



Title: Inclusive Leadership and Project Success: A Bibliometric Analysis of Global Research Trends

Author (s): Noor Ul Haya Adnan¹ and Amir Gulzar ²

Affiliation (s): Department of Management Sciences, Foundation University Islamabad Pakistan ^{1&2}

History: Received: April 02, 2026
Revised: May 21, 2026
Accepted: June 04, 2026
Published: June 30, 2026

Citation: Adnan, N. U. H., and Gulzar, A.,(2026), Inclusive Leadership and Project Success: A Bibliometric Analysis of Global Research Trends, Journal of Workplace Behavior, 7(1), 15-34.

ORCID iD: 0009-0002-5569-5113¹
0000-0003-3163-0438²

JEL Classification: M10, M16 & M19

Copyright: © The Authors

Conflict of Interest: The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

Funding: The research is not supported from any source.

Ethical Consideration: - Written permission was obtained for the scales used in the study.
- Ethics committee approval was obtained from the Institutional Ethical Board
- Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.



Inclusive Leadership and Project Success: A Bibliometric Analysis of Global Research Trends

Noor Ul Haya Adnan and Amir Gulzar (PhD)

Department of Management Sciences,
Foundation University Islamabad Pakistan.
noorulhayaadnan@gmail.com

Abstract

The concept of inclusive leadership has recently gained increasing momentum in project-oriented organizations, but the body of knowledge is scattered across research on leadership, organizational behaviour, psychology, and project management. The literature on inclusive leadership has been primarily in the service of defining and understanding the implications of inclusive leadership and its impact, but has not systematically examined how this literature relates to multidimensional project success. To fill the gap, this study considers 359 journal articles in English from the last five years (2011 to 2 April 2026) that have been indexed in Scopus. To determine the intellectual and social structure of the field, performance analysis, keyword co-occurrence mapping, thematic mapping, trend analysis, country and institutional collaboration analysis, and an exploratory text-profile comparison of the 15 most-cited documents were conducted. The number of publications increased from 12 papers published in 2021 to 144 papers published in 2025, representing a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 86.12% during this four-year period. Literature is focused on inclusive leadership, psychological empowerment, project success, transformational leadership, and psychological safety with little research on innovative work behaviour, job satisfaction, authentic leadership and affective commitment. China, Pakistan and Malaysia are the top three countries as regards number of publications, while the United States has the greatest average citation impact of the top three countries. The study brings together bits and pieces of knowledge in a project-oriented research structure and demonstrates a growing consideration of leadership from the psychological and relational aspects that affect team learning, innovation, and outcomes of relevance to stakeholders. Interpretation is still constrained by Scopus only coverage, language restrictions, 2026 coverage and bias from citations age, and metadata analysis instead of full text analysis.

Keywords: *Bibliometric Analysis, Inclusive Leadership, Psychological Empowerment, Psychological Safety, Thematic Analysis.*

1. Introduction

Inclusive leadership is a set of attitudes and actions that encourage employees to participate, communicate openness and accessibility, and that allow employees to feel connected and valued for their unique knowledge and identity (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006; Randel et al., 2018). The idea is particularly applicable to the project context. Projects are typically completed on a team of cross-functional people who will need to coordinate specific expertise and knowledge under tight development schedules, fluctuating priorities, and evolving stakeholder needs. Under those circumstances, individuals may have valuable information but be hesitant to challenge assumptions, correct mistakes, or provide unconventional information. Therefore, inclusive leadership is not just a good interpersonal approach; it can shape the project team's mobilization of knowledge and voice to adapt and perform.

The definition of project success is also broadened. Although the classic triangle of time, cost and quality is significant, it fails to account for whether a project generates value for users,

whether it meets important stakeholders' expectations, whether it provides learning opportunities for a project team, or whether it contributes to the organization's strategy (Atkinson, 1999; Shenhar et al., 2001). This wider context establishes a sound conceptual linkage to inclusive leadership. Participation can be made safe and meaningful through the leadership, which can enhance psychological safety, psychological empowerment, knowledge sharing, work engagement, and innovative behaviour. Not only does these mechanisms influence delivery efficiency, but they also impact on the quality of decisions, responsiveness of stakeholders, learning, and value of the project for the long term.

Empirical research in these relationships has exploded and is located in multiple literatures. The scholarship of inclusive-leadership has grown largely within organizational behaviour and human resource management and project-success studies have been published in project management, construction, information technology, healthcare, hospitality, and public administration. The conceptual frameworks and outcomes of inclusive leadership have been elucidated through systematic reviews (Korkmaz et al., 2022; Shore & Chung, 2022), as have leadership styles and the multi-faceted measures of success in project management. What is not so transparent, however, is how these streams have coalesced: What kinds of authors, journals, countries, and institutions can be said to influence the field; what are the underlying psychological and behavioral mechanisms that give the field a conceptual backbone; what are the themes that are ripe for harvest or in development; and is there a shared intellectual profile of key documents in the field?

The appropriate method of problem solving in this case is the bibliometric method which can be used for the combination of the performance analysis with science mapping. Performance indicators are used to select productive and influential contributors, co-occurrence, collaboration, and thematic analyses are used to identify relationships that are not apparent in a traditional narrative review (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Donthu et al., 2021; Zupic & Čater, 2015). The current study makes a contribution by mapping the intersection of inclusive leadership and project success instead of the literature on inclusive leadership or project success alone. It also translates the bibliometric architecture in terms of project work mechanisms of safety, empowerment, knowledge exchange, engagement and innovation. Four research questions are explored:

- RQ1. What are the evolutions in the research on inclusive leadership and project success over time?
- RQ2. Who have been the most visible or influential authors, journals, institutions, countries, and collaborations with others internationally?
- RQ3. What are the key terms, ideas, buzz topics, and issue perspectives for the space?
- RQ4. What are the intellectual underpinnings of and similarities in influential research in the field? The remainder of the paper is organized as follows.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Inclusive leadership in project-based work

Openness, availability and accessibility, invitation, value of diverse perspectives and fair participation in group processes have been recognized as behaviours of inclusive leadership. Nembhard and Edmondson (2006) found that inclusiveness by leaders can help to minimize status barriers that inhibit professionals from speaking up. Randel et al. (2018) subsequently shifted the concept of inclusive leadership to two complementary experiences: the experience of belongingness and the experience of being valued for uniqueness. This distinction becomes significant in projects as it is important to have a shared sense of team identity for effective coordination, and to retain and apply the members' specialized perspectives for complex problem solving.

Inclusive leadership is linked to, but different from, transformational, empowering, humble, authentic, and ethical leadership. Participation and/or development can also be promoted by these two neighboring approaches, but inclusive leadership places special importance on how difference is treated and on creating space for diverse members to contribute. Recent reviews suggest that the field has developed rapidly, still is theoretically plural, and has employed several theoretical lenses to examine outcomes including social identity (Korkmaz et al., 2022), optimal distinctiveness (Shore & Chung, 2022), leader-member exchange (LMX) theory, social exchange theory, and conservation-of-resources theory (COR) (Shore & Chung, 2022; Korkmaz et al., 2022). Bibliometric mapping can be used because of this plurality, since the same processes might be represented under various disciplinary traditions and leadership labels.

2.2 Project success as a multidimensional outcome

Project success doesn't just come in one form. However, Atkinson (1999) questioned the adequacy of cost, time, and quality. Shenhar et al. (2001) advanced a strategic and multidimensional perspective that goes beyond efficiency and includes customer impact, business success, and future preparation. Modern project research also differentiates the immediate delivery performance from the satisfaction of the stakeholders, team development, innovation, sustainability, and organizational benefits. Thus, a project may be on time and on budget, but not accepted, learned, or strategically beneficial; or a project may be off schedule, but result in long-term strategic advantages.

