
Inclusive Leadership and Employee Voice in Multinational Teams: A Multilevel Analysis of Cultural and Psychological Safety

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Abstract

Research is growing and gaining momentum on the concept of inclusive leadership and psychological safety, as they become more pertinent to understanding employee voice in culturally diverse and multinational workplaces. This research investigated the impact of inclusive workplace support on employee willingness to communicate sensitive concerns, and the possible mediation between this and psychological safety. A quantitative, cross-sectional design was used, while employee voice was measured by the extent to which employees express themselves about concerns in the workplace to their supervisor and coworkers. Indicators of inclusive workplace support included organizational communication, confidentiality, provision of resources, treatment of employees, and perceived non-punitive responses. correlation analysis, ordinal logistic regression, multilevel analysis and mediation analysis were used. In the model, inclusive support indirectly affected employee voice by influencing psychological safety, meaning that the effects of inclusive support on employee voice are partially mediated by psychological safety, and that supportive work conditions foster communication partly through the lens of perceived risks in the workplace. Staff felt more at ease discussing concerns with supervisors than with other staff, and employees in remote working positions felt that they had better access to voice upwards. There was some variation in employees' voice across countries, but country-level differences accounted for a relatively small amount of the total variance.

Keywords: *Inclusive leadership, employee voice, psychological safety, multinational workplaces, organizational support*

1. Introduction

Today's organizations increasingly rely on those who will express concerns, offer ideas, question ineffective practices, and are active participants in organizational learning. This discretionary communication, often referred to as employee voice, is particularly relevant for multinational teams where the members may have varying cultural values, expectations of authority, professional backgrounds and languages. When employees feel safe enough to speak up, their voice can enhance problem identification, innovation, coordination, and the organization's response; however, employees are not always safe to voice their opinions. They are affected by what supervisors, coworkers and others in the organization expect them to say or not say (Abdulgalimov et al., 2020; Morrison, 2023).

Inclusive leadership has become an important leadership style to develop when it comes to building inclusive working environments that are respectful, valued, and inclusive of employees. An inclusive leader is open, accessible, available and appreciates the differences of employees. Such leaders try to reconcile the requirements for belongingness with the need to keep employees' individuality in the group (Korkmaz et al., 2022; Shore & Chung, 2022). Additionally, recent scale-development and meta-analytic review evidence suggest that inclusive leadership is linked to positive employee attitudes and behaviors, with some conditions being contextual and some psychological. (Li et al., 2025; Merlini et al., 2025) These behaviors may be especially relevant when working in cross-national teams, as it is possible that these teams include employees from various cultural backgrounds who may have different understandings of what participation means, what hierarchy means, what disagreements mean, and what it means to be accessible to the leader.

However, employee voice doesn't just happen when individual employees have the confidence to speak up; it emerges in a social atmosphere that conveys the message to employees of whether or not it's the right time and place to speak up. Leaders contribute to this climate through their willingness to accept suggestions with a positive attitude, their facilitation of participation and their minimizing of uncertainty about the impact of disclosure. Farmers' norms and expectations about when and how to speak reinforce or inhibit personal expression (Brykman & Maerz, 2023). Inclusive leadership could thus enable employee voice to be expressed through the assurance that employee views will be considered in a fair and respectful way. Empirical studies have revealed positive links between inclusive leadership and employee voice, and organizational justice, leader identification, and social resources are identified as important explanatory or boundary conditions (Qi et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2025).

A key explanation for why inclusive leadership could be a facilitator of employee voice is psychological safety. It is the attitude that interpersonal risk-taking is acceptable and that it is not subject to humiliation, rejection, punishment or harm to one's career. The psychological safety for employees allows them to ask questions, admit to errors, report problems, and suggest other opinions. Psychological safety is a well-known organizational phenomenon related to learning, performance, innovation and communication (Edmondson & Bransby, 2023). Supportive organizational climates more generally set the stage for experimentation, knowledge sharing and positive engagement (Newman et al., 2020).

