

Inclusive Leadership and Career Adaptability: The Sequential Mediating Roles of Psychological Safety and Thriving at Work

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Abstract

The increasingly dynamic work environment driven by digital transformation, technological disruption, and evolving career demands has made career adaptability a critical capability for employees navigating uncertainty and change. This study examines how inclusive leadership shapes career adaptability through the sequential mediating roles of psychological safety and thriving at work. Using a quantitative explanatory design, data were collected from 200 employees across various industries in Indonesia through purposive sampling and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS. The findings show that inclusive leadership significantly enhances psychological safety, thriving at work, and career adaptability both directly and indirectly. Psychological safety and thriving at work both serve as significant mediators, with psychological safety emerging as the stronger mediating mechanism, as reflected by its larger indirect effect on career adaptability compared to thriving at work. Most importantly, this study confirms that inclusive leadership contributes to career adaptability through a sequential process in which employees first feel psychologically safe, then experience greater learning and vitality at work, and ultimately become more capable of adapting to changing career demands. Together, these mechanisms explain 62.7% of the variance in career adaptability. The findings highlight that employees' ability to adapt does not develop in isolation; rather, it is shaped by everyday workplace experiences and interactions with their leaders. When leaders are open, approachable, and supportive, employees are more likely to feel safe, continue learning, and grow in their careers. For organizations, these findings suggest that developing inclusive leadership should go hand in hand with creating a psychologically safe work environment. Future research may extend this model by examining additional variables and testing its applicability across different career stages and cultural contexts in Southeast Asia.

Keywords: Inclusive Leadership, Psychological Safety, Thriving at Work, Career Adaptability, SmartPLS, PLS-SEM.

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1. Introduction

Indonesia is currently experiencing rapid digital transformation across industries, driven by the adoption of artificial intelligence, automation, and new forms of work. However, adapting to these changes involves more than acquiring technical competencies. In the Indonesian workplace, employees often operate within relatively hierarchical organizational structures characterized by high power-distance relationships, where subordinates may hesitate to express ideas, challenge existing practices, or discuss career concerns openly. Such cultural conditions can limit employees' opportunities to learn, experiment, and develop the adaptability required to navigate increasingly dynamic career environments (Xu et al., 2023; Li & Peng, 2023; Dai & Fang, 2023). Therefore, understanding how leadership can create psychological conditions that encourage employee growth becomes particularly important in Indonesia. In this context, inclusive leadership may foster career adaptability through a sequential process in which employees first experience psychological safety, then develop greater vitality and learning at work (thriving at work), and ultimately become more capable of adapting to evolving career demands.

Conceptually, career adaptability is defined as the psychological resources that enable individuals to tackle career development tasks, navigate career transitions, and adapt to unexpected changes and challenges throughout their career journey. This concept comprises four main dimensions concern, control, curiosity, and confidence which help individuals prepare for their career future, make independent career decisions, explore available opportunities, and maintain confidence in facing various career obstacles. Various studies indicate that career adaptability contributes to

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enhanced employability, career success, job satisfaction, readiness to cope with organizational changes, and proactive career behavior. Conversely, low career adaptability can cause individuals to struggle with changes in the work environment, reduce their ability to make career decisions, and hinder long-term career development (Xu et al., 2023; Peng et al., 2021). Thus, identifying factors that can enhance career adaptability has become an increasingly important issue in organizational and human resource management research.

Given the importance of this adaptability, inclusive leadership is a leadership approach that emphasizes openness, accessibility, and the leader's availability in building working relationships with employees. Inclusive leaders not only value individual diversity but also encourage active participation, listen to ideas and feedback from subordinates, and create a fair and supportive work environment. In the context of modern organizations characterized by rapid change and career uncertainty, the role of leaders becomes increasingly important in helping employees develop the adaptive capacities needed to face various workplace challenges. Research indicates that inclusive leadership can enhance various positive outcomes, such as innovation, proactive behavior, work engagement, learning, and employee career development (Li & Tang, 2022; Qasim et al., 2022; Fang et al., 2021). By providing support, recognition, and opportunities for employees to grow, inclusive leaders can help individuals build self-confidence, expand their learning capabilities, and enhance their readiness to navigate career changes. Therefore, inclusive leadership is viewed as a key factor with the potential to enhance employees' career adaptability amid the current dynamics of the workplace.

