psychological empowerment can be advanced by encouraging supportive behaviors, providing opportunities and building commitment and trust-qualities that inclusive leaders can instill. In terms of leadership styles, Zhang and Bartol (2010) explored the impact of empowering leadership on psychological empowerment and found a negative relationship, indicating that empowering leadership can reduce dependency on formal authority, thus fostering psychological empowerment. They also found that psychological empowerment enhances engagement in creative processes and has a significant role in boosting intrinsic motivation. Similarly, Schermuly and Meyer (2020) demonstrated that transformational leadership substantially affects psychological empowerment, while Jo and Jo (2017) observed a strong positive correlation between authentic leadership and psychological empowerment. These studies highlight how different leadership styles can shape psychological empowerment, enhancing employees' motivation, creativity and overall engagement.

On the other hand, psychological empowerment can be influenced by several organizational and behavioral variables. One of the most crucial elements that can affect the empowerment feeling of employee can be assumed as inclusive leadership. As previous literature review showed, different types of leaderships can increase psychological empowerment in a positive way. In this manner, inclusive leaders can hear every voice and respect every employee in the organization. Especially, every diverse perspective and belief are accepted and therefore employees are encouraged to contribute for gaining of the targets of the businesses. Due to the fact that psychological empowerment has the origins where authorization and role of the employees in the decision-making process, the inclusive atmosphere which inclusive leaders can originate can enhance the empowerment feeling in the workplace. The relationship between inclusive leaders and their subordinates is based on reciprocal influences which foster responsibility and autonomy (Hollander, 2009). In this manner, inclusive leaders encourage the visions, opportunities, opinions and values in the organizations where feeling of empowerment can emerge among employees. According to Nembhard & Edmondson (2006), inclusive leaders provide useful task information and welcome the subordinate’s contribution. On the other hand, inclusive leaders authorize the employees to use organizational power during completion of work activities which influences the feeling of greater empowerment. As a result, intrinsic motivation of employees can be positively affected to gain psychological empowerment.

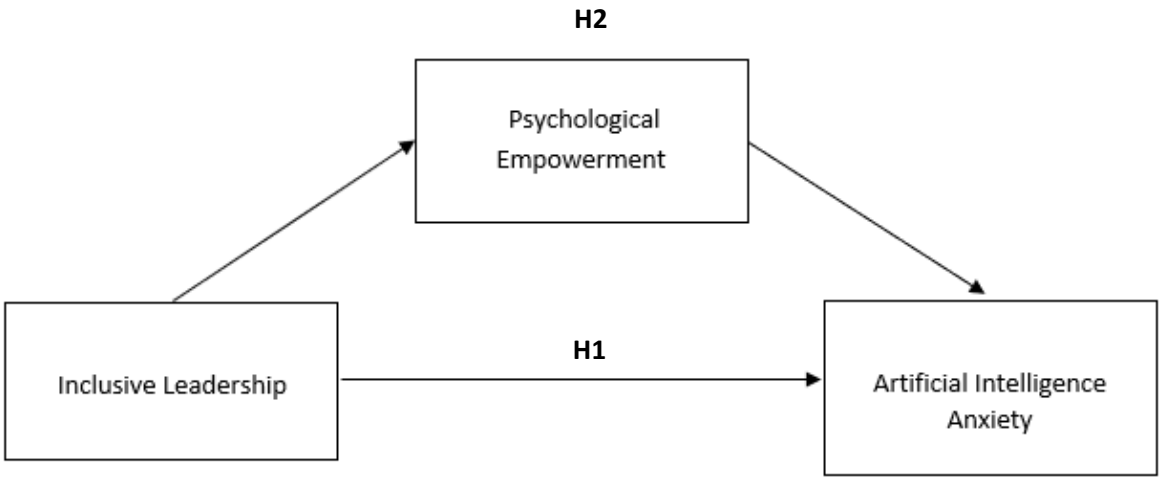
Inclusive leadership has a significant impact on enhancing psychological empowerment, which in turn can help prevent a range of unintended organizational issues. Negative organizational factors, such as concerns, anxieties and anti-work behaviors, can severely impact the efficiency and effectiveness of organizational outcomes. Among these, artificial intelligence anxiety has emerged as a critical area of concern in the evolving technological landscape, particularly as it relates to employees’ cognitive and psychological well-being. Artificial intelligence anxiety, which refers to the apprehension and unease associated with artificial intelligence integration