Leadership is important because many factors to success are not just formal plans. Project managers need to develop environments in which team members can communicate issues that arise, share knowledge that is distributed, negotiate priorities, and work on these projects in the face of uncertainty. Some projects may be more important than others because of professional diversity, remote collaboration, high novelty, or competing stakeholder interests, and thus be more significant with regard to inclusive leadership. It can influence how social interaction quality translates to project outcomes through technical resources.

2.3 Psychological and behavioral mechanisms

Psychological safety is a collective norm that interpersonal risk-taking is safe. It enables the reporting of errors, seeking help, experimentation, and learning, which are central in uncertain project work (Edmondson & Lei, 2014; Frazier et al., 2017; Majeed et al., 2024). The inclusive leader can help ensure safety through constructive responses to questions and dissent, diminish the social cost of speaking up, and show that status differences are irrelevant to the extent of whose knowledge is heard. Empirical project research has thus explored how inclusive leadership relates to project success through the lens of psychological safety (Khan et al., 2020; Mahmood et al., 2024).

A second mechanism is psychological empowerment. Meaning, competence, autonomy, and impact for project members increase their willingness to take responsibility for tasks and seek improvements. Empowerment is related to innovative work behaviour and project outcomes (Ali et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2020). Knowledge sharing and work engagement are closely linked mechanisms: when people feel safe they feel more at ease to contribute; when they feel empowered, they feel more motivated to contribute; when they feel engaged, they are committed to keeping the effort needed to turn ideas into action. The use of these constructs in the literature implies that inclusive leadership is gaining salience as a process that enables rather than as a predictor of performance.

2.4 Existing reviews and the unresolved mapping problem

There have been significant contributions from existing reviews. Korkmaz et al (2022) reviewed the general inclusive-leadership literature and pointed out that there was a lack of

clarity in terms of concepts, antecedents and outcomes of inclusive leadership. Shore and Chung (2022) investigated the ways in which leaders encourage or discourage work-group inclusion, and emphasized the part of this that involves marginalized identities. While these reviews define the conceptual field of inclusive leadership, the purpose of these reviews is not to define the overlap between inclusive leadership and project success. In contrast, research on project-leadership tends to be more narrow in scope, concentrating on specific leadership styles, sectors, or mediating models. Therefore, it is hard to find an integrated overview of the field's publication history, intellectual footholds, geographical focus, collaborations and newly relevant mechanisms for projects. In the present study, the unsolved mapping problem is addressed. Does not test a causal model or make hypotheses. It, instead, outlines the organization of the evidence base and the focus of theoretical and empirical studies. This is significant, because it is a difference between patterns of attention and association, and the impact of these relationships. The following interpretation, then, expresses itself tentatively and links the positioning and clustering to the text of the literature concerned, rather than to the number of frequencies or citations, and does not therefore claim to provide evidence for the importance of theory.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design and data source

This study is a bibliometric study of performance analysis and science mapping design. The choice of Scopus was made because it offers structured metadata for documents, authors, affiliations, citations, countries, sources, abstracts, and keywords, as well as the wide scope of coverage of management, social science and applied fields (Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016). The search took place on 2 April 2026. As 2026 was not completed at time of retrieval, its publication count is only reported descriptively, and it is not included in growth-rate calculations, and is not included in statements of a decline or change in momentum.

The reproducible Scopus search string was: TITLE-ABS-KEY ("inclusive leadership" AND ("project success" OR "project performance"))

The first search yielded 413 results. Retained: Journal articles were included if published in English, and records excluded if they were not of a type (journal) or source (journal) or language (English) or publication status (journal). A total of 359 articles were included in the final sample between 2011 and 2 April 2026. The cross-database duplication problem did not arise as only one database was used, but double-checks were performed for DOI and normalized-title values to catch duplication of records in the export.

3.2 Eligibility, screening, and PRISMA reporting

The screening process was conducted according to the transparency principles of PRISMA 2020 by Page et al., 2021. There were 413 records identified, but 53 records were ineligible due to either not being a journal article or due to the publication status. These exclusions included review papers, books and book chapters, conference papers, and one retracted paper. The remaining 360 records were reviewed for language and one Spanish-language article was rejected. This resulted in the final sample of 359 English-language journal articles. The numbers in Figure 1 are the same as in the written screening account, eliminating the numerical discrepancy in the screening description above.

3.3 Data cleaning and standardization

Data from the bibliographic sources were cleaned before analysis. Author names were standardized to family name and initial(s) and variants were compared using affiliation and publication details. Where there was a clear institutional match affiliations were standardized, but broad labels like "School of Management" were kept when the Scopus record did not reveal

a parent institution. Harmonized country names, and singular-plural variants, spelling variants, and close variants of author keywords were consolidated. Variants of the term “innovative work behaviour/behaviour” were, for example, considered the same term. Institutional results are more sensitive to the quality of the metadata than country- or journal-level results, though these procedures minimize artificial fragmentation.

3.4 Analytical procedures and software

Descriptive indicators and relational mapping were used together for the analysis. Descriptive production, citation, source, country, thematic and trend analyses were performed using Bibliometric/Biblioshiny (5.2.1) in R. A bibliometric network inspection was performed with VOSviewer version 1.6.20, and the figures were prepared by using Python and Matplotlib 3.10.8 (for publication) and the exploratory document-similarity heatmap. Frequencies of publication and keywords were calculated using full counting. For the normalization of keyword networks, association strength was used, the occurrence threshold for co-occurrence map was 3, and the one for trend-topic analysis was 5. Co-authorship linkages and full counting were used to facilitate country collaboration.

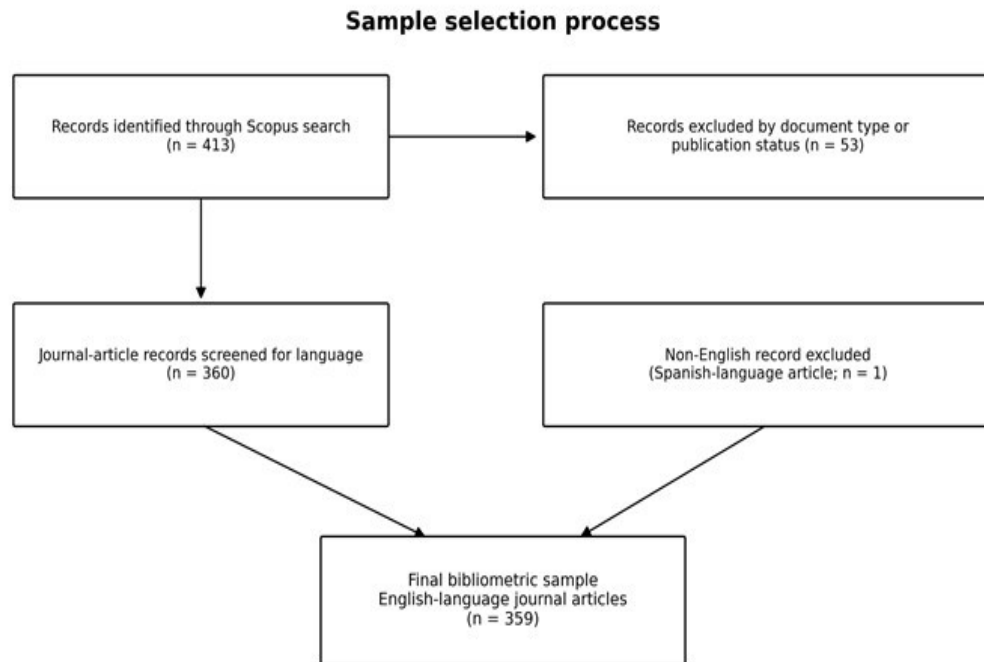


Figure 1. PRISMA-style flow of Scopus record identification and screening.