Although inclusive leaders can guide employees to become more adaptable, this process requires a psychological bridge in the workplace, namely psychological safety (Edmondson & Bransby, 2023). Psychological safety refers to an individual's belief that they can express ideas, opinions, questions, and concerns without fear of being humiliated, punished, or facing negative consequences from their social environment. In an environment with high psychological safety, employees are more likely to boldly voice ideas, ask for help when facing difficulties, and take the interpersonal risks necessary for learning and self-development. Conversely, low psychological safety can lead individuals to be reluctant to speak up, afraid of making mistakes, and hinder the process of adapting to change. Various studies indicate that leadership behavior plays a crucial role in shaping psychological safety. Inclusive leaders tend to create an open environment, value the contributions of every team member, and provide space for employees to freely express their opinions, thereby enhancing the perception of psychological safety within the organization (Li & Tang, 2022; Li & Peng, 2022; Qasim et al., 2022). Thus, psychological safety can be viewed as a key outcome of inclusive leadership practices, which in turn has the potential to drive employees' career development and adaptation.

In addition to creating a sense of security, employees also need sustained energy to remain adaptable by a positive psychological state known as thriving at work (Abid & Contreras, 2022; Hussain et al., 2022). Thriving at work is a psychological state characterized by two main components: learning, which refers to the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, and vitality, which refers to a sense of energy and passion in work (Kleine et al., 2023; Hussain et al., 2022). Employees who are thriving are not merely surviving in the workplace but are actively growing and developing professionally through self-improvement and continuous learning (Yang et al., 2023). This ideal state is heavily influenced by employees' level of psychological safety; a work environment that ensures safety to speak up, share ideas, exchange knowledge, and experiment provides employees with the freedom to learn from mistakes without psychological pressure. This sense of safety encourages employees to become more actively engaged in the learning process, competency development, and innovative work behaviors, which in turn boosts their vitality and work enthusiasm (Xu & Suntrayuth, 2022; Zadow et al., 2023). Thus, psychological safety serves as a crucial foundation that supports employees' positive energy and learning capacity to achieve a state of thriving at work (Yang et al., 2023).

Although research on inclusive leadership, psychological safety, thriving at work, and career adaptability has seen significant advancements in recent years, several important gaps remain. Studies have shown that inclusive leadership enhances positive employee outcomes through inclusive and supportive work environments (Li & Tang, 2022; Li & Peng, 2022), and that psychological safety fosters learning, creativity, and knowledge-sharing behavior (Edmondson & Bransby, 2023; Qasim et al., 2022). Thriving at work has similarly been linked to improved performance, continuous learning, and resilience (Hussain et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2023), while career adaptability has been identified as a critical resource for navigating career uncertainty (Xu et al., 2023; Song et al., 2023). However, these variables have largely been examined in isolation or through single mediation pathways. Fang et al. (2021) examined thriving at work as a mediator between inclusive leadership and career sustainability but did not account for the role of psychological safety as a preceding condition that enables thriving to develop. While some studies have examined psychological safety and thriving at work as separate mediators, no study to date has tested their sequential operation as a chained psychological mechanism specifically linking inclusive leadership to career adaptability in the Indonesian workplace context. This study addresses that gap by proposing and testing a serial mediation model in which psychological safety and thriving at work sequentially mediate the relationship between inclusive leadership and career adaptability.

