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Enhancing Creative Excellence in the Southern Indian IT Sectors: The Role of Autonomous Motivation in Inclusive Leadership Practices

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Abstract

The Southern Indian IT sector thrives on innovation but promoting employee creativity requires specific leadership approaches. This study aims to explore the influence of inclusive leadership on employee creative behavior, considering the mediating factor of autonomous motivation in southern Indian IT. The study situates the relationship between these variables within the framework of the self-determination theory. The survey, conducted with convenience sampling, involved 354 participants employed in the southern region of Indian IT sectors. The suggested simple mediation model was scrutinized by employing PLS-SEM. The findings indicated a favorable influence of inclusive leadership on the promotion of employee creative behavior, and autonomous motivation. Inclusive leadership practices cultivate an environment that fosters intrinsic motivation increasing employee creativity. The reliability of the outcomes may be impaired because of the limited sample size and the utilization of a cross-sectional study design. Also, these results imply that organizations and managers who want to see more employee creative behavior from their employees could do so by implementing inclusive leadership practices. This research contributes to the understanding of leadership style and employee creativity in the southern Indian IT sector. By highlighting the mediating role of autonomous motivation, the study encourages IT organizations to adopt inclusive leadership practices that develop intrinsic motivation and liberate employee creative potential. This promotes competitive advantages in the dynamic IT sector.

Keywords: Autonomous Motivation, Employee Creative Behavior, Inclusive Leadership, Self-Determination Theory.

Introduction

The IT sector in southern India has experienced significant growth and development over the past few decades, driven by the region's unique cultural diversity and economic dynamism. Despite this progress, the sector continues to face challenges in fostering creativity and innovation among its workforce (1). Creativity is a critical component of organizational success, as it enables companies to adapt to changing market conditions, develop new products and services, and stay ahead of the competition (2). However, the IT sector in southern India has historically struggled to balance the need for creativity with the demands of a rapidly evolving industry. Recent studies have highlighted the importance of inclusive leadership in fostering a culture of creativity and innovation within organizations. (3, 4). Inclusive leadership is characterized by its ability to empower employees, promote diversity and inclusion, and create a sense of belonging among team members. This leadership style encourages participation and values the input of all employees, which in turn can lead to higher levels of intrinsic motivation. However, the specific mechanisms through which inclusive leadership influences creativity remain poorly understood (5). Autonomous motivation refers to an individual's intrinsic drive to engage in work that is personally fulfilling and self-directed. Employees who feel empowered and included by their leaders are more likely to experience this type of motivation, which encourages them to express their ideas, take initiative, and pursue creative solutions. Inclusive leadership enhances employees' sense of ownership over their work, and significantly boosts their intrinsic motivation, leading to greater creativity and innovation (6). At the organizational level, creativity involves the integration of these individual efforts, alongside the organization's capacity to support, implement, and sustain innovative processes, practices, and

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solutions. The Southern Indian IT sector, particularly in Bangalore and Chennai, serves as a vital hub for technology and innovation, driven by its cultural diversity and competitive landscape. Exploring how inclusive leadership fosters autonomous motivation and creativity in this context offers valuable insights for organizations in similar dynamic environments (4). The study distinguishes between individual and organizational creativity by emphasizing individual creativity as influenced by inclusive leadership and autonomous motivation. Although the focus is on how inclusive leadership cultivates creativity at the individual level, the study also considers the potential for these individual contributions to collectively enhance organizational creativity. In the study, creativity is assessed across several key factors: idea generation, problem-solving, and the implementation of innovative solutions. These factors are important in the IT sector, where continuous innovation is necessary to remain competitive (2). By examining how inclusive leadership influences each of these aspects of creativity through autonomous motivation, this study aims to prove a more significant understanding of how leadership practices drive innovation within organizations. The purpose of this study is to investigate how inclusive leadership practices influence creative excellence within the southern Indian IT sector, with a particular focus on the role of autonomous motivation. By exploring these dynamics, the study aims to address this knowledge gap and provide actionable insights for organizations seeking to foster innovation and enhance employee creative behaviors in a highly competitive industry. The study contains the following objectives.