in the workplace, is influenced by various behavioral and psychological factors, including psychological resilience, psychological capital, psychological safety and psychological empowerment. Particularly, psychological empowerment has been shown to reduce adverse workplace outcomes such as turnover intentions, organizational cynicism and alienation, while also mitigating concerns related to artificial intelligence anxiety. Artificial intelligence anxiety often originates from employees' psychological states, particularly when faced with the uncertainties surrounding emerging technologies. Psychological empowerment, characterized by dimensions such as autonomy, encouragement, intrinsic motivation and respect, serves as a buffer against this anxiety. Empowered employees, who feel a sense of control and agency in their roles, are better equipped to confront the challenges posed by unfamiliar technological developments, such as artificial intelligence. For instance, autonomy enables employees to make independent decisions and engage more confidently with artificial intelligence-driven processes, while intrinsic motivation and respect foster a secure environment in which employees feel valued and capable of contributing meaningfully to organizational goals. Psychological empowerment thus can reinforce employees' sense of control, increasing their resilience to uncertainties and reducing anxieties associated with artificial intelligence. Through these mechanisms, psychological empowerment can act as a mediating factor between inclusive leadership and artificial intelligence anxiety. Inclusive leadership fosters a supportive environment that promotes open communication, respect and individual recognition, which enhances employees' psychological empowerment. This empowered state subsequently reduces artificial intelligence anxiety by strengthening employees' cognitive and emotional readiness to engage with new technologies. Inclusive leaders, by creating an atmosphere of support and inclusion, enable employees to develop a positive, self-assured approach toward artificial intelligence integration. In summary, psychological empowerment, a crucial aspect of an individual's cognitive framework, can play a mediating role in the relationship between inclusive leadership and artificial intelligence anxiety. Empowered employees experience greater intrinsic motivation, self-confidence and engagement, which collectively diminish anxiety surrounding artificial intelligence. Thus, building on these assessments, the second hypothesis posits that inclusive leadership indirectly reduces artificial intelligence anxiety through its positive impact on psychological empowerment, enhancing employees' adaptability and resilience in an artificial intelligence-driven work environment.

$H_{2:}$ Psychological empowerment will mediate the relationship between inclusive leadership and artificial intelligence anxiety.

The model of the research is presented in Figure-1 in line with the hypotheses formed based on the theoretical justifications stated above.

Figure 1 Research Model



3. Methodology of research

3.1 Sample

This study was conducted with actively employed white-collar professionals. A total of 337 individuals participated through an online questionnaire. Participants were drawn from the defense and manufacturing sectors, all based in Turkey. The survey targeted full-time employees and was conducted in Turkish. Data collection took place between November 2024 and January 2025. Demographic analysis revealed that 51% of the respondents identified as male, while 49% identified as female. Regarding educational background, 83,4% of participants had completed undergraduate studies, and 16,6% had attained graduate-level education. Marital status analysis showed that 68% were single, whereas 32% were married. The majority of respondents were aged between 23 and 39 years. Additionally, most participants reported total work experience ranging from 1 to 15 years, with an average of 8.16 years. Sectoral distribution indicated that 92% of the participants were employed in the private sector, while the remaining 8% worked in the public.

3.2 Measurement instruments

The present study utilized three primary scales to measure inclusive leadership, psychological empowerment and artificial intelligence anxiety. These scales were adapted into Turkish by researchers based on relevant literature.

Inclusive Leadership Scale: Originally developed by Carmeli, Reiter-Palmon and Ziv (2010), this scale was translated into Turkish by Surucu and Maslakcı (2021). It comprises nine items categorized into three dimensions: openness, readiness and accessibility. The scale is structured as a 5-point Likert scale, with response options ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree).

Psychological Empowerment Scale: The Psychological Empowerment Scale, initially developed by Spreitzer (1995), was adapted into Turkish by Surgevil, Tolay and Topoyan (2013) following thorough validity and reliability analyses. This scale is also presented as a 5-

point Likert-type instrument, with response categories from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree).

Artificial Intelligence Anxiety Scale: Developed by Wang and Wang (2019), this scale was subsequently translated into Turkish by Akkaya, Özkan and Özkan (2021). Comprising 21 items, it is similarly based on a 5-point Likert scale format, with responses ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree).