Based on this research gap, this study aims to analyze the effect of inclusive leadership on career adaptability, considering the roles of psychological safety and thriving at work as mediating variables. Specifically, this study aims to test whether inclusive leadership behaviors can enhance employees' psychological safety, which in turn fosters conditions for thriving at work and ultimately improves individuals' career adaptability. In addition to examining direct effects between variables, this study also aims to test indirect effects through both single mediation and serial mediation involving psychological safety and thriving at work. Thus, this study is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of literature on inclusive leadership, positive organizational behavior, and career development, while also providing practical implications for organizations in creating a work environment that supports employee learning, growth, and career sustainability amid an increasingly dynamic world of work.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Framework: Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory

According to Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, people naturally strive to acquire, maintain, and develop resources that are valuable to them so they can cope with life's challenges and achieve their goals (Hobfoll et al., 2018). These resources may include personal, psychological, and social factors, as well as environmental conditions that help employees adapt to changes and pressures in the workplace. In this study, inclusive leadership serves as a resource from the work environment, psychological safety as an internal resource, and thriving at work as an indicator that employees have accumulated sufficient resources. Based on the COR theory, when all these resources support one another, a positive cycle (resource gain spiral) is created, which ultimately enhances employees' career adaptability in facing various future workplace challenges (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Hobfoll et al., 2018).

2.2. Career Adaptability

Career adaptability is an individual's psychosocial ability to cope with various tasks, transitions, and challenges that arise throughout their career journey. This concept describes how prepared employees are to adapt to changes in the work environment, technological advancements, and the ever-increasing uncertainty of careers. According to Li et al. (2024), career adaptability greatly helps employees manage career transitions more effectively, as this ability makes them better prepared to plan, make independent decisions, actively seek new opportunities, and remain resilient when facing obstacles in the workplace.

This career adaptability is built upon four key dimensions: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. Concern relates to the extent to which employees are prepared to plan their future careers; control reflects employees' ability to take charge of their own career decisions; curiosity indicates the level of interest in exploring various new opportunities; while confidence describes the degree of self-assurance employees have in overcoming the work challenges they face (Fang et al., 2024). When analyzed from the perspective of Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, career adaptability functions as a long-term psychological resource that keeps employees flexible during an uncertain work environment.

2.3. Inclusive Leadership

Inclusive leadership is a leadership style that prioritizes openness, accessibility, and respect for diversity within an organization. Inclusive leaders not only provide equal rights and opportunities to all employees but also actively encourage them to participate, listen to diverse perspectives, and foster a work environment where everyone feels welcomed. Through these positive and supportive working relationships, inclusive leadership has been shown to increase employee engagement and make them more willing to openly share ideas or opinions (Qi et al., 2023).

From the perspective of Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, inclusive leadership functions as a highly valuable contextual resource for employees. A leader's supportive, attentive, and open attitude serves as the primary capital that helps employees gather various psychological resources to cope with their job demands. In line with this, research by (Chen et al., 2024) and (Dai and Fang, 2023) also demonstrates that inclusive leaders significantly assist employees in developing positive work behaviors, adaptability, and mental well-being. For these reasons, inclusive leadership is believed to play a crucial role in boosting employees' psychological safety, thriving at work, and career adaptability in the workplace.

2.4. Psychological Safety

Psychological safety is the belief among employees that they can voice their opinions, ask questions, share new ideas, and even make mistakes without fear of negative consequences—such as excessive criticism, rejection, or punishment from coworkers or supervisors. It is this environment that creates a sense of security for employees to express themselves honestly and actively participate in organizational activities. In line with this, research by (Wang & Ning, 2024) demonstrates that psychological safety plays a crucial role in fostering a culture of learning, encouraging the sharing of knowledge, and accelerating employees' professional development in the workplace.