- To investigate the relationship between inclusive leadership and autonomous motivation in the Southern Indian IT sector.
- To examine the mediating role of autonomous motivation in the relationship between inclusive leadership and creativity.
- To identify the specific mechanisms through which leadership enhances creativity in the Southern Indian IT sector, with a focus on the role of autonomous motivation.

Since employees are crucial in the IT sector (6), today's organizational leaders with the challenge of balancing key factors like motivating employees and developing their creative skills to deliver high-quality performance consistently (7). Autonomous motivation is a key psychological construct that refers to the intrinsic drive to engage in activities for personal satisfaction and enjoyment. When employees are motivated by autonomy, they are more likely to be creative, innovative, and committed to their work (8). Inclusive leadership, with its emphasis on empowerment and participation, is well-positioned to foster autonomous motivation among employees (3).

By exploring the relationship between inclusive leadership and autonomous motivation, this study aims to provide insights into the mechanisms through which inclusive leadership can enhance creativity in the southern Indian IT sector. The digital age has created a higher demand for creativity and innovation, especially in the fast-changing southern Indian IT sector. This leads to an important question: Can inclusive leadership be used to enhance creativity and innovation in the southern Indian IT sector by fostering autonomous motivation among employees?

Besides that, the study aims to resolve the intricate dynamics that hinge creativity within the IT sector, drawing upon theoretical insights from self-determination theory and empirical evidence from organizational contexts. Through this endeavor, the study ambitious to pave the way for transformative change, driving sustainable growth and competitive advantage in the dynamic landscape of southern Indian IT innovation. The study is structured as follows: the first section presents a review of the literature on the variables, the second outlines the research methodology, the third focuses on data analysis, and the fourth discusses implications, limitations, and future research directions.

Theory and Literature

Self-Determination Theory

The Self-Determination Theory (9), identifies three essential psychological needs that are crucial for fostering autonomous motivation: autonomy, com petence, and relatedness. Through this concept how these needs create a powerful influence on human behavior governed by growth and self-actualization. Self-determination theory goes beyond just defining motivation; it breaks it down to its amount, quality, and type needed to sustain positive outcomes (10, 11). The theory provides two broad categories of motivation: intrinsic and

extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is the purest form of engagement that stems out of mere enjoyment or satisfaction in doing something for its own sake. Conversely, different types of regulations show varied levels of internalization. At this basic level is external regulation, a marionette manipulated by the strings of extrinsic rewards and punishments. After that comes introjected regulation where individuals are driven by a puppeteer inside themselves- either the need for self-esteem or fear of disapproval. Both external and introjected regulations are instances of controlled motivation, which are characterized by low levels of self-determination. Identified regulation occurs when one relates an activity to his/her values and goals to make it a part of who they are. Lastly, introjected regulation exemplifies the highest form of self-determined motivation. They actively become so fully infused into oneself that it is impossible to differentiate from the core values and aspirations one has in life. However, the advancement of integrated regulation for research purposes may be a futile exercise because it may impact reliability (12-15). Therefore, autonomous motivation will include intrinsic motivation and identified regulation as represented in the most self-determined strands in human behavior. Inclusive leadership aligns closely with the principles of self-determination theory. Leaders who embrace inclusivity empower employees by fostering participation, valuing diverse perspectives, and creating a sense of belonging. This inclusive environment supports the psychological needs outlined in self-determination theory, particularly autonomy and competence, which are crucial for intrinsic motivation. Inclusive leadership goes beyond traditional leadership styles by actively promoting psychological safety and making employees feel valued and supported. This sense of safety and inclusion enables employees to take creative risks.

Inclusive Leadership

Inclusive leadership was initially proposed in a study (16), as "the words and deeds by a leader that indicates an invitation and appreciation for the contribution of others." It is all about leaders who are open, willing, and accessible in their interactions with subordinates (17). Inclusive leaders encourage participation and value the opinions of their followers (18). When employees feel safe expressing their thoughts, even unconventional ones, it allows for a wider range of ideas to be explored. This diversity of perspectives is a breeding ground for creativity. By fostering an inclusive environment, leaders can unlock the creative potential of the workforce.