Inclusive leadership and employee voice are thus likely to work in part through psychological safety. Support, confidentiality, recognition of employee concerns, and no punishment for your employees' expression of sensitive workplace issues may make it seem to your employees that they are less at risk when communicating sensitive workplace issues. Practising psychological safety has been confirmed to have an intervening effect between inclusive leadership and voice behaviours such as error reporting in healthcare environments (Lee & Dahinten, 2021). Likewise, the multilevel studies show that inclusive leadership can foster innovative performance by increasing psychological safety at the organizational levels (Li & Tang, 2022).

These relationships can be further modified by cultural context. In higher power-culture societies, workers might be less inclined to question authority or speak up about issues to their bosses, despite leaders' positive actions. However, inclusive leadership can be more important in these contexts as leader openness can indicate an explicit invitation to participate (Guo et al., 2022). Multinational teams thus need analysis that considers the perception of each workplace as well as the conditions in each country. Recent research has made strides in understanding inclusive leadership and employee outcomes, but there is still a need for deeper research to better understand how psychological safety is related with employee voice in various national and organizational settings (Li et al., 2025; Yang et al., 2025).

The study brings together the concepts of leadership, psychological safety, voice, and cultural context to provide a more holistic understanding of how to establish environments where employees feel safe and supported to voice concerns, ideas, and workplace experiences.

Objectives

1. To explore the interconnection between inclusive leadership and employee voice in a multinational work context.
2. To evaluate the contribution of psychological safety to employee openness about workplace issues.
3. To assess the difference in employee voice in different national and cultural environments.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The study used a quantitative, explanation and cross-sectional research design to explore the relationships between inclusive leadership, psychological safety, culture, and employee voice in international technology contexts. Secondary data was collected from Kegggle.

2.2 Data Source and Sample

The OSMI Mental Health in Tech Survey 2016 includes 1433 respondents and 63 variables, which span from employer support to mental-health benefits, through to work communication, confidentiality, disclosure consequences and country of employment, to employment conditions (Open Sourcing Mental Illness, 2016). Consistent with the general lack of applicability of employer- and supervisor-related questions to the self-employed, the primary analytical sample consisted of respondents employed by an organization.

2.3 Unit and Levels of Analysis

Country of employment was the higher-level contextual unit of analysis, and the individual respondent was the unit of analysis used. The structure for the proposed study was thus to have employees at level 1 and countries at level 2. The analysis is a cross-national design, not a multilevel design with employees nested in identifiable multinational teams because the dataset does not contain any team, supervisor, department and organization identifiers.

2.4 Measurement of Inclusive Leadership

Inclusive leadership was realized via proxy indicators of supportive, open and non-punitive leadership. The variables that were relevant were: the presence of a formal discussion surrounding mental health by the employer, the employer providing information or resources regarding mental health, anonymity of the employee when discussing mental health, and the employer treating mental health as an equal issue to physical health, as well as the encouragement of communication between the employee and their direct supervisors.

2.5 Measurement of Employee Voice and Psychological Safety

The definition of employee voice was expressed as the employees' willingness to talk about sensitive issues in the workplace. Willingness to communicate with coworkers serves as a secondary indicator of upward voice, and comfort in discussing a mental-health issue by a direct supervisor was used as the primary indicator. Answer choices "Yes," "Maybe," and "No" were defined as ordinal variables.

2.6 Cultural Context and Control Variables

The broader cultural and institutional context was represented by country of employment. Where there were very few respondents in a country, this was either omitted from the descriptive analysis or amalgamated into a larger group of countries in the same region or was not included in the multilevel modelling, where it was not possible to make a stable estimate. Control variables were age, gender, company size, employment position, status in a technology company, remote working status, having access to mental health benefits, and having previous experience in a workplace or mental health.