In the document-level comparison, terms in the titles, abstracts, and author keywords of the 15 most cited documents were used to represent the documents. Lowercasing, removal of punctuation, stop-words, and term normalization were performed, and a document-term matrix was constructed. The frequencies of the terms were then centered and subjected to Pearson correlation as an exploratory profile-similarity measure.

This option reflects whether two documents highlight terms in similar relative proportions, or whether it is just presented as a reward for lengthy documents. It is not meant to be a full-text semantic coding or a claim to causal or theoretical equivalence, but rather a metadata-based comparison. Only the biggest positive pairing is interpreted cautiously; all coefficients with

sparse text matrices are being treated. Future replications should also include the cosine coefficient as a sensitivity check as well as the Pearson coefficient.

The citations listed were provided by Scopus on 2 April 2026. Citation indicators are thus time-dependent and will tend to favor older publications. They are taken as indicators of visibility and not measures of research quality. Similarly, the patterns of scholarly interest represented by constructs' keyword co-occurrence and their thematic positions do not reflect the empirical strength of the relationships between constructs.

4. Results

This section reports the results in the order of the four research questions. Interpretation that requires comparison with prior literature is reserved for Section 5.

4.1 Dataset profile

Table 1. Main characteristics of the bibliometric dataset.

Description	Result
Timespan	2011–April 2026
Sources (journals)	206
Documents	359
Unique authors	1,085
Average citations per document	13.26
Average document age (years)	2.07
Average authors per document	3.50
Annual production CAGR, 2011–2025	42.62%
Post-2021 production CAGR, 2021–2025	86.12%

The dataset contains 359 journal articles distributed across 206 sources and written by 1,085 unique authors. The average of 3.50 authors per document refers to author appearances per paper and is therefore not expected to equal the number of unique authors divided by the number of documents. The low average document age of 2.07 years confirms that much of the literature is recent. Scopus recorded 13.26 citations per article on average at the retrieval date, although this mean is influenced by a small number of highly cited older papers.

4.2 Annual publication development

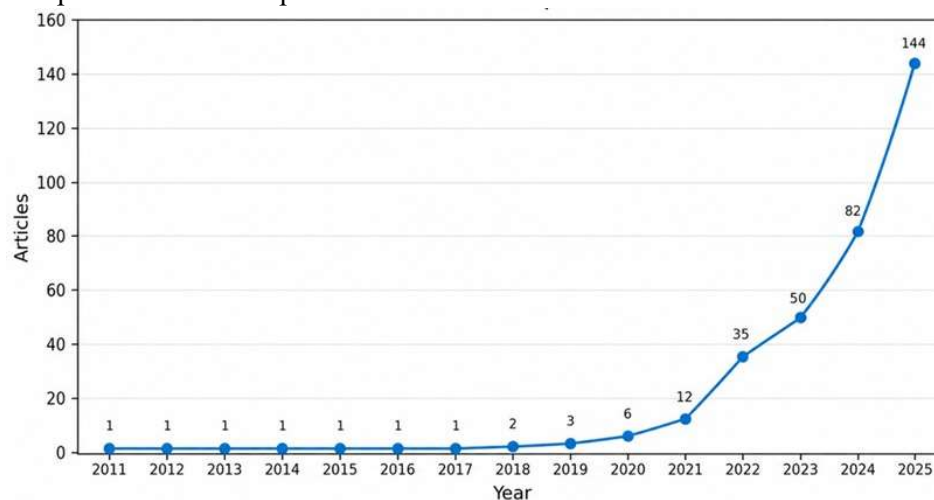


Figure 2. Annual scientific production. The 2026 value covers publications indexed up to April 2026.

Annual output remained very limited during the first decade: one article was recorded in each of 2011, 2015, and 2017; two appeared in 2019; six in 2020; and 12 in 2021. Production then increased to 35 articles in 2022, 50 in 2023, 82 in 2024, and 144 in 2025. This represents an 86.12% compound annual growth rate from 2021 to 2025. The 25 articles recorded for 2026 reflect only the first three months and should not be interpreted as a decline in scholarly interest.

4.3 Authors and citation visibility

The author's output is concentrated in a selected number of groups that occur repeatedly. Namra Mubarak had the highest number of total publications (19 documents and 469 citations), and Jabran Khan had the highest number of total citations (600). Positional variants were also included for certain contributors, such as name-order variants and initials variants, in the rankings, including records of Mastura Jaafar. These variants were checked during cleaning, and the result shows the advantages of author-level ranking over journal- or country-based ranking, which are more sensitive to the standardization of metadata. The field is, in fact, not more accurately characterized as being dominated by a single scholar, but rather by co-author teams.

4.4 Most relevant sources

Table 2. Ten leading publication sources

Source	Documents	Citations	First year
Frontiers in Psychology	19	266	2021
International Journal of Managing Projects in Business	11	212	2015
Project Management Journal	11	76	2021
Leadership & Organization Development Journal	8	263	2020
SAGE Open	8	81	2022
International Journal of Project Management	7	140	2019
Sustainability	7	68	2021
Administrative Sciences	7	67	2023
Management Decision	5	19	2024
Engineering, Construction and Architectural Management	5	11	2024

Note. Leading sources by publication count; citation counts are as recorded on 2 April 2026.

The most popular journals are Frontiers in Psychology (19 documents), the International Journal of Managing Projects in Business (11 documents), and Project Management Journal (11 documents). The sources include contributions from the fields of psychology, leadership, project management, sustainability, and general management. Citation volume is not linearly proportional to document volume: This is especially true for citation volume for the Leadership & Organization Development Journal, which received 263 citations from 8 documents, compared to 19 papers with 266 citations in Frontiers in Psychology. This difference is based on the age of publication, visibility of the articles, and the topic-specific influence, and does not mean a ranking in journal quality.

4.5 Highly cited documents and intellectual foundations

The table clearly separates out direct studies from foundational and adjacent research. The most cited record is by Frazier et al.'s (2017) meta-analysis of psychological safety, which has 758 citations. The high level of its visibility suggests that the corpus is much influenced by an existing mechanism but it is not possible to prove that the field is "theoretically" grounded in psychological safety. The last two papers discuss, or reimagine, inclusive leadership. There are also a number of other highly cited records that are indirectly related to either of the two focal constructs and are more likely to be related to innovation, burnout, proactive personality or high-quality relationships. The presence of these is a reflection of the size of the search corpus

for Scopus and the cross-over nature of the project-success research in adjacent organizational-behaviour literatures.

Table 3. Highly cited documents in the search corpus.

Title	Author(s)	Year	Citations	Relationship to focal topic
Psychological safety: A meta-analytic review and extension	Frazier et al.	2017	758	Foundational mechanism
About and beyond leading uniqueness and belongingness: A systematic review of inclusive leadership research	Korkmaz et al.	2022	235	Direct review
Inclusive leadership: How leaders sustain or discourage work group inclusion	Shore & Chung	2022	205	Direct theory/review
Antecedents and consequences of business model innovation in the IT industry	Bhatti et al.	2021	165	Adjacent innovation study
Impact of humble leadership on project success: The mediating role of psychological empowerment and innovative work behavior	Ali et al.	2020	113	Direct project study
Managing hospital employees' burnout through transformational leadership	Chen et al.	2022	104	Adjacent leadership mechanism
Does inclusive leadership affect project success?	Khan et al.	2020	104	Direct project study
Linking capacities of high-quality relationships to team learning and performance	Brueller & Carmeli	2011	78	Foundational team mechanism
The impact of a proactive personality on innovative work behavior	Mubarak et al.	2021	73	Adjacent behavioral study
Collaboration in project teams: The role of mastery and performance climates	Caniëls et al.	2019	68	Direct project-team study



Figure 3. Word frequency in the titles, abstracts, and author keywords

The word-frequency display is dominated by leadership, inclusive, psychological, success, safety, work, and engagement. Because a word cloud does not preserve relationships among terms, it is used only as a descriptive supplement to the network and similarity analyses that follow.