Employee creative behavior refers to the generation of novel and useful ideas. This includes both the ability to come up with new concepts (idea exploration) and develop them into practical solutions (idea generation) (19). It's a crucial element for organizational success, driving innovation, improved work practices, and competitiveness. Inclusive leadership fosters an environment conducive to employee creative behavior. By valuing diverse perspectives and encouraging participation, inclusive leaders create a space for employees to explore new ideas and take risks (4). This sense of security and appreciation motivates employees to contribute their unique ideas, ultimately leading to a greater likelihood of creative behavior. According to Self-determination theory, individuals are motivated by three basic psychological needs: autonomy (feeling in control), competence (feeling capable), and relatedness (feeling connected, 9). Inclusive leadership, by fostering autonomy and creating a supportive environment, aligns with these needs. Therefore, according to self-Determination Theory, this facilitates intrinsic motivation thus enhancing employee's creative behavior.

The Mediating Role of Autonomous Motivation

Autonomous motivation signifies an individual's complete ownership and alignment of their actions with personal goals, needs, interests, and values (20). It's the inner drive to act with choice and willingness, fueled by a desire for self-direction (21). Autonomous motivation is a complex construct comprised of two distinct components: intrinsic motivation and identified regulation. Intrinsic motivation arises from the inherent joy and satisfaction derived from the activity itself. Identified regulation emerges when individuals perceive an activity aligning with their personal values and aspirations, integrating it into their sense of self. Inclusive leadership plays a crucial role in fostering autonomous motivation (3). Leaders who embrace inclusivity implement practices that empower employees, acknowledge their contributions, promote team unity, and ensure fair treatment. Inclusive leadership encourages independent work, and participation in

decision-making, and fosters a respectful and fair atmosphere, all address employees' basic psychological needs in the workplace and cultivate an environment that promotes autonomous motivation. When driven by autonomous motivation, employees tackle tasks with greater efficiency and skill (22, 23), and employees are highly invested in their work and apply their cognitive abilities to the fullest in exploring and executing new ideas. This type of motivation fosters complex problem-solving behaviors and fuels creativity. Inclusive leadership acts as a bridge, fostering autonomous motivation within individuals, which in turn influences their creative behavior.

According to self-determination theory, inclusive leadership practices like empowering employees and fostering a sense of belonging fulfill their core psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (9). This, in turn, strengthens autonomous motivation, the driving force behind creative behaviors. Intrinsically motivated employees feel a sense of ownership and freedom to explore new ideas, take calculated risks, and experiment - all crucial ingredients for creative problem-solving and innovation (21, 22). Therefore, autonomous motivation acts as a mediator, carrying the influence of inclusive leadership practices toward fostering creative behavior within employees.

H1: Inclusive leadership is positively associated with employee creative behavior.

H2: Autonomous motivation mediates the relationship between inclusive leadership and employee creative behavior.

H2a: Autonomous motivation is positively associated with inclusive leadership.

H2b: Autonomous motivation is positively associated with employee creative behavior.