When analyzed using Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, psychological safety functions as an internal psychological resource that strengthens employees' mental resilience in coping with workloads and environmental uncertainty. When employees feel psychologically safe, they are more likely to take initiative, innovate with new work methods, and learn from experience without worrying about damaging relationships with coworkers. In line with this view, Hao et al. (2022) found that this sense of psychological safety triggers a far more effective process of knowledge exchange and learning, which ultimately strengthens employees' ability to continue growing and adapting. Therefore, psychological safety is believed to play a crucial role in fostering a thriving work environment and enhancing employees' career adaptability.

2.5. Thriving at Work

Thriving at work is a positive psychological state that describes a situation in which employees are not only able to perform their duties well but also continue to grow and develop in their work. This concept is built on two main components: learning and vitality. Learning refers to the feeling that one is continuously acquiring new knowledge and skills, while vitality reflects a state in which employees feel energetic, enthusiastic, and motivated at work. According to Zhao et al. (2024), employees who are thriving at work tend to demonstrate significantly higher levels of self-development, work engagement, and performance compared to those who do not experience this state.

From the perspective of Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, thriving at work can be viewed as the result of the resources successfully accumulated by employees. When employees receive strong support from their work environment and feel psychologically secure, they are more motivated to learn, innovate, and develop new competencies. This process directly enhances employees' vitality and learning capacity, making them better prepared to face various changes and workplace challenges. In line with this, research by Zhao et al. (2022) and Ni et al. (2023) demonstrates that thriving at work plays a crucial role in fostering positive work behavior, promoting individual growth, and enhancing adaptability in a dynamic work environment.

2.6. Research Framework

The conceptual framework of this study was developed to clarify the relationships among the theories, concepts, and variables analyzed in the study. Based on the research background and theoretical review presented earlier, this research framework is formulated and presented as follows.

H1: Inclusive Leadership Affects Psychological Safety

Inclusive leadership is characterized by openness, support, and appreciation for employees' contributions. When leaders provide opportunities for employees to voice their opinions and participate in decision-making, employees feel more secure in expressing ideas and taking interpersonal risks. Research by Li and Tang (2022) and Qasim et al. (2022) shows that inclusive leadership can enhance psychological safety by fostering a supportive and inclusive work environment. According to COR Theory, a leader's support serves as a contextual resource that can enhance employees' psychological safety.

H2: Psychological Safety Affects Thriving at Work

Psychological safety enables employees to learn, experiment, and voice ideas without fear of negative consequences. This environment fosters learning and positive energy, which are key characteristics of thriving at work. Gerlach and Gockel (2022) explain that psychological safety supports the learning process and employee engagement in the workplace. Therefore, the higher the level of psychological safety employees perceive, the greater their level of thriving at work.

H3: Thriving at Work Affects Career Adaptability.

Thriving at work helps individuals gain positive energy and ongoing learning opportunities, thereby enhancing their ability to cope with change and career demands. Employees who thrive at work tend to be better prepared to adapt to a dynamic work environment. Topino et al. (2022) explain that psychological resources that support individual development contribute to increased career adaptability and the ability to cope with career challenges. These findings are reinforced by Chen et al. (2024), who demonstrate that career adaptability is associated with various positive work outcomes. Therefore, thriving at work is expected to have a positive effect on career adaptability.