4.6 Keyword co-occurrence structure

Table 4. Leading author keywords in the co-occurrence network.

Keyword	Cluster	Links	Occurrences	Total link strength
inclusive leadership	2	22	46	49
psychological empowerment	1	27	38	66
project success	1	21	34	43
transformational leadership	1	20	32	44
psychological safety	2	23	28	39
leadership	2	17	21	28
innovative work behaviour	3	19	21	27
knowledge sharing	1	13	16	20
work engagement	2	13	15	20
project management	1	12	14	21

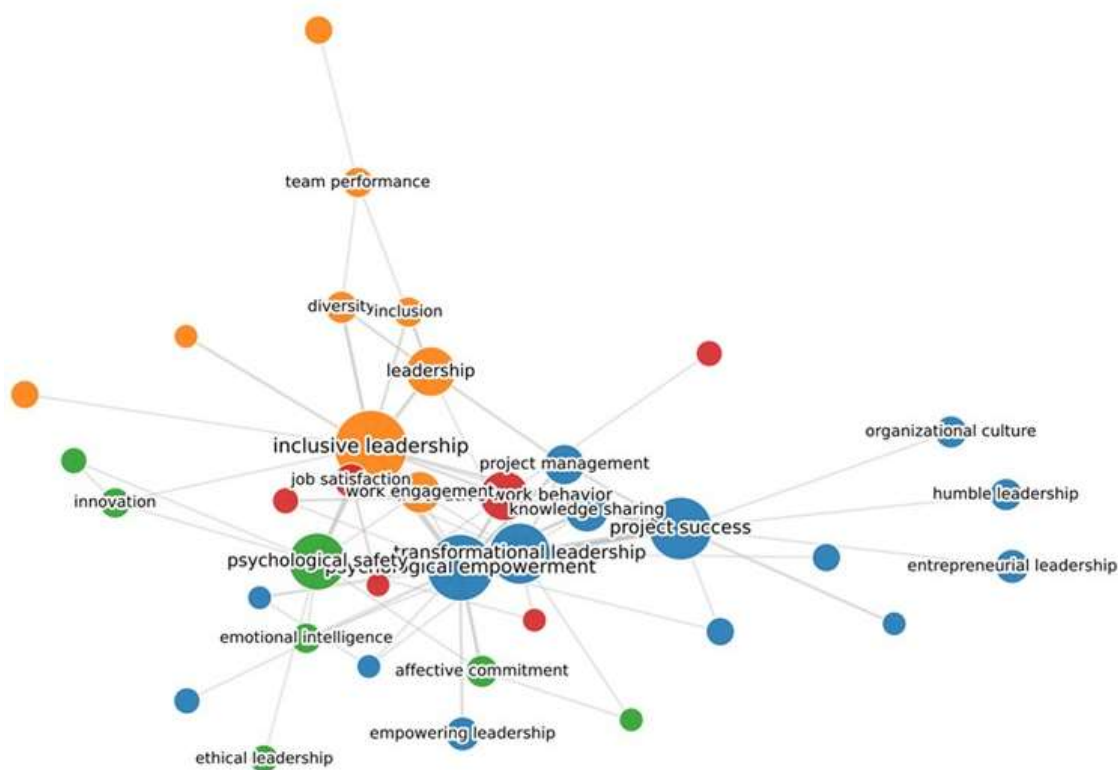


Figure 4. Author-keyword co-occurrence network using full counting and association-strength normalization; minimum occurrence threshold = 3.

The number of times inclusive leadership is displayed is 46, and it is linked to 22 other displayed terms, whereas psychological empowerment is noted 27 times, and has the most total link strength (66). The words project success, transformational leadership, and psychological safety each show up 34 times. The network splits into four general strands: project-success and leadership-effectiveness, inclusive-leadership, inclusion and engagement, psychological-safety and innovation, and a smaller group of employee-attitudes (job-satisfaction and innovative-work-behaviour). These clusters are patterns of co-use among author words and are not causal pathways which have been tested.

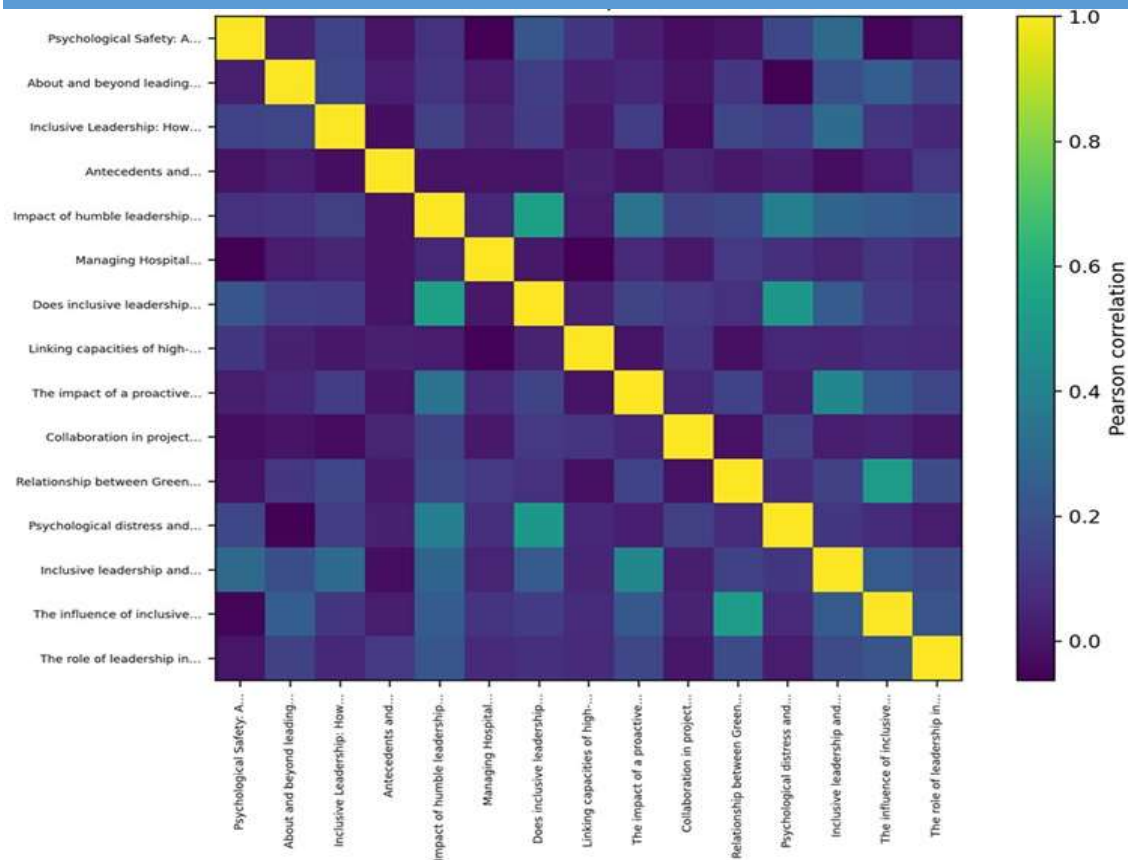


Figure 5. Exploratory Pearson profile similarity based on title, abstract, and author-keyword terms.

Table 5. Largest positive Pearson correlations among top-cited document pairs.