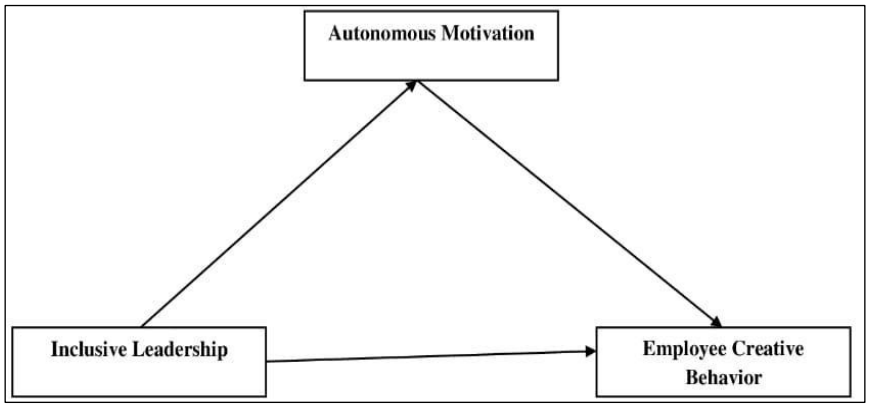

Figure 1: Proposed Model

Methodology

Sample and Procedure

The present study explored the Southern Region of the Indian IT industry by surveying full-time personnel employed in private IT companies in Chennai and Bangalore. We employed convenience sampling a non-probability sampling technique, where participants were selected based on their availability and willingness to participate in the study. With the support of HR managers familiar with our study goals, we identified IT firms that prioritized innovation as a strategic pillar and specifically targeted both senior-level and mid-level employees across different departments working in teams closely supervised by leaders. This approach (Figure 1) ensured frequent interaction with colleagues and ample exposure to leadership behaviors, allowing for a wide range of perspectives within the IT sector. To ensure that the data accurately represents the wider Southern Indian IT sector, efforts were made to include companies of varying sizes and departments, from large multinational corporations to smaller, locally-owned firms. Exclusion criteria included part-time employees, and interns, as their work dynamics differ from the core workforce. Our targeted sampling approach aimed to capture insights from individuals across different departments and job levels to provide a comprehensive perspective on leadership and creativity. Survey participants were furnished with pertinent details regarding the study and guaranteed the confidentiality of their identities. This data covered various departments to provide a broader perspective. The data collected was cross-sectional, and respondents were tasked with

completing the questionnaire based on their perceptions of their leader's inclusive behaviors trust in the leader, levels of thriving at work, and creative behavior. A number of 540 questionnaires were disseminated among the staff members, resulting in 348 usable questionnaires being obtained from the participants.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics

Variables	Categories	Rate of occurrence	Percentage
Gender	Male	194	56 %
	Female	154	44 %
Age	≤ 25 years	85	24 %
	26 to 30 years	130	37%
	31 to 35 years	73	21%
	36 to 40 years	51	15%
	≥ 41 years	9	3%
Educational Background	Bachelor's Degree	206	59%
	Master's Degree	74	22%
	Doctoral Degree	11	3%
	Others	57	16%
Job Experience	≤ 1 years	83	24%
	1-5 years	118	34%
	6-10 years	52	15%
	11-15 years	71	20%
	More than 15 years	24	7%

Measures

The study selected well-established five-point Likert scales to measure each construct, allowing participants to express their level of agreement with each item. To assess inclusive leadership, a nine-item (17) scale was utilized. Prior researchers (24-26) have employed a similar scale in their studies. An example item addressing all three attributes of inclusive leadership is " The manager is open to hearing new ideas (openness)", 'My manager is readily available for consulting any problem (Availability)" and " The manager is available for consultation on problems (Accessibility)". Moreover, the scale's value of 0.934 indicates its dependability. To assess employee creative behavior, we adopted a nine-item measure (27). This self-reported scale has been widely utilized in recent studies, with similar scales applied by researchers (28-30). Sample items "I always look for opportunities to improve work approaches and processes", "I always think about things from different angles" and "I often take risks to support new ideas or ideas". Moreover, the scale's value of 0.892 indicates its dependability. To assess autonomous motivation, a six-item scale (31) is introduced in previous studies (32-34). A sample item captured autonomous motivation "Because I consider it important to put effort in this job" and "Because I have fun doing my job". Moreover, the scale's value of 0.842 indicates its dependability. Previous studies reported that employees' socio-demographic characteristics can affect creative behavior. Thus, age, gender, education, and experience were used as control variables (35). It is shown in Table1.

Results

The primary stage of PLS-SEM analysis is the measurement model. The study model involves reflectively measured construct, composite reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant (36). In the measurement model, the first step is to examine the indicator reliability, which explains the relevant construct (37) and is also used to measure indicator variance (38). These values are indicated by outer loadings, and the threshold value is above 0.70 (39). If the items have outer loadings from 0.40 to less than 0.70, they are considered for removal, especially if their deletion results in an increase in the average variance extracted over the recommended value (40). Cronbach's alpha, rho-A, and composite reliability statistics assess reliability. In this study, Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability are greater than the threshold value of 0.700 (41). The rho-A was also found to be above 0.700 (42, 43) indicating that the study achieved good reliability, as shown in Figure 2. As recommended in past study (44), the AVE was above 0.500 for most of the construct, indicating that convergent validity was

acceptable. Discriminant validity was assessed by comparison of the correlations among the latent variables and the square root of AVE (44) and heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlation (43), with values below the (conservative) threshold of 0.85. Hence, discriminant validity is established as depicted in Table 2, 3 and 4.