2.7 Data Preparation and Measurement Assessment

The data were checked for duplications, missing data, improbable ages, inconsistent gender coding, and non-standard country codes. Names of countries were standardized, incorrect age answers were recorded as missing, and "Not applicable" answers were coded as structurally missing. Selected proxy measures were analyzed by item distribution, inter item correlation,

exploratory factor analysis and Cronbach's alpha. Before calculating composite indices, items with low factor loadings, high levels of missingness, and low conceptual relevance were excluded.

2.8 Statistical Analysis

The respondents' characteristics and the distribution of the main variables were summarized using descriptive statistics. Categorical variables were presented as frequencies and percentages, continuous or composite measures of variables were presented as means and standard deviations. To explore initial relationships, correlation analysis, chi-square tests and group comparisons were employed. Before regression modelling, the degree of multicollinearity was determined using the tolerance values and variance inflation factors.

3. Results

3.1 Sample Characteristics

After excluding 287 self-employed a total of 1146 employees were drawn into the analytical sample in technology-related and other organizational contexts. Table 1 shows that most of the respondents were male (73.6%). Twenty-three-point five percent of the female respondents were classified under the category of females while the other 2.9% were classified under other gender categories. The mean age of the respondents was 33.39 years with standard deviation of 7.69 years.

Table 1. Demographic and employment characteristics of respondents

Characteristic	Category or statistic	n	Percentage
Total analytical sample	Employed respondents	1,146	100.0
Gender	Male	844	73.6
	Female	269	23.5
	Other gender categories	33	2.9
Employer type	Primarily a technology company	883	77.1
	Non-technology company	263	22.9
Remote work	Always	217	18.9
	Sometimes	611	53.3
	Never	318	27.7
Company size	1–5 employees	60	5.2
	6–25 employees	210	18.3
	26–100 employees	292	25.5
	100–500 employees	248	21.6
	500–1,000 employees	80	7.0
	More than 1,000 employees	256	22.3
Age	Mean ± SD	33.39 ± 7.69	—

3.2 Inclusive Workplace-Support Conditions

There was also a wide variation across the surveyed workplaces in terms of organizational indicators that are used as proxies for inclusive leadership. Table 2 demonstrates 20.1% (n = 230) of the analytical sample stated that their employer had formally talked about mental health. By contrast, 70.9% said they had not had a formal discussion of it. Likewise, 25.7% reported their employers' support of resources to learn about mental health issues and/or help-seeking. Some uncertainty became apparent about organizational practices in particular concerning confidentiality.

Table 2. Workplace-support and inclusion indicators

Indicator	Positive response n (%)	Uncertain response n (%)	Negative response n (%)
Employer formally discussed mental health	230 (20.1)	103 (9.0)	813 (70.9)
Employer-provided mental-health resources	295 (25.7)	320 (27.9)	531 (46.3)
Anonymity was protected	320 (27.9)	742 (64.7)	84 (7.3)
Mental health is taken as seriously as physical health	350 (30.5)	493 (43.0)	303 (26.4)
No negative consequences expected from the employer discussion	438 (38.2)	487 (42.5)	221 (19.3)

3.3 Employee Voice and Willingness to Speak Up

Respondents were asked if they spoke with a mental health concern with their direct supervisor and co-workers, which served as measures of employee voice. As indicated in Table 3, 428 respondents (37.3% of the sample) reported that they would feel comfortable talking to their immediate supervisor about such a concern. Another 33.3% said “Maybe,” and 29.3% said they would not be comfortable. Willingness to interact with peers was less than willingness to interact with supervisors. Few respondents (24.0%) said they felt comfortable talking to coworkers about a mental-health concern, 41.8% were unsure, and 34.2% were not comfortable talking with coworkers about a mental-health concern. The percentage of people who said “yes” was greater for communication with supervisors than with coworkers, as shown in Figure 1. But with so many responses of “Maybe”, it's clear that the voice at work was not consistently present or solid for many of those working.