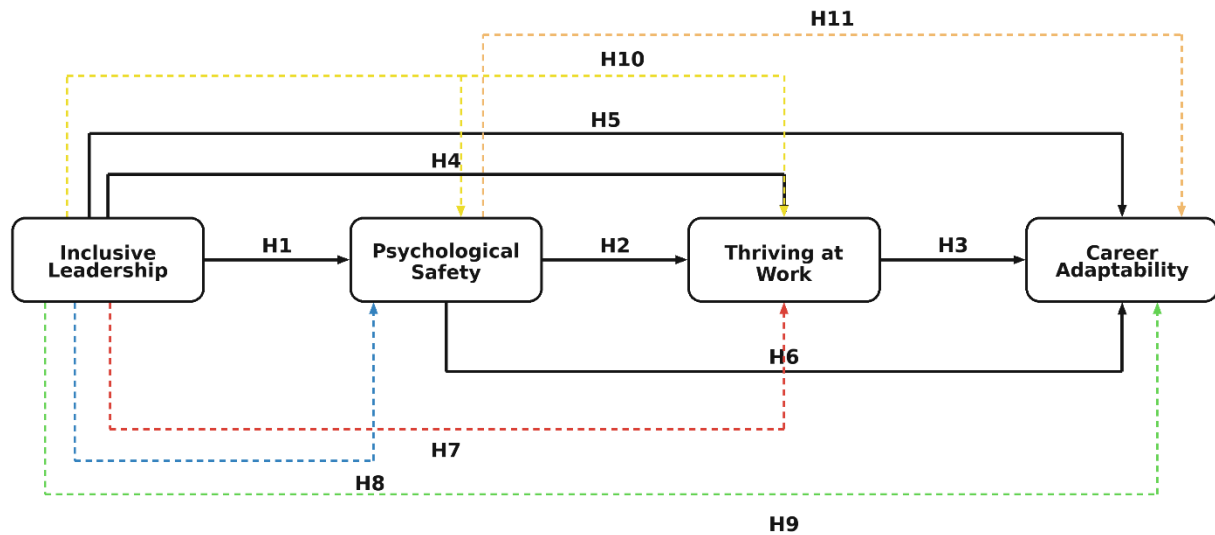


Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework

H4: Inclusive Leadership has a positive impact on Thriving at Work

Inclusive leaders can create a work environment that supports employee learning and engagement. When employees feel valued and engaged in the organization, they tend to have higher work energy and are motivated to continue growing. Suryani et al. (2023) demonstrate that leadership that supports and values employees can enhance thriving at work through increased learning and work vitality. Similar results were also found by Sugiono et al. (2023)

H5: Inclusive leadership has a positive effect on career adaptability.

Inclusive leadership provides support, opportunities, and recognition that enable employees to develop to their full potential. Through an inclusive work environment, employees gain the resources that help them navigate changes and career challenges. Qasim et al. (2022) demonstrate that inclusive leadership fosters individual development and positive work behaviors relevant to career adaptability. These findings are supported by Ma et al. (2024), who show that leadership behaviors oriented toward support and attention to employees can enhance career adaptability as a critical resource for coping with change and job demands.

H6: Psychological safety has a positive effect on career adaptability.

Psychological safety enables employees to share ideas, try new approaches, and learn from mistakes without fear of negative consequences. A psychologically safe work environment encourages individuals to be more open to change and self-development, thereby increasing their readiness to face various career challenges. Gerlach and Gockel (2022) explain that psychological safety supports individual learning and development in the workplace. Additionally, Du et al. (2022) found that psychological safety helps employees build flexibility and the ability to adapt to changes in the work environment. Therefore, psychological safety is expected to have a positive effect on career adaptability.

H7: Psychological safety mediates the effect of inclusive leadership on Thriving at Work.

Inclusive leadership creates an open and supportive work environment, thereby enhancing employees' psychological safety (Li & Tang, 2022). When employees feel safe to express their opinions, take initiative, and learn from mistakes, they tend to demonstrate higher levels of learning and work engagement (Kleine et al., 2023). Patil et al. (2023) explain that psychological safety contributes to individual learning and effectiveness in the workplace, which are foundational conditions for thriving. Therefore, psychological safety is expected to mediate the effect of inclusive leadership on thriving at work.

H8: Psychological safety mediates the effect of inclusive leadership on career adaptability.

Inclusive leadership can enhance psychological safety through support, openness, and recognition of employees' contributions (Li & Tang, 2022). Employees who feel psychologically safe are more likely to embrace change, develop new skills, and explore career opportunities, thereby enhancing their career adaptability. Du et al. (2022) found that an individual's psychological resources contribute to their career adaptability in the face of changes in the work environment. Thus, psychological safety is expected to mediate the relationship between inclusive leadership and career adaptability.