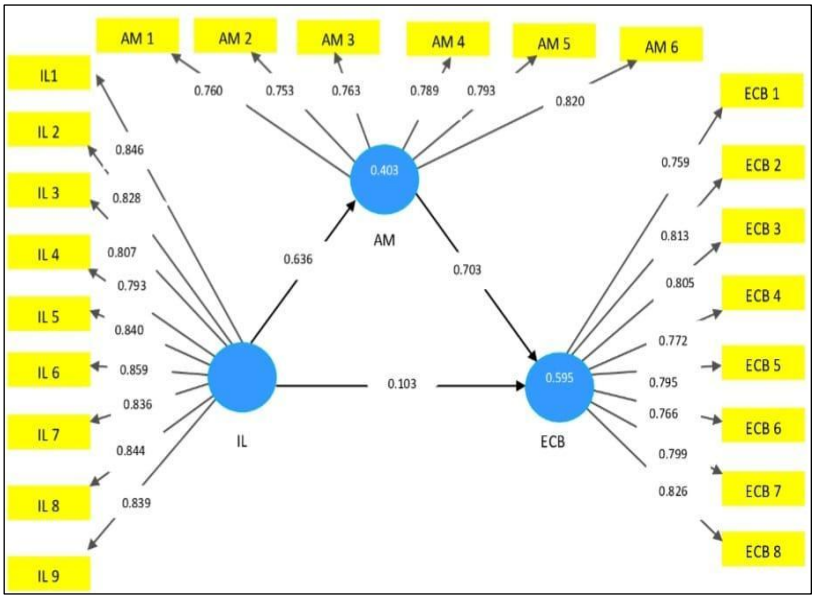

Figure 2: SEM Model

Table 2: Reliability and Validity of the Construct

construct	Items	Factor Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Extracted Variance
Inclusive Leadership			0.945	0.946	0.694
	IL 1	0.846			
	IL 2	0.828			
	IL 3	0.807			
	IL 4	0.793			
	IL 5	0.840			
	IL 6	0.859			
	IL 7	0.836			
	IL 8	0.844			
	IL 9	0.839			
Autonomous Motivation			0.871	0.871	0.608
	AM 1	0.760			
	AM 2	0.753			
	AM 3	0.763			
	AM 4	0.789			

	AM 5	0.793			
	AM 6	0.820			
Employee Creative Behavior			0.915	0.916	0.628
	ECB 1	0.759			
	ECB 2	0.813			
	ECB 3	0.805			
	ECB 4	0.772			
	ECB 5	0.795			
	ECB 6	0.766			
	ECB 7	0.799			
	ECB 8	0.826			

Table 3: Fornell-Larcker Criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio

Fornell-Larcker criterion				**Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)**			
Constructs'	**AM**	**ECB**	**IL**	**Constructs'**	**AM**	**ECB**	**IL**
AM	**0.780**			AM	-		
ECB	0.769	**0.792**		ECB	0.845	-	
IL	0.636	0.550	**0.833**	IL	0.696	0.589	-

N = 348, IL - Inclusive Leadership, ECB- Employee Creative Behavior, AM - Autonomous Motivation

Table 4: Cross Loading

Indicators	**AM**	**ECB**	**IL**
AM 1	**0.760**	0.606	0.578
AM 2	**0.753**	0.627	0.498
AM 3	**0.763**	0.655	0.476
AM 4	**0.789**	0.535	0.455
AM 5	**0.793**	0.554	0.501
AM 6	**0.820**	0.601	0.451
ECB 1	0.617	**0.759**	0.487
ECB 2	0.640	**0.813**	0.439
ECB 3	0.616	**0.805**	0.444
ECB 4	0.595	**0.772**	0.383
ECB 5	0.645	**0.795**	0.470
ECB 6	0.565	**0.766**	0.397
ECB 7	0.580	**0.799**	0.424
ECB 8	0.603	**0.826**	0.435
IL 1	0.581	0.512	**0.846**
IL 2	0.508	0.459	**0.828**
IL 3	0.511	0.446	**0.807**
IL 4	0.513	0.440	**0.793**
IL 5	0.534	0.443	**0.840**
IL 6	0.551	0.473	**0.859**