Table 3. Distribution of supervisor- and coworker-directed employee voice

Response	Direct supervisor n (%)	Coworkers n (%)
No	336 (29.3)	392 (34.2)
Maybe	382 (33.3)	479 (41.8)
Yes	428 (37.3)	275 (24.0)
Total	1,146 (100.0)	1,146 (100.0)

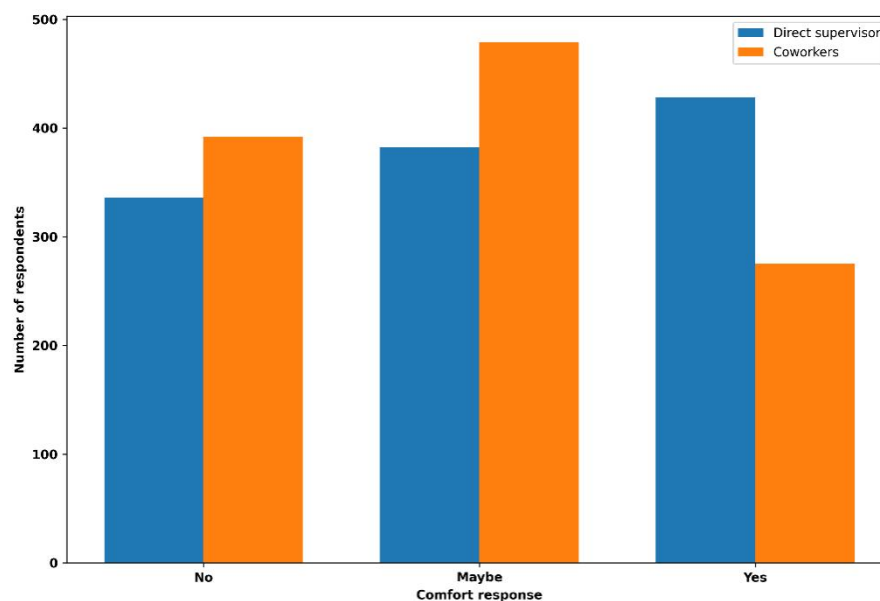


Figure 1. Distribution of employee willingness to discuss mental-health concerns with supervisors and coworkers

3.4 Descriptive Statistics, Reliability and Correlations

The mean of the inclusive workplace-support index was 0.546 with a standard deviation of 0.211, while the mean of the psychological-safety index was 0.532, and the standard deviation was 0.198. For each proxy index, the internal consistency estimates were moderate, as can be seen in Table 4. The Cronbach alpha for the items measuring inclusive workplace support was 0.628, and for the items measuring psychological safety was 0.613. These values fell short of the traditional 0.70 level but were deemed acceptable for exploratory use in secondary data analysis of the conceptually related proxy indicators. The mean rating for the three-category

scale (0–2) was 1.080 for supervisor-directed employee voice. The mean for the Coworker-directed voice was 0.898. In the bivariate analysis, inclusive workplace support was positively associated with supervisor-directed voice (Spearman's correlation = 0.491). As seen in Figure 2, the relationship between inclusive workplace support and employee voice is also evident and Figure 3 reveals that the psychological-safety scores went up in all three types of employee voice.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics, reliability and correlations

Variable	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α	1	2	3	4
1. Inclusive workplace support	0.546	0.211	0.628	1.000	0.495	0.491	0.382
2. Psychological safety	0.532	0.198	0.613	0.495	1.000	0.455	0.405
3. Supervisor-directed voice	1.080	0.813	0.605	0.491	0.455	1.000	0.627
4. Coworker-directed voice	0.898	0.756	-	0.382	0.405	0.627	1.000