Document A	Document B	Pearson r
Humble leadership and project success	Inclusive leadership and project success	0.542
Green leaders' emotional intelligence	Inclusive leadership and green innovative service behaviour	0.526
Inclusive leadership and project success	Psychological distress and project success	0.505
Proactive personality and innovative work behaviour	Inclusive leadership and work engagement	0.430
Humble leadership and project success	Psychological distress and project success	0.394
Humble leadership and project success	Proactive personality and innovative work behaviour	0.342
Work-group inclusion	Inclusive leadership and work engagement	0.307
Psychological safety meta-analysis	Inclusive leadership and work engagement	0.304
Humble leadership and project success	Inclusive leadership and work engagement	0.281
Inclusive-leadership systematic review	Inclusive leadership and green innovative service behaviour	0.257

The study with the largest coefficient is the correlation between the humble-leadership/project-success study and the inclusive-leadership/project-success study ($r = .542$). The following two match-ups are between green leadership and innovation ($r = .526$) and inclusive leadership and psychological distress in project work ($r = .505$). The moderate coefficients indicate a certain thematic similarity, but not a coherent literature. The parallels are uniform and correspond with frequent coverage of leadership, mental conditions, and performance results, but they are not

deemed to be theoretical equivalents. Some influential papers also cite specific topics or contexts, as evidenced by the negative and near zero cells in the heatmap.

4.8 Affiliation patterns

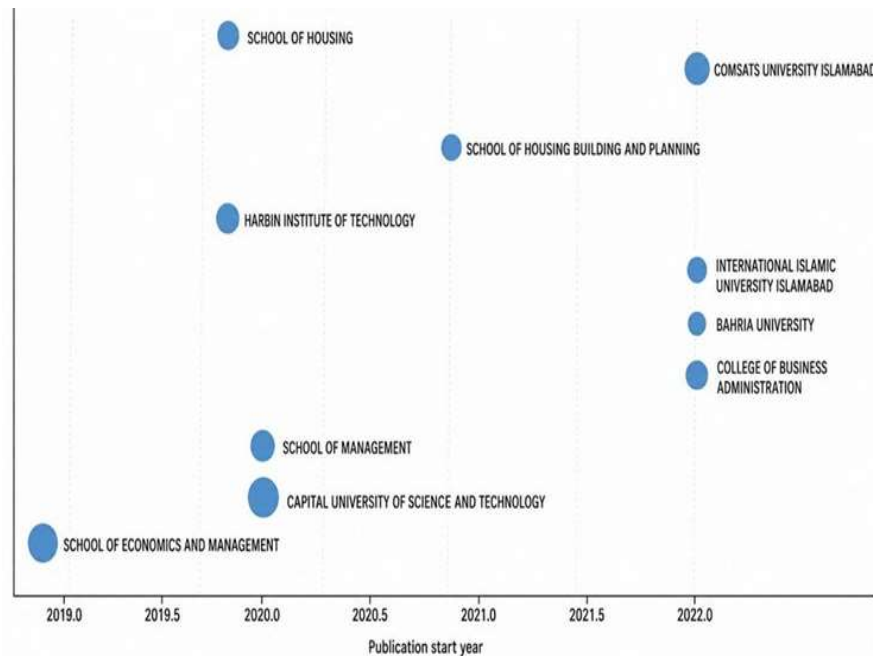


Figure 6. Publication timing and relative output of visible affiliation labels in the Scopus metadata.

The School of Economics and Management, Capital University of Science and Technology, School of Management, College of Business Administration, Bahria University, International Islamic University Islamabad, and COMSATS University Islamabad are the most visible affiliations displayed in the affiliation display. The bigger nodes are tightly grouped around the end of 2019. The results should be treated with care, as Scopus may have the listing of faculty, school or college that the parent university is affiliated with. Raw classification data like “School of Management” can not be reliably assigned to any particular school and can disaggregate and/or misclassify output. The figure may therefore be used to recognize the publication and general institutional involvement but is not suitable for a definitive institutional league table.

4.9 Country productivity and citation impact

Table 6. Leading countries by publication frequency.

Country	Documents	Citations	Share of corpus (%)	Citations/ document
China	101	1,187	28.13	11.75
Pakistan	88	1,416	24.51	16.09
Malaysia	38	703	10.58	18.50
United States	30	1,167	8.36	38.90
Saudi Arabia	23	281	6.41	12.22
United Kingdom	22	177	6.13	8.05
India	19	167	5.29	8.79
Indonesia	18	50	5.01	2.78
United Arab Emirates	15	118	4.18	7.87
Thailand	13	76	3.62	5.85

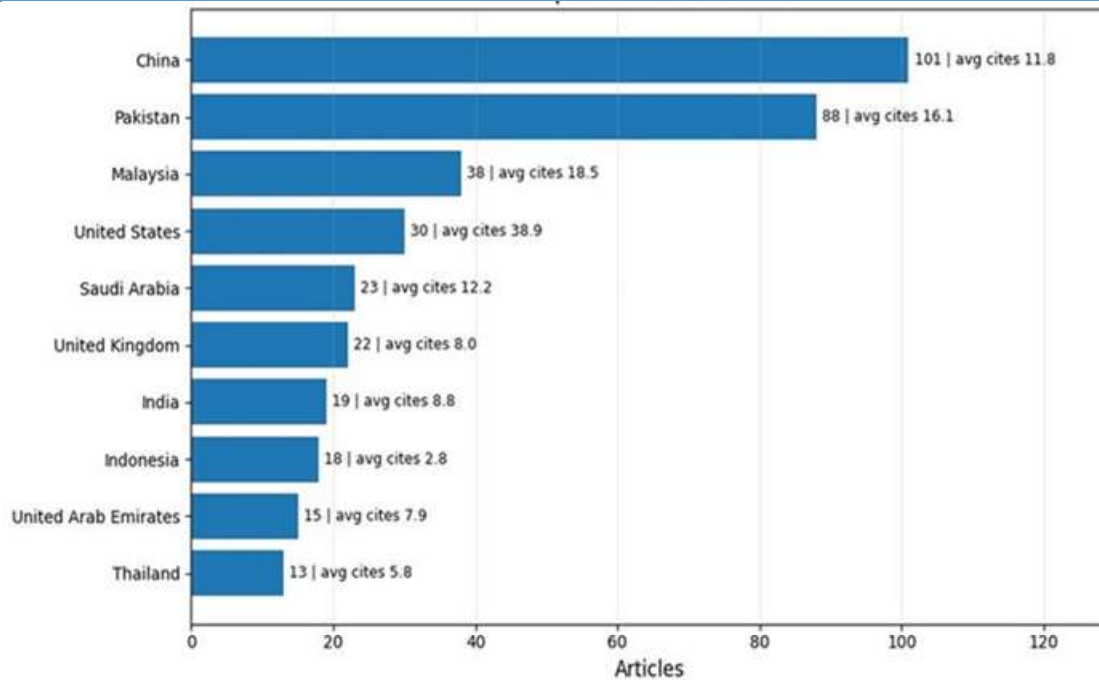


Figure 7. Leading countries by publication count, with average citations per document.

China contributes 101 documents (28.13% of the corpus), followed by Pakistan with 88 (24.51%) and Malaysia with 38 (10.58%). The United States does not have the largest output but does have the highest average citation rate of 38.90 citations per document of the top countries. The total citations in Pakistan are 1416 with high volume, while Malaysia has 18.50 citations per paper. These indicators are descriptive and relate to the retrieval date and are influenced by the age and citation profile of publications from each country.