IL 7	0.488	0.424	**0.836**
IL 8	0.514	0.469	**0.844**
IL 9	0.556	0.449	**0.839**

Following the evaluation of the measurement model, the structural model was assessed based on recommendations from past study (45). This evaluation included examining collinearity, the significance of path coefficients, and the coefficient of determination (R^2) for explained variance. Bootstrapping with 5,000 samples (46) was employed to generate t-statistics for testing the significance of path coefficients (β). All analyses were conducted at a significance level of α = 0.05, with a critical t-value of 1.96. To diagnose potential collinearity, variance inflation factor (VIF) values were calculated using the latent variable scores of the exogenous constructs. All VIF values were below 3, indicating no significant collinearity concerns within the model. In addition, the value of goodness of fit generated through the normed fit index (NIF) was 0.874 which was greater than the recommended value 0.80.

Our findings support Hypothesis 1 (H1). Inclusive leadership has no significant positive effect on employee creative behavior (c') (β = 0.103, T-value = 1.619, p < 0.05; confidence interval [LL] = -0.013, [UL] = 0.240). Additionally, significant positive relationships were found between inclusive leadership, autonomous motivation, and employee creative behavior (H2, β = 0.447, T-value = 7.577, p < 0.05; confidence interval [LL] = 0.323, [UL] = 0.552). Furthermore, the analysis revealed significant positive relationships between inclusive leadership and autonomous motivation (H2a, β = 0.636, T-value = 10.155, p < 0.05; confidence interval [LL] = 0.507, [UL] = 0.747), and autonomous motivation and employee creative behavior (H2b) (β = 0.703, T-value = 10.886, p < 0.05; confidence interval [LL] = 0.560, [UL] = 0.811). The estimates of all the effects tested hypotheses are shown in Table 5 and the direct effects and indirect effects statistics are presented in Table 6. Overall, the results suggest partial mediation of the effect of autonomous motivation on employee creative behavior by supervisor support.

Table 5: Testing Hypothesis

Effects on variables	Path	β value	Standard deviation	T statistics	Confidence intervals		P value	Decision	f-square
					2.5%	97.5%			
Inclusive Leadership	Autonomous motivation (a)	0.636	0.063	10. 155	0.507	0.811	0.000	Significant	0.678
Employee Creative Behavior	H1: Inclusive Leadership (C')	0.103	0.108	1.619	-0.013	0.240	0.105	Non-Significant	0.016
	Autonomous motivation (b)	0.703	0.063	10.886	0.560	0.811	0.000	Significant	0.731

*Sig- Indicates a Significant Direct Effect at 0.05, NS - Indicates A Non-Significant Direct Effect *** P< 0.001; Bootstrapping Conducted with N = 5000 Subsamples*

Table 6: Indirect Effects and Direct Effects

Effect	Path		β value	Standard deviation	T statistics	Confidence intervals		P value
						2.5%	97.5%	
Indirect effect	Inclusive Leadership	+	0.447	0.059	7.577	0.323	0.552	0.000
	Autonomous motivation	+						

	employee creative behavior (H2)						
Direct effect	Inclusive Leadership + Employee creative behavior (c')	0.550	0.077	7.118	0.388	0.690	0.000
	Inclusive Leadership + Autonomous motivation (a)	0.636	0.063	10.155	0.507	0.747	0.000
	Autonomous motivation + Employee creative behavior (b)	0.703	0.065	10.886	0.560	0.811	0.000

*Sig- Indicates a Significant Direct Effect at 0.0, NS- Indicates A Non-Significant Direct Effect ***P < 0.001, Bootstrapping Conducted with N = 5,000 Subsamples*

The structural model analysis included the evaluation of fit indices. The coefficient of determination (R^2) values for the endogenous constructs were satisfactory. R^2 values for autonomous motivation, and employee creative behavior were 0.404 and 0.597, respectively, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.10. Additionally, the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) was calculated to assess model fit. As suggested in previous research (47), an SRMR value below 0.08 indicates a good fit. Our model achieved a desirable SRMR of 0.055, further supporting its adequacy.