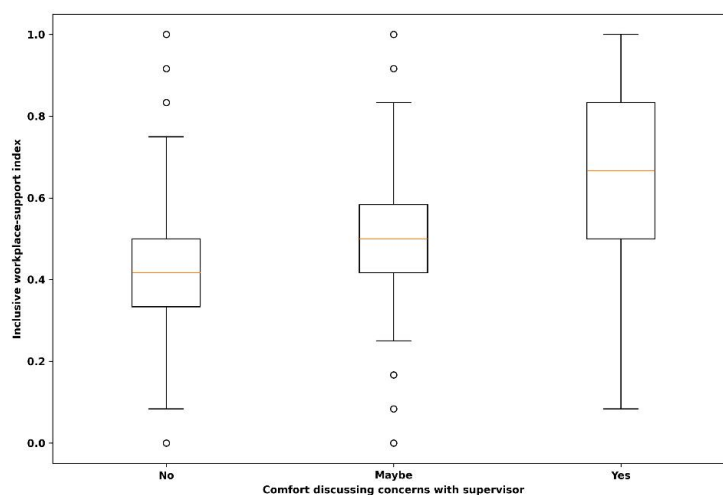


Figure 2. Inclusive workplace-support scores across supervisor-directed voice categories

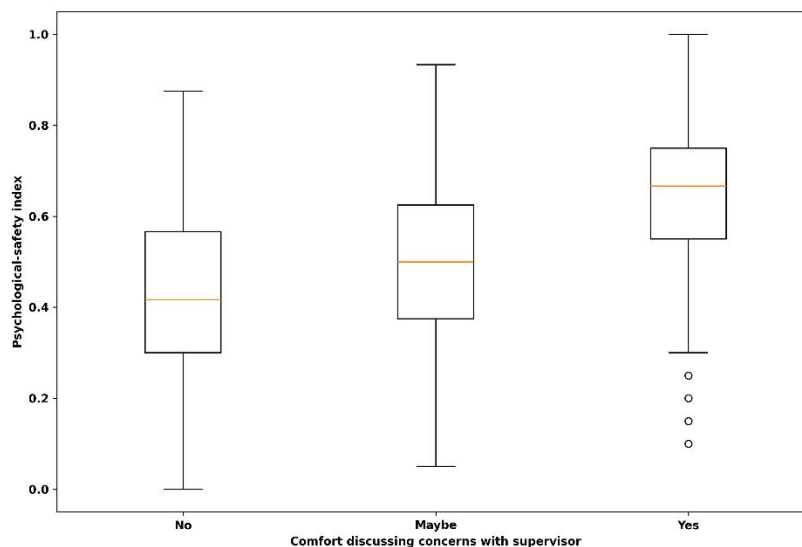


Figure 3. Psychological-safety scores across supervisor-directed voice categories

3.5 Cross-National Differences in Employee Voice

The number of countries represented by respondents was 44, with unequal samples per country. The cross-national analysis was thus limited to countries with 5 or more respondents who were employed. The United States had the highest number of respondents, with the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands and Australia shown in Table 5. In countries with larger surveys, the proportion of those who felt comfortable talking with supervisors was:

38.0% in the United States, 39.8% in the United Kingdom, 31.1% in Canada, and 15.9% in Germany. A relatively high incidence rate was observed in the Netherlands (51.6%) and Australia (42.3%). Denmark was found with the highest percentage at 80.0%, but with only five respondents, this figure needs to be interpreted with caution. Variability in speaking up willingness across countries was apparent, as shown in Figure 4.

Table 5. Supervisor-directed employee voice across selected countries

Country of employment	n	Comfortable n	Comfortable (%)	Mean voice score
United States	716	272	38.0	1.09
United Kingdom	133	53	39.8	1.17
Canada	61	19	31.1	1.00
Germany	44	7	15.9	0.84
Netherlands	31	16	51.6	1.29
Australia	26	11	42.3	1.27
Sweden	15	6	40.0	1.20
France	11	3	27.3	0.73
Ireland	10	5	50.0	1.10
Brazil	9	3	33.3	0.67
Russia	9	1	11.1	0.67
India	7	3	42.9	0.86