4. Findings

4.1 Validity, reliability and model goodness fit values

The results indicate that inclusive leadership, psychological empowerment, and artificial intelligence anxiety demonstrate satisfactory reliability, as evidenced by their Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.92, 0.93, and 0.95, respectively. The inclusive leadership model satisfies key fit criteria, with GFI (0.952), AGFI (0.886), CFI (0.974), and IFI (0.974) aligning with acceptable thresholds, while the RMSEA value (0.096) remains within the permissible range. Similarly, the psychological empowerment model exhibits an acceptable-to-good fit, as indicated by CMIN/DF (3.803), GFI (0.939), and CFI (0.958), meeting established benchmarks. Likewise, the artificial intelligence anxiety model demonstrates an overall acceptable fit, as supported by indices such as GFI (0.889), CFI (0.926), and RMSEA (0.092), though the AGFI value (0.829) remains below the recommended level for a strong model fit. Finally, inclusive leadership, psychological empowerment, and artificial intelligence anxiety scale have CR values of 0.94, 0.95 and 0.94 respectively. Additionally, the average variance extracted (AVE) values for inclusive leadership, psychological empowerment, and artificial intelligence anxiety are 0.69, 0.67, and 0.51, respectively, further supporting the constructs' convergent validity. In summary, the models exhibit strong reliability and overall acceptable validity, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Validity, reliability and model goodness fit values

Variables	*CA*	*CMIN/DF*	*GFI*	*AGFI*	*CFI*	*NNFI*	*IFI*	*RMSEA*	*χ2*	*df*	*p*
IL	*0,92*	*4,172*	*0,952*	*0,886*	*0,974*	*0,966*	*0,974*	*0,096*	*71,423*	*15*	*0,000*
PE	*0,93*	*3,803*	*0,939*	*0,885*	*0,958*	*0,944*	*0,958*	*0,090*	*110,276*	*29*	*0,000*
AIA	*0,95*	*3,872*	*0,889*	*0,829*	*0,926*	*0,904*	*0,926*	*0,092*	*340,700*	*88*	*0,000*

Notes: CA (Cronbach Alpha), CMIN/DF (Minimum Discrepancy/Degrees of Freedom): Acceptable if $3 \leq \chi^2/df \leq 5$, good if ≤ 3, GFI (Goodness of Fit Index): Acceptable if ≥ 0.90, good if ≥ 0.95, AGFI (Adjusted GFI): Acceptable if ≥ 0.85, good if ≥ 0.90, CFI (Comparative Fit Index): Acceptable if ≥ 0.90, good if ≥ 0.95, NNFI (Non-Normed Fit Index): Acceptable if ≥ 0.90, good if ≥ 0.95, IFI (Incremental Fit Index): Acceptable if ≥ 0.90, good if ≥ 0.95, RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation): Acceptable if ≤ 0.1, good if ≤ 0.08, χ^2 = Chi-Square Value, df = Degrees of Freedom, P = Significance level. Variables: IL= Inclusive Leadership, PE=Psychological Empowerment, AIA=Artificial Intelligence Anxiety, *P < 0.05, **P < 0.01

4.2 Means, Standard Deviation, Reliability and Correlations

Descriptive statistics, reliability and correlations among the research variables were computed and are presented in Table 2. The analysis aimed to identify the varying effects of the factors under study. The results indicate that the means and standard deviations fall within the acceptable range for a normal distribution. The median scores for all primary research variables exceeded 3. Additionally, the bivariate correlations between the key model variables were found to be statistically significant.

Table 2 Means, Standard Deviation, Reliability and Correlations

	Mean	*SD*	*Gender*	*Mar. St.*	*Edu.*	*Age*	*Exp.*	*Sector*	*AIA*	*PE*	*IL*
Gender	1,49	0,5	1								
Mar.St.	1,68	0,46	0,05	1							
Edu.	2,17	0,47	-0,04	-0,05	1						
Age	33,91	18,2	0,01	-,118*	0,04	1					
Exp.	8,15	6,8	-0,08	-,362**	,168**	,386**	1				
Sector	1,92	0,26	0,04	,111*	-0,08	-,115*	-,299**	1			
AIA	1,97	0,53	-0,03	-,134*	-0,07	0,05	,251**	-,187**	1		
PE	4,18	0,57	0,00	0,04	0,08	0,00	-0,07	0,05	-,563**	1	
IL	3,96	0,7	0,05	,135*	-0,07	-0,06	-,281**	,192**	-,573**	,659**	1

Notes: Gender (1 = male, 2 = female), Marital Status (1=Married, 2=Single), Education (1 = diploma, 2 = bachelor, 3 = master,4 = PhD), Sector (1 =Public, 2 =Private), IL= Inclusive Leadership, PE=Psychological Empowerment, AIA=Artificial Intelligence Anxiety. *P < 0,05 and **P < 0,01