Discussion

Inclusive leadership, though very much taken seriously as a critical drive of employee creativity, has limited studies on its specific effect. A study (48) highlighted the importance of this topic, but further exploration is needed. This study focused on the IT sector, a breeding ground for innovation, and explored the connections between inclusive leadership, employee creative behavior, and a key ingredient often missing from the equation: autonomous motivation. To address this gap, this study examines the relationships between inclusive leadership, employee creative behavior, and the mediating factor of autonomous motivation, specifically within the IT sector. The finding revealed a positive and significant association between inclusive leadership and employee creative behavior, supporting similar observations (49). Also, this study suggests that inclusive leadership might be the secret zest that enhances intrinsic motivation, or the inner drive, that motivates creative problem-solving. This then adds a layer of understanding to how styles of leadership can trigger a culture of innovation, particularly within the dynamic IT sector.

The IT industry, which constantly requires creativity and innovation, thrives on employees with high levels of autonomous motivation. Such employees are more likely to embrace challenges, experiment with new technologies, and think outside the box. Inclusive leadership practices that cultivate this type of motivation can be particularly impactful in this dynamic environment. This study's findings resonate with the previous study (50), who demonstrate that an inclusive leadership style fosters innovative work behavior through an autonomous work environment. This further strengthens the connection between inclusive leadership, autonomy, and creativity. Additionally, the study also aligns with the research (51) where a positive link was established between autonomous motivation and employee creative behavior. Also, this study adds valuable pieces of evidence that underline autonomous motivation as a way of facilitating employee creativity in an environment of inclusive leadership.

Theoretical and Practical Implication

This study contributes to Self-Determination Theory (SDT) by providing empirical evidence for the mediating role of autonomous motivation in the relationship between inclusive leadership and employee creative behavior, particularly within the IT sector. Traditionally, self-determination theory research focused on the impact of work environments on general employee motivation and well-being. This study extends the theory by demonstrating how specific leadership styles (inclusive leadership) can influence specific work outcomes (employee creative behavior) through the lens of autonomous motivation. This study

highlights the unique role of autonomous motivation in fostering creativity within the IT sector. By emphasizing the importance of autonomy for IT professionals, the study adds a valuable layer to the understanding of how self-determination theory principles can be applied in a dynamic and innovation-driven sector. This study's results also indicate that inclusive leadership practices go beyond the creation of a sense of belonging and team spirit. They also play an important role in enhancing autonomous motivation, a core principle of self-determination theory. This highlights the need for further study to explore the specific leadership behaviors that cultivate autonomy within the models of inclusive leadership. Also, the study highlights the relevance of Self-Determination Theory in understanding employee creativity within organizational contexts. It exhibits how leadership styles, specifically inclusive leadership, can influence the key psychological needs outlined by Self-Determination Theory (competence, autonomy, and relatedness) and ultimately promote autonomous motivation, a crucial driver of creative behavior. The study's findings provide further evidence for the mediating role of autonomous motivation between inclusive leadership and creative behavior. This strengthens the theoretical foundation of Self-Determination Theory by demonstrating how autonomy specifically stokes up creative problem-solving and innovation.

The nature of the IT sector - the fast-paced and ever-changing industry that requires a unique style of leadership. It's all about encouraging employees to take initiative and think outside the box. Inclusive leadership practices that emphasize empowerment, open communication, and employee participation are crucial in fostering autonomous motivation, which in turn stimulates creativity and innovation at both the individual and organizational levels. Leaders should create an environment where calculated risks are encouraged, and new ideas are welcomed with a glad hand. Embracing failures as learning opportunities and acknowledging that not every endower will result in immediate success. The results of this study provide actionable insights for leadership development programs in IT organizations, suggesting that incorporating inclusive leadership training can significantly enhance creativity and innovation within teams. Offering continuous learning and skill-building opportunities is essential, as it qualifies employees with the necessary tools to navigate the constantly evolving IT landscape and approach challenges with creativity. For organizations that wish to develop their IT workforce in Southern India, it's important to note that inclusive leadership significantly influences the creative behavior of employees in this region. Creating a sense of belonging, valuing differences, and empowering teams and leaders can discharge creativity and innovation in the IT sector. This also means creating a psychologically safe space where teams and individuals feel safe to share their ideas, no matter how crazy they may sound. IT organizations must focus on building inclusive leadership practices across management levels. IT leaders can further enhance their teams' creative potential by adopting leadership behaviors aligned with inclusivity principles, ensuring that employees feel valued and have the autonomy to take initiative in problem-solving.