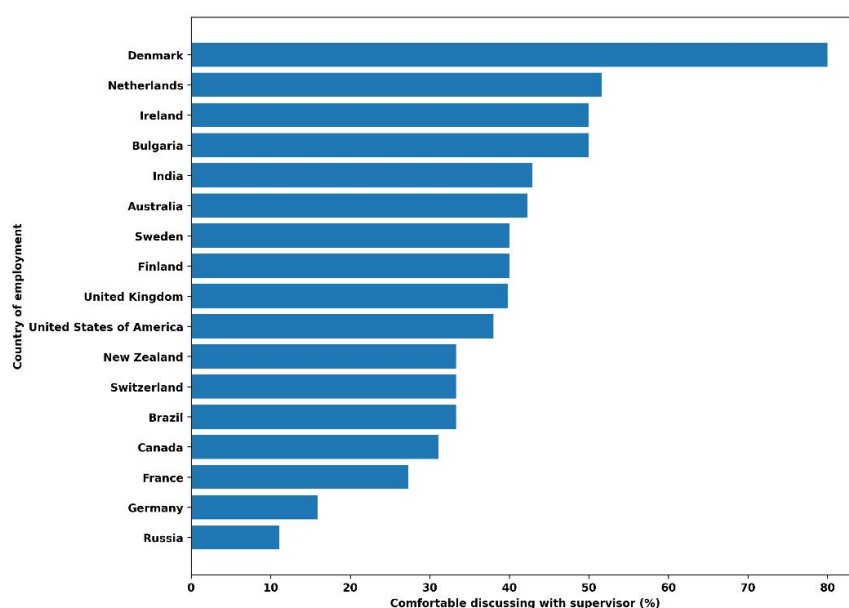


Figure 4. Percentage of employees comfortable discussing concerns with supervisors across countries

3.6 Multivariable Prediction of Employee Voice

Supervisor-directed employee voice was the dependent variable for the estimation of an ordinal logistic regression model. Outcome categories were higher the more willing to talk with a direct supervisor. Inclusive workplace support, psychological safety, age, company size, technology-employer and gender, and remote-working arrangement were included in the model. Inclusive workplace support was also a strong predictor of employee voice and statistically significant as illustrated in Table 6. The age effect was small with a positive direction, meaning that for every 10 additional years of age, the odds (log odds) of high supervisor-directed voice rose by 1.22. Company size had a negative relationship with employee voice. The mean score pattern shown in Figure 5 is consistent with the multivariable findings.

Table 6. Ordinal logistic regression predicting supervisor-directed employee voice

Predictor	B	SE	Odds ratio	p-value
Inclusive workplace support	4.104	0.368	60.608	<.001
Psychological safety	3.185	0.367	24.171	<.001
Age, per 10 years	0.195	0.082	1.216	.017
Company size	−0.176	0.042	0.839	<.001
Technology employer	−0.142	0.152	0.868	.351
Female	0.184	0.144	1.202	.201
Other gender category	0.327	0.381	1.387	.390
Always works remotely	0.460	0.184	1.585	.012
Sometimes works remotely	0.346	0.141	1.414	.014