4.10 Trend topics

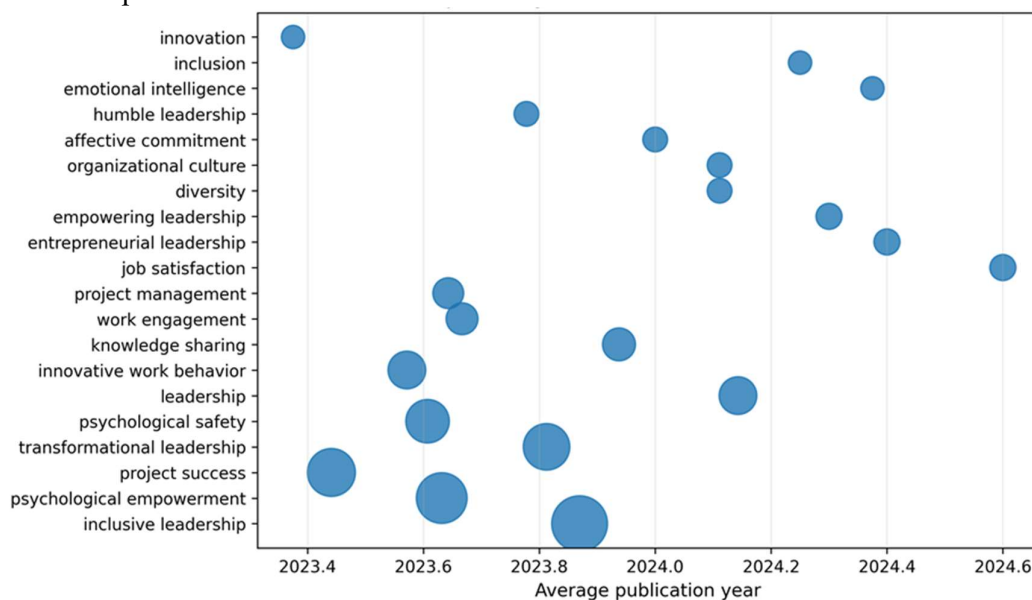


Figure 8. Trend topics with at least five occurrences

The most frequent words continue to be inclusive leadership, psychological empowerment, project success, transformational leadership and psychological safety. Average job satisfaction, entrepreneurial leadership, emotion intelligence, inclusion and innovation are more recent and visible. As is evident in the figure, work engagement, knowledge sharing, and innovative work behaviour are situated around 2023–2024, suggesting ongoing, rather than focused attention. The timing metric identifies when a topic is concentrated in the dataset; it does not predict that the topic will continue to grow.

4.11 Thematic map

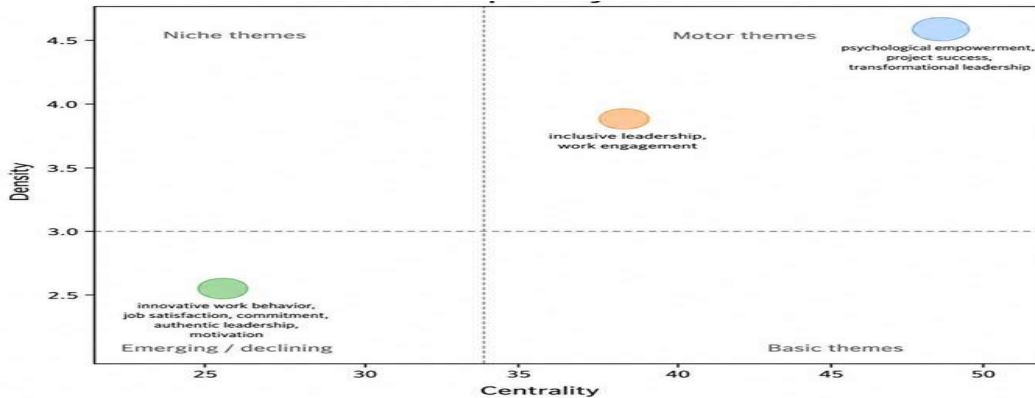


Figure 10. Thematic map based on keyword-cluster centrality and density.

The top right quadrant presents a very central and internal development of a cluster around psychological empowerment, project success and transformational leadership. A second, well-developed cluster is work engagement and inclusive leadership. In the lower left corner, the innovative work behavior, job satisfaction, commitment, authentic leadership and motivation are found. The lower density and centrality are indicating that they are not as compact as the rest of this data set, which means only the map cannot show if they are increasing or decreasing but only when coupled with a trend analysis. The lower right quadrant of the basic theme is relatively empty, indicating that the field is structured into well defined mechanism themes, but not a large number of generic and weakly developed concepts.

4.12 International collaboration

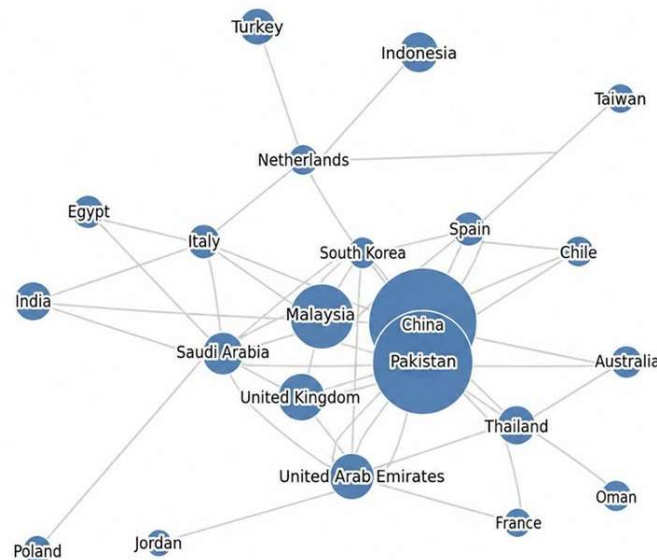


Figure 10. Country co-authorship collaboration network

The cooperation network focuses on the countries of China, Pakistan and Malaysia, and includes connections with the United Kingdom, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, India, Thailand, Australia, Spain, Italy, South Korea and the Netherlands. Peripherals that have smaller nodes are Ghana, Nigeria, Vietnam, Canada, Portugal, Jordan, Poland, Chile, Oman, and France. The network shows that it is geographically centered with some international connections. This may be attributed to the fact that there is less publications, cross-border partnerships or representation in the filters (Scopus or English language).

5. Discussion

This study aimed to clarify the evolution of the literature related to inclusive leadership and project success, who has developed it, how it is organized and what the more influential documents show. The findings indicate a young and rapidly developing area of research, with its focus in the psychological and relational context of project work. Recent research has begun to focus on how leadership impacts on voice, empowerment, knowledge sharing, engagement, and innovation, rather than assuming voice is a contextual factor.

5.1 Research Questions

5.5.1 RQ1: Growth and development of the field

The first research question was related to publication development. The data reveal a well-documented structural break after the year 2021 where the annual number of articles increased from 12 in 2021 to 144 in 2025. The increase is more informative than the partial count for 2026, which is based on the first quarter. The acceleration is coinciding with broader managerial interest in diversity, voice, hybrid ways of work and the functioning of knowledge intensive teams.

It also acknowledges the growing application of multidimensional success criteria that opens a new space for leadership research to account for the outcomes of learning, innovation, stakeholder response, team wellbeing as well as cost and schedule outcomes. It also indicates immaturity because of its rapid growth. The rate of publication isn't necessarily a measure of conceptual consolidation. There are a number of overlapping terms for leadership in the literature, and frequently, the same types of mechanisms are tested in different sectoral contexts. The sense of convergence is found in the thematic concentration around empowerment, safety and engagement, while a lack of coverage in a broad basic-theme quadrant means that definitions, boundary conditions and outcome measures still need to be integrated. The field is developing at a faster rate than its conceptual design stabilizes.