The study also underlines the important role of autonomous motivation in driving employee creativity within Southern Indian IT organizations should focus on practices that develop intrinsic motivation. This can be achieved by providing challenging and meaningful work, allowing autonomy in work processes, and encouraging experimentation. Collaborate with employees so that they can establish some very challenging yet realistic goals that have been aligned with their interests as well as abilities. This creates a sense of purpose and lets employees take responsibility for the outcome and thus release their creative potential. Acknowledging these regional insights could effectively nurture a more innovative culture in the IT sectors.

Limitations and Future Direction

This study offers valuable insights into the interplay among inclusive leadership, autonomous motivation, and employee creative behavior in the IT sector, it is important to note several limitations. Firstly, the cross-sectional study design inhibits the establishment of causality among the variables studied. Longitudinal studies could offer a more comprehensive understanding of the temporal dynamics of creativity within technology-driven organizations. Secondly, this study's reliance on self-report measures may introduce biases such as social desirability and response biases, potentially

affecting the validity of the study findings. Employing multiple data collection methods, including objective performance measures and behavioral observations, could mitigate these biases and enhance the credibility of the study conclusions. Additionally, this study's exclusive focus on the IT sector in southern India limits the epitomized of the study findings to other industries or organizational contexts. Replicating our investigation across diverse sectors could uncover sector-specific differences in creativity dynamics, offering a more comprehensive understanding.

The future study could deepen the understanding of creativity dynamics within the IT sector and beyond. Exploring contextual factors such as organizational culture, industry competitiveness, and technological complexity could highlight the contextual contingencies shaping the relationships among inclusive leadership, autonomous motivation, and employee creative behavior. Moreover, examining the outcomes of employee creativity beyond individual-level performance measures could provide insights into its organizational impact, including team innovation and competitive advantage. Finally, integrating alternative theoretical frameworks could enrich our understanding of the mechanisms driving creativity within technology-driven organizations. Addressing these limitations and pursuing future study directions will advance both theoretical understanding and practical application in the field.

Conclusion

The study on inclusive leadership and employee creative behavior in the southern Indian IT sector has provided valuable insights into the relationship between leadership style and the promotion of creative behavior among employees. The study finding highlights the power of inclusive leadership that values diverse perspectives, empowers teams, and fosters a sense of psychological safety. The emphasis on diverse perspectives highlights the need for leaders to consider a wide range of viewpoints in the decision-making process. Psychological safety refers to creating an environment where individuals feel comfortable taking interpersonal risks without fearing negative consequences. Autonomous motivation allows employees to find fulfillment in their work by pursuing tasks out of personal interest rather than external rewards or pressures. Self- Self-determination theory provides a framework for understanding how intrinsic motivation can be nurtured within organizational settings through promoting feelings of competence (feeling effective in one's action), autonomy (having control over one's behavior), and relatedness (feeling connected socially). Further insights could include an analysis of specific strategies for leaders to promote inclusivity and psychological safety among their employees. This study makes a significant contribution to understanding how different leadership styles impact the creativity of employees in the IT sector.

Moving forward, IT organizations in Southern India should take into account the findings of this research when formulating and fostering leadership strategies. Adopting an inclusive leadership style can enhance a more energetic and innovative workplace. Additionally, it is important to highlight that the Southern Indian IT sector has seen significant growth over recent years, with major cities like Bangalore and Chennai emerging as key hubs for technology development. This region has also been attracting attention from global tech giants seeking to establish their presence due to its skilled workforce and favorable business environment. As such, understanding the dynamics of leadership and its impact on employee creativity in this context holds great relevance and implications for the broader IT sectors in India.

Abbreviation

PLS-SEM: Partial least squares structural equation modeling.

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Author Contributions

Devapriyanga G: Initiated this study by formulating the introduction and conducting a comprehensive analysis of the relevant literature, questionnaire, discussion, and conclusion. She also collected, organized, and cleaned the data, Subashini R: Formulated the study and the research framework. She has further undertaken data analysis and interpretation. The complete manuscript has been meticulously reviewed and revised by her.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Ethics Approval

Not applicable.

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