4.3 Regression Analysis

The mediation analysis for this study was performed using SPSS version 26, supplemented by the PROCESS 3.5.3 macro developed by Hayes (2017). This macro enables the examination of complex mediation models by assessing both direct and indirect effects. To enhance the robustness of statistical estimates, the analysis utilized 5,000 bootstrap samples. Hypothesis 1 posited a negative correlation between inclusive leadership and artificial intelligence anxiety. The results indicated that inclusive leadership explained 38% of the variance in artificial intelligence anxiety. Moreover, the coefficient for inclusive leadership and the model constant were found to be statistically significant. The analysis confirmed a negative relationship between inclusive leadership and artificial intelligence anxiety, with a β coefficient of -0.458 and a significance level of $p < 0.01$. The detailed results of this analysis are reported in Table 3. These findings provide empirical support for Hypothesis 1, demonstrating that inclusive leadership is significantly and inversely affecting artificial intelligence anxiety.

Table 3 Direct effect of inclusive leadership on artificial intelligence anxiety

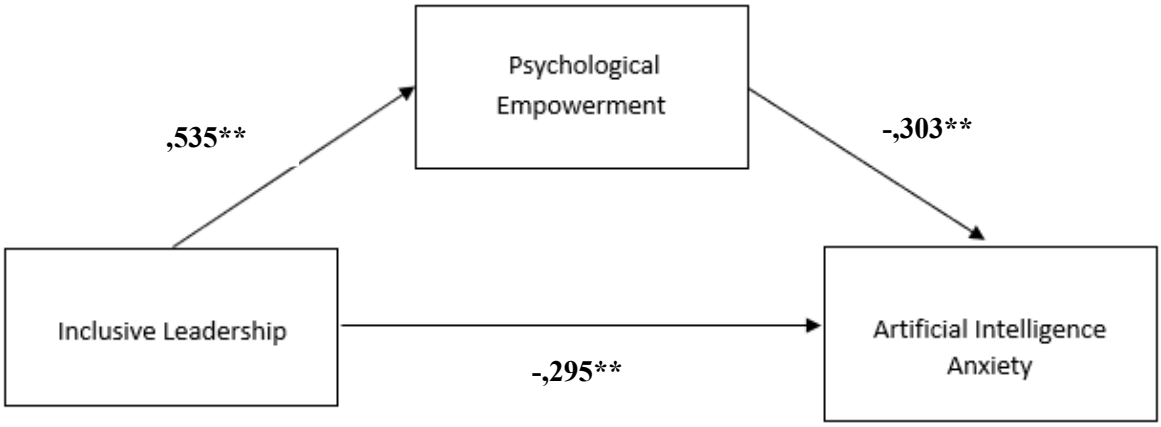
Coefficient	*se*	*t*	*p*	*LLCI*	*ULCI*
-,458	,034	-13,328	,000	-,5256	-,3904

Hypothesis 2 posited that psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between inclusive leadership and artificial intelligence anxiety. The analysis results confirmed the significance of the indirect effect of inclusive leadership on artificial intelligence anxiety. This finding is supported by the absence of zero within the confidence intervals (β = -0.162, LLCI = -0.2763, ULCI = -0.0566). Psychological empowerment was shown to have a significant mediating role. Inclusive leadership positively influences psychological empowerment (β = 0.535, $p < 0.01$), which, in turn, is negatively associated with artificial intelligence anxiety (β = -0.303, $p < 0.01$). Furthermore, the direct effect of inclusive leadership on artificial intelligence anxiety remained significant (β = -0.295, $p < 0.01$), indicating partial mediation by psychological empowerment. These findings demonstrate that while inclusive leadership directly reduces artificial intelligence anxiety, its effect is further mediated through the enhancement of psychological empowerment. This partial mediation underscores the importance of psychological empowerment in the relationship between inclusive leadership and artificial intelligence anxiety.

Table 4 Indirect effect of inclusive leadership on artificial intelligence anxiety

Coefficient	*se*	*p*	*LLCI*	*ULCI*
-,162	,0556	,000	-,2763	-,0566

Figure 2 Results of the research



5. Conclusion

Key Findings

This research examines the role of inclusive leadership in reducing artificial intelligence anxiety and explores how psychological empowerment influences the relationship between inclusive leadership and artificial intelligence anxiety. Inclusive leadership is recognized as a key factor in addressing workplace challenges, including fears and anxieties. As one of today's most significant and widely discussed topics, artificial intelligence offers numerous benefits to society while providing employees with distinct advantages in performing workplace tasks. This study investigates how individuals perceive the behaviors of inclusive leaders and seeks

to understand the impact of these perceptions on employees' internal experiences, behaviors and overall well-being. It is anticipated that inclusive leadership can boost employee confidence, enhance adaptability to artificial intelligence-driven changes and challenges and foster higher engagement with emerging artificial intelligence technologies.