5.1.2 RQ2: Contributors, outlets, and geographic concentration

The second research question looked at visible contributors and collaboration. By reviewing the authors' and source results, the author is able to deduce that the field has evolved through collaborative groups publishing in psychology, leadership and project-management publications. The inter-disciplinary spread is fruitful as it introduces well-known mechanisms from the field of organization behaviour into project research. Also, it can lead to concurrent discussions, as psychology papers can highlight individual states, and project journals can discuss delivery and governance without linking these processes with the outcomes of stakeholders and strategies. The country results show a strong Asian centre with China, Pakistan and Malaysia being the top three nations. This rise of Pakistan's prominence is in line with a number of project-leadership studies in the construction industry, information technology (IT) industries and project-based organizations. The United States has lower number of papers but significantly higher average citations that could be due to older basic papers, and greater global presence. Theoretically, there is a relevance to geographic

concentration. The results of these contexts may not be directly applicable in project contexts that are low in power distance or high in institutionalization, or in contexts with few resources. A more balanced geographic spread is thus needed prior to drawing universal conclusions about inclusive leadership processes in the field.

The affiliation analysis confirms a methodological issue which the reviewers have highlighted: institutional rankings are as reliable as the metadata on which they are based. Frequently, productivity measures are confused by generic labels at the school level and by different names for university schools. Recognizing this in the results, but not just in the limitations, helps prevent the appearance of certain affiliation data in the results as accurate institutional performance.

5.1.3 RQ3: Conceptual core and emerging mechanisms

The third research question was keywords and themes. Psychological empowerment has the highest level of network connectivity and inclusive leadership is the term that occurs the most as a focal term. The conceptual core is complemented by project success, transformational leadership and psychological safety. All these findings indicate a sequential explanation; team members' feelings surrounding their team leader's behaviour influence their participation, their knowledge sharing, engagement and innovative behaviour, which in turn influence project outcomes.

This sequence is in line with the empirical studies like Khan et al. (2020) and Ali et al. (2020) whereas the sequence itself is not tested by the bibliometric analysis. Transformational and humble leadership are two key examples that show that inclusive-leadership research is evolving in conversation with related theories of leadership. This presents an opportunity and a problem. Comparative work can help us to understand which behaviors are truly unique to inclusive leadership, while studies that re-code similar behaviors without discriminant measures can overestimate the extent of theoretical diversity.

The construction of leadership in the same models and incremental explanatory value should be compared in future working. Underdeveloped areas also are identified in the trend and thematic analyses. The positions of job satisfaction, affective commitment, authentic leadership, motivation, and innovative work behaviour are less central and less dense, although some of these have more recently average publication years. The themes are not just “new topics,” they are potential connections made from day-to-day inclusion to the work to be done in the project. Their development would take the literature beyond the focus on psychological safety and empowerment, without sacrificing the mechanism-based approach that provides coherence to the literature at present.

5.1.4 RQ4: Intellectual foundations and document similarity

The fourth research question explored influential documents and their similarity. Among the many referenced studies, this set includes direct studies of inclusive leadership/project success along with seminal research on psychological safety, team learning, innovation, and employee behaviour. Such a composition is due to the interdisciplinary nature of the field. Also, it warns against assuming that a citation has relevance only if it is within the same content area. While the conceptual infrastructure for a highly cited psychological-safety meta-analysis, it is not evidence of project success until it is tested in subsequent project studies. The moderate Pearson similarities agree with that. The best matches are found between studies that have a common leadership–psychological mechanism–performance structure, but even the best matches are by no means perfectly close. It can be said that the common core of the influential literature is recognizable but not conceptually uniform. This is a more defensible version of the interpretation that all high impact papers are part of one theory or research tradition.

5.2 Theoretical and practical implications

5.2.1 Theoretical implications

Three theoretic contributions are made. In the first place, it links inclusive-leadership scholarship to the multi-faceted project-success literature. This relationship focuses the attention on the processes and mechanisms whereby project teams transform diverse expertise into project delivery, learning, innovation and creation of value for stakeholders. The bibliometric structure does not imply that there are competing explanations for psychological safety and empowerment, but that they could be complementary conditions. The interpersonal risks of the contribution are reduced by safety, whereas the perceived capacity and authority to contribute is increased by empowerment.

Second, the findings place inclusive leadership among other relational leadership styles. The theme of transformational, humble, authentic, empowering and ethical leadership is evident throughout the network and highly cited set. Instead of the next adjacent leadership label, theoretical advancement in the future hinges on the specification of behaviour overlap, distinct mechanisms and boundary conditions. Comparative models should assess if inclusive leadership accounts for project outcomes in addition to general leader support, empowerment, or transformational influence.

Thirdly, the study offers a structuring framework for further project research. The literature can be dealt with at four levels that are interconnected: leader behaviours, psychological states, team climate, and team processes like voice, knowledge sharing, collaboration and innovation; and multidimensional project outcomes. This architecture does not claim to develop a causal model from the bibliometric data, but rather a coherent set of constructs that can be tested in multilevel, longitudinal and cross-cultural designs.

5.2.2 Practical implications

This research suggests including leadership practices need to be translated into observable practices for project sponsors and managers. Leaders can seek input before decisions are final, allow for rotation of input to meetings, get the input of lower status specialists for risks, engage in positive response to bad news, and make the "how and why" of decisions obvious. These practices are especially valuable when early risk identification, design reviews, lessons learned, and change control discussions are conducted during periods of silence, when it can cost you. Intermediate conditions identified in the literature should also be evaluated by project organizations.

Team surveys and retrospectives can be used to track psychological safety, empowerment, knowledge sharing, and engagement, before schedule and cost issues become an issue. That's not the same as removing technical solutions in favor of climate solutions. It involves integrating the delivery indicators with early social-process indicators which will give insights as to why problems are or are not being surfaced and resolved.

The results can be used by human-resource and project-management offices to create leadership development scenarios based on projects. Training should cover handling conflict, synthesizing culturally different skills, bringing distant people into the mix, and difference between true consultation and symbolic participation. Similarly, senior managers should not be solely responsible to the project leaders. Governance systems that foster open reporting, support good challenge and offer avenues for stakeholders to provide input are more likely to support inclusive behaviour.

5.3 Limitations and future research directions

The interpretation of the results is limited by a number of factors. Firstly, the data set is limited to the Scopus. While Scopus is comprehensive, it lacks coverage of relevant work in databases that are not Web of Science, Dimensions, Crossref or region specific. Second, the English language limitation could underrepresent scholarship from areas that study project management or inclusion at work in a language other than English. Thirdly, citation counts are time-dependent and give more weight to older documents; and the 2026 publication count only includes documents published until 2 April. Fourth, bibliometric metadata cannot tell us the entirety of the theory processing, measurements, samples, or results of all the articles. Fifth, the names of authors and institutions are not uniformly standardized, and the institutional labels are generalized. Lastly, the text similarity analysis incorporates titles, abstracts, and author keywords, not the full content of the article; Pearson correlation is also very sensitive to the distribution of the terms. The coefficients are thus considered to be exploratory. The results identify gaps that should be addressed in future research:

Engagement, safety and knowledge sharing are all new features that are becoming more prominent, which should be explored in virtual and hybrid projects, where silence, visibility and participation is different from co-located projects. Individual-level perceptions dominate the field in the form of multilevel project teams. Research should examine the link between leader behaviour and team-level climate, cross-functional coordination, and project-level outcomes, with the use of multilevel designs. Cross-cultural comparisons: China, Pakistan, and Malaysia were the geographic areas focused here; matched studies are necessary in high- and low-power-distance countries, as well as in developing and developed countries.

National culture should be used as a boundary condition, not a background controlled. There are two types of design: longitudinal and temporal. Repeated measurement can be used to help determine if inclusive behavior comes first to safety and empowerment and if they remain throughout the various phases of the project.