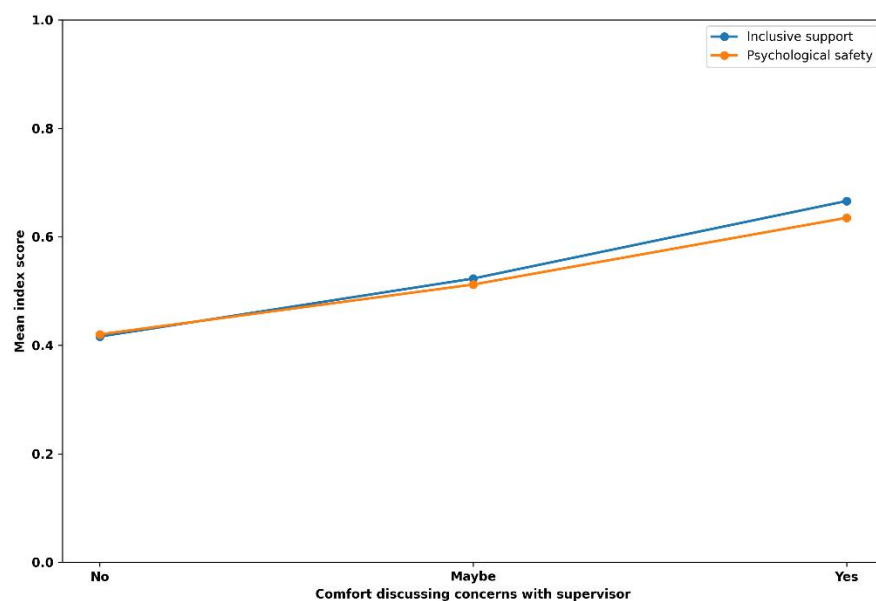


Figure 5. Mean inclusive-support and psychological-safety scores by supervisor-directed voice category

3.7 Mediating Role of Psychological Safety

The mediation analysis tested whether the statistical explanation of the relationship was partial, testing the hypothesis that psychological safety mediated some of the relationship between inclusive workplace support and supervisor-directed employee voice. There was a positive association between inclusive workplace support and psychological safety, $\beta = 0.484$ (unstandardized pathway coefficient). After the control variables were added, the coefficient of the PS to EVE was 1.117, indicating that psychological safety remained a predictor of employee voice. The indirect effect was estimated to be 0.541, as summarized in Table 7.

Table 7. Mediation analysis of inclusive workplace support, psychological safety and employee voice

Path or effect	Coefficient (b)	95% confidence interval	Interpretation
Inclusive support → psychological safety (Path a)	0.484	Not reported	Inclusive workplace support was positively and significantly associated with psychological safety.
Psychological safety → employee voice (Path b)	1.117	Not reported	Higher psychological safety was positively and significantly associated with employee voice.
Direct effect of inclusive support on employee voice (Path c')	1.349	Not reported	Inclusive workplace support retained a positive and significant direct association with employee voice after psychological safety was included.
Total effect of inclusive support on employee voice (c)	1.890	Not reported	Inclusive workplace support had an overall positive association with employee voice before separating the direct and indirect effects.

3.8 Summary of Results

The findings indicated that inclusive workplace support and psychological safety were positively related to employees' willingness to talk freely with supervisors. Individuals who found organizational communication, confidentiality, mental-health support, and non-punitive workplace practices to be more positive had more voice directed by their supervisor. The relationship between supportive leadership and employee voice was partially mediated by psychological safety, which suggests that when leadership is supportive, it promotes employee voice, in part, by lowering interpersonal and career-related risks.

4. Discussion

The results show that inclusive workplace support and psychological safety are significant factors when it comes to employees' willingness to discuss sensitive issues with their supervisors. Supervisor-directed voice was higher among employees who felt they had more organizational communication, confidentiality, resources, and non-punitive treatment. The pattern reflects the belief of inclusive leadership, forming the conditions for employees to be recognized, respected, and motivated to participate, not to remain silent. Past studies also indicate that openness and responsiveness of leaders boost employee voice, as it conveys that the employees' issues are being considered fairly (Fatoki, 2024; Yang et al., 2025). This finding is also consistent with previous studies that have shown a positive link between leader identification and employees' openness to reporting positive recommendations and worries (Guo et al., 2022; Qi et al., 2023).

Employee voice was also found to be an independent, positive, and significant relationship to psychological safety. Fewer fears of mental health issues causing damage to their careers, fewer fears of negative reactions from co-workers, and fewer fears of organizational retaliation had a positive effect on employees being willing to discuss mental health issues with direct supervisors. But when risks are perceived as low due to psychological safety, employees are more likely to raise concerns (Edmondson & Bransby, 2023; O'Donovan et al., 2021). This pattern of voice behaviour and error reporting is also supported by healthcare evidence that psychologically safe environments facilitate voice behaviour and error reporting because it helps to alleviate fear of negative response from authority figures (Lee & Dahinten,

2021).