Artificial intelligence anxiety often arises from organizational transformations and can lead to unintended negative outcomes, such as work alienation, increased turnover intention and reduced job satisfaction. In other words, artificial intelligence anxiety can have both psychological and physical repercussions, making it a critical concern in organizational behavior and strategic human resource management. To explore artificial intelligence anxiety more deeply, it was hypothesized that certain psychological and cognitive factors, such as psychological empowerment, might mediate the relationship between inclusive leadership and artificial intelligence anxiety. Psychological empowerment, a crucial organizational resource, is vital for fostering resilience and adaptability during transformative processes. Organizations must prioritize enhancing psychological empowerment to cultivate a supportive and adaptive workplace culture.

Based on these considerations, the first hypothesis proposed that inclusive leadership negatively affects artificial intelligence anxiety. Analysis of the collected data revealed that inclusive leadership significantly reduces artificial intelligence anxiety. The findings highlight that the positive behaviors of inclusive leaders, including adaptive and inclusive actions, help alleviate employees' feelings of fear, doubt and anxiety. Inclusive leaders foster a sense of connection, adaptability and inclusion within organizations, particularly during periods of significant change and transformation. As a result, employees' artificial intelligence anxiety is mitigated through their perception of inclusive leadership behaviors. The second hypothesis suggested that psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between inclusive leadership and artificial intelligence anxiety. Data analysis confirmed that inclusive leadership positively influences psychological empowerment, which, in turn, reduces artificial intelligence anxiety. The findings demonstrate that psychological empowerment partially mediates the effect of inclusive leadership on artificial intelligence anxiety. While inclusive leadership directly reduces artificial intelligence anxiety, psychological empowerment significantly strengthens this relationship. This partial mediation effect underscores the importance of both inclusive leadership and psychological empowerment in mitigating artificial intelligence anxiety. Although limited research specifically addresses the relationships examined in this study, the findings are consistent with broader literature on leadership, empowerment and workplace anxiety.

Implications

This study was steered to discover the effects of inclusive leadership on reducing artificial intelligence anxiety, as well as the mediating role of psychological empowerment in this relationship. In this respect, inclusive leadership appears as a critical factor to enhancing the overall functioning of organizations and cumulative employee adaptability to technological changes. The more inclusive leaders engage in supportive and adaptive behaviors toward their employees, the more encouraging consequences can be achieved, such as enhanced psychological empowerment, reduced anxiety and improved engagement with artificial intelligence technologies. Inclusive leadership plays a pivotal role in development of confidence and inclusion among employees, which in turn promotes resilience and openness to change.

Psychological empowerment is closely related to employees' perceptions of their own competence, autonomy, impact and meaningfulness in the workplace With the inclusive care they offer, leaders can improve these dimensions of empowerment, positively influencing employees' adaptability, engagement and overall well-being. By encouraging an empowering and inclusive atmosphere, leaders not only reduce artificial intelligence anxiety but also encourage employees to hold new technologies as opportunities for growth and development. In other words, inclusive leaders should align their behaviors in a way that instills a sense of empowerment and actively cultivate this mindset within their teams to ensure long-term organizational success.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

This study focused on the relationship between inclusive leadership, artificial intelligence anxiety and psychological empowerment. As a result, other organizational and individual variables outside this model were not considered, creating a limitation in the scope of the research. Factors such as individual personality traits, organizational culture or other situational variables were excluded and may provide additional insights if incorporated into future studies. Additionally, the construct of psychological empowerment, being inherently subjective, was assessed based on employees' self-perceptions in this study. This subjectivity may lead to variations in results when applied to different samples or organizational contexts. Future research could address this limitation by incorporating a more objective measurement of empowerment through multi-source data collection, such as input from peers, supervisors and external evaluators. Moreover, artificial intelligence anxiety was evaluated solely from the employees' perspective. Gathering data from leaders or examining organizational-level metrics related to AI implementation could provide a more holistic understanding of how inclusive leadership mitigates anxiety. Future research should also explore the longitudinal effects of inclusive leadership and psychological empowerment, examining how these dynamics evolve over time as organizations integrate artificial intelligence into their workflows. Expanding the research to include different cultural or industry contexts could further validate the model and its generalizability.

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