Multidimensional outcomes: Objective measurements should be used in future studies, encompassing schedule variance, cost variance, quality defects, stakeholder acceptance, innovation output, benefits realization, and post-project learning. Complexity and diversity of the project: Complexity, professional diversity, interdependence of the tasks, digitalization and conflict among the stakeholders should be tested as moderating variables that increase the value of inclusive leadership or increase the costs of coordination. Construct comparison: Transformational, humble, authentic, and empowering leadership can be seen as lying in the same conceptual space, so studies should seek to achieve discriminant validity and incremental explanatory power in the same samples. Future bibliometric studies should:

- (1) include a combination of Scopus and Web of Science,
- (2) generate thesaurus and cleaning files,
- (3) standardize affiliation identifiers,
- (4) apply fractional-counting sensitivity checks,
- (5) compare Pearson with cosine similarity on full-text or richer abstract data

These guidelines do not simply reiterate the concept of “more research”. Each stems from a particular shortcoming of the evidences mapped: geographic concentration, mechanism testing across sections, perceptual outcomes, construct overlap, basic themes that are sparse, and metadata limitations.

5.4 Conclusion

The links between inclusive leadership and project success are now from a modest beginning to an ever-growing interdisciplinary research base. It is not just about technical management of projects, but about human processes of using the knowledge under uncertainty. They form

the most visible conceptual core: inclusive leadership, psychological empowerment, psychological safety, transformational leadership, work engagement, and project success. Other concepts are less consolidated: job satisfaction, affective commitment, authentic leadership, and innovative work behaviour. There is also evidence of social inequality. The three countries with the highest numbers of publications are China, Pakistan, and Malaysia; international collaboration exists but is focused; and affiliation metadata influence institutional rankings. The most cited documents are a mix of project studies, as well as fundamental and surrounding studies into aspects of organization behavior, thus substantiating that the branch of study draws heavily on other theories of safety, relationships and innovation. The hallmark of the paper is the project-oriented map of inclusive-leadership scholarship in which the focus is on the psychological mechanisms, team processes, and multidimensional outcomes that should inform the next phase of theory and empirical research in the field.

References

- Ali, M., Zhang, L., Shah, S. J., Khan, S., & Shah, A. M. (2020). Impact of humble leadership on project success: The mediating role of psychological empowerment and innovative work behavior. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 41(3), 349–367. <https://doi.org/10.1108/LODJ-05-2019-0230>
- Aria, M., & Cuccurullo, C. (2017). Bibliometrix: An R-tool for comprehensive science mapping analysis. *Journal of Informetrics*, 11(4), 959–975. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joi.2017.08.007>
- Asghar, M., Gull, N., Xiong, Z., Shu, A., Faraz, N. A., & Pervaiz, K. (2023). The influence of inclusive leadership on hospitality employees' green innovative service behavior: A multilevel study. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 56, 347–358. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2023.07.007>
- Atkinson, R. (1999). Project management: Cost, time and quality, two best guesses and a phenomenon, its time to accept other success criteria. *International Journal of Project Management*, 17(6), 337–342. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0263-7863\(98\)00069-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0263-7863(98)00069-6)
- Bhatti, S. H., Santoro, G., Khan, J., & Rizzato, F. (2021). Antecedents and consequences of business model innovation in the IT industry. *Journal of Business Research*, 123, 389–400. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.10.003>
- Brueller, D., & Carmeli, A. (2011). Linking capacities of high-quality relationships to team learning and performance in service organizations. *Human Resource Management*, 50(4), 455–477. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.20435>
- Caniëls, M. C. J., Chiocchio, F., & van Loon, N. P. A. A. (2019). Collaboration in project teams: The role of mastery and performance climates. *International Journal of Project Management*, 37(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2018.09.006>
- Chen, J., Ghardallou, W., Comite, U., Ahmad, N., Ryu, H. B., Ariza-Montes, A., & Han, H. (2022). Managing hospital employees' burnout through transformational leadership: The role of resilience, role clarity, and intrinsic motivation. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(17), 10941. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph191710941>
- Donthu, N., Kumar, S., Mukherjee, D., Pandey, N., & Lim, W. M. (2021). How to conduct a bibliometric analysis: An overview and guidelines. *Journal of Business Research*, 133, 285–296. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.04.070>
- Edmondson, A. C., & Lei, Z. (2014). Psychological safety: The history, renaissance, and future of an interpersonal construct. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and*

- Organizational Behavior, 1, 23–43. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-031413-091305>
- Frazier, M. L., Fainshmidt, S., Klinger, R. L., Pezeshkan, A., & Vracheva, V. (2017). Psychological safety: A meta-analytic review and extension. *Personnel Psychology*, 70(1), 113–165. <https://doi.org/10.1111/peps.12183>
- Khan, J., Jaafar, M., Javed, B., Mubarak, N., & Saudagar, T. (2020). Does inclusive leadership affect project success? The mediating role of perceived psychological empowerment and psychological safety. *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business*, 13(5), 1077–1096. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJMPB-10-2019-0267>
- Korkmaz, A. V., van Engen, M. L., Knappert, L., & Schalk, R. (2022). About and beyond leading uniqueness and belongingness: A systematic review of inclusive leadership research. *Human Resource Management Review*, 32(4), 100894. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2022.100894>
- Mongeon, P., & Paul-Hus, A. (2016). The journal coverage of Web of Science and Scopus: A comparative analysis. *Scientometrics*, 106(1), 213–228. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-015-1765-5>
- Mubarak, N., Khan, J., Yasmin, R., & Osmadi, A. (2021). The impact of a proactive personality on innovative work behavior: The role of work engagement and transformational leadership. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 42(7), 989–1003. <https://doi.org/10.1108/LODJ-11-2020-0518>
- Nembhard, I. M., & Edmondson, A. C. (2006). Making it safe: The effects of leader inclusiveness and professional status on psychological safety and improvement efforts in health care teams. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 27(7), 941–966. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.413>
- Page, M. J., McKenzie, J. E., Bossuyt, P. M., Boutron, I., Hoffmann, T. C., Mulrow, C. D., et al. (2021). The PRISMA 2020 statement: An updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. *BMJ*, 372, n71. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n71>
- Randel, A. E., Galvin, B. M., Shore, L. M., Ehrhart, K. H., Chung, B. G., Dean, M. A., & Kedharnath, U. (2018). Inclusive leadership: Realizing positive outcomes through belongingness and being valued for uniqueness. *Human Resource Management Review*, 28(2), 190–203. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2017.07.002>
- Shafi, M. Q., Qayyum, A., Naz, S., Rabbani, S., & Kamal, N. (2023). Impact of inclusive leadership on project success through climate for innovation: The moderating role of knowledge sharing. *International Journal of Knowledge and Learning*, 16(2), 171–190. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJKL.2023.129909>
- Shenhav, A. J., Dvir, D., Levy, O., & Maltz, A. C. (2001). Project success: A multidimensional strategic concept. *Long Range Planning*, 34(6), 699–725. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0024-6301\(01\)00097-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0024-6301(01)00097-8)
- Shore, L. M., & Chung, B. G. (2022). Inclusive leadership: How leaders sustain or discourage work group inclusion. *Group & Organization Management*, 47(4), 723–754. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1059601121999580>
- Siyal, S. (2023). Inclusive leadership and work engagement: Exploring the role of psychological safety and trust in leader in multiple organizational contexts. *Business Ethics, the Environment & Responsibility*, 32(4), 1170–1184. <https://doi.org/10.1111/beer.12556>

- van Eck, N. J., & Waltman, L. (2010). Software survey: VOSviewer, a computer program for bibliometric mapping. *Scientometrics*, 84(2), 523–538. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-009-0146-3>
- Zupic, I., & Čater, T. (2015). Bibliometric methods in management and organization. *Organizational Research Methods*, 18(3), 429–472. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428114562629>