The mediation outcomes offer additional understanding of the mediation between inclusive workplace support and employee voice. Psychological safety was a key factor accounting for this relationship, but inclusive support had a direct relationship with voice. The partial mediation proposed suggests that interpersonal risk is not the only factor that leads to communication during inclusive practices, though it is not the sole factor, but also other factors such as trust, commitment, empowerment, and perceived organizational care, play a role in the communication process (Li & Tang, 2022; Zeng et al., 2020). There is also some evidence that inclusive leadership can foster employee engagement and thrive through psychological processes that are supportive (Siyal, 2023; Rabiul et al., 2023).

Staff were more likely to talk to managers about sensitive issues than to co-workers. This finding indicates that voice has been influenced by the intended recipient and expectations towards their reception. Supervisors might feel more empowered to offer accommodations, resources or formal assistance, while disclosing to peers can lead to informal judgment or relationship changes. "Voice climate" and consensus on "appropriate speaking" can, thus, influence communication in different ways in hierarchical and peer relations (Brykman & Maerz, 2023; Morrison, 2023). The high percentage of "Maybe" responses also reflect some uncertainty about voice, which also reinforces the need for communication systems that afford clear, accessible and safe opportunities for voice (Abdulgaliimov et al., 2020; Constantinides et al., 2021).

There was also a great deal of uncertainty regarding the organizational-support indicators. Formal communication, learning materials, and equal treatment of mental and physical health were reported by a minority of respondents, and many did not know if the confidentiality of the information was maintained. Belongingness and respect for individual uniqueness are essential conditions of inclusive leadership along with the presence of leader behaviours and institutional arrangements (Korkmaz et al., 2022; Shore & Chung, 2022). Recent measurement studies and meta-analytical research also indicate the need to consider inclusive leadership as a multi-faceted phenomenon: its impact relies on how inclusive leadership is experienced by employees and on contextual factors (Li et al., 2025., Merlini et al., 2025).

The descriptive variation in employee voice was found across countries, but the country-level effect accounted for only a small portion of the total variation. This suggests that it was not only the national context that was important but also immediate experiences in the workplace. There can be significant differences between employees from within any country regarding the extent to which they accept upward communication despite the cultural values of power distance, but these variables do not seem to account for differences in employees' perception of leader accessibility (Guo et al., 2022). Logically, the individual psychological and social resources can be more powerful indicators of voice than wider contextual classifications where supportive leadership is present, as shown cross-level (Yang et al., 2025).

There was an overall increase in flexibility in communication with supervisors among remote workers compared to those who never work remotely. Digital communication could offer more workforce autonomy in means of disclosure, form, and privacy, but remote working could also be a source of relational distance (Mohase et al., 2025). In a broader sense, the same style of leadership that fosters commitment, citizenship behaviour, service quality, and innovation can have a positive outcome beyond employee voice (Joshy & Varghese, 2024; Rabiul et al., 2022).

5. Conclusion

The finding of this study is that inclusive workplace support and workplace psychological safety are at the core of employees' willingness to communicate sensitive concerns in a multinational work context. Probably the most significant finding here was that employees were more likely to communicate with supervisors when they felt their organization had more in place to support them, they felt their communications were better understood, they felt there was more confidentiality, they felt they had access to the relevant resources, and they felt there was less risk of negative consequences. It revealed another factor that was important to explain why employees felt free to speak up: psychological safety, which was defined as supportive workplace conditions that fostered employees' voice partly through minimizing concerns about judgment, retaliation, and career harm. But the direct link between inclusive support and voice continues to suggest that other variables such as trust, empowerment, organizational commitment and perceived fairness could be important factors that may impact on speaking-up behaviour. There was some visibility across countries, but national location by itself

accounted for a small proportion of overall variation, suggesting that the immediate experiences in the workplace had a stronger influence than the overall location of the national culture. Workers who were working at a distance also reported greater positive voice, suggesting the benefits of flexible and private communication options.

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