H9: Thriving at Work mediates the effect of Inclusive Leadership on Career Adaptability.

Inclusive leadership provides support, learning opportunities, and engagement that enable employees to thrive in their work. These conditions can enhance thriving at work, characterized by high levels of vitality and individual learning, which in turn help employees improve their ability to adapt to changes and career demands. Zhao et al. (2022) demonstrate that thriving at work is associated with various positive work behaviors, while Ma et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of career adaptability as an individual resource for addressing workplace challenges. Therefore, thriving at work is expected to mediate the relationship between inclusive leadership and career adaptability.

H10: Psychological safety and thriving at work sequentially mediate the effect of inclusive leadership on career adaptability.

Based on the Conservation of Resources Theory, inclusive leadership is a social resource that can enhance employees' psychological safety through support and openness in the workplace (Hobfoll et al., 2018; Li & Tang, 2022). Psychological safety then fosters thriving at work by enhancing learning and work vitality, which ultimately helps individuals develop career adaptability in the face of changes in the work environment. Therefore, psychological safety and thriving at work are expected to mediate the chain of effects of inclusive leadership on career adaptability.

H11: Thriving at Work mediates the effect of psychological safety on career adaptability.

Psychological safety enables employees to learn, experiment, and develop their skills without fear of negative consequences. This environment fosters greater thriving at work, characterized by continuous learning and high work engagement. Alwahhabi et al. (2023) demonstrate that thriving at work serves as a crucial mechanism linking workplace environmental factors to various positive work outcomes, while Topino et al. (2022) explain that individual psychological resources contribute to the development of career adaptability. Therefore, thriving at work is expected to mediate the relationship between psychological safety and career adaptability.

3. Methods

This study employs a quantitative approach with a causal-explanatory design to examine the direct and indirect effects of Inclusive Leadership on Career Adaptability, with Psychological Safety and Thriving at Work as mediating variables. The population includes all active employees working across various industries in Indonesia, selected through purposive sampling with criteria of active workers aged 18 to 42 years. Data were collected from 200 respondents via an online survey distributed through Google Forms. To ensure an adequate sample size, an a priori statistical power analysis was conducted using G*Power 3.1. Following Cohen's (1988) recommendations, a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$), significance level of 0.05, statistical power of 0.95, and a maximum of three predictors were specified, corresponding to the most complex endogenous construct in the model (Career Adaptability). The analysis indicated a minimum sample size requirement of 119 respondents. Therefore, the final sample of 200 respondents exceeded the minimum requirement and was considered sufficient to detect the proposed effects and test the structural model reliably.

Each variable was measured using internationally validated scales adapted to the Indonesian workplace context. Inclusive leadership using an adapted scale from Li and Peng (2023), psychological safety using the Psychological Safety Inventory by Plouffe et al. (2023), career adaptability using an adapted scale from AlMemari et al. (2023) and thriving at work using an adapted scale from Islam and Idris (2025). All items were rated on a 1-to-5 Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." Since all measurement scales were originally developed in English, a translation and adaptation procedure was conducted before data collection. The instruments were first translated from English into Indonesian by a bilingual researcher and subsequently back-translated into English by an independent bilingual translator to ensure semantic equivalence. Any discrepancies identified during the comparison process were discussed and resolved through consensus among the researchers. Prior to the main survey, a pilot study involving 30 employees was conducted to assess item clarity, readability, and cultural appropriateness within the Indonesian workplace context. The pilot test results indicated satisfactory reliability, with all constructs achieving

Cronbach's alpha values above the recommended threshold of 0.70. Minor wording adjustments were made based on participant feedback before the final questionnaire was distributed.

Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS, which was deemed appropriate given the complexity of the sequential mediation structure in this model. The analysis was conducted in two stages: testing the measurement model (outer model) through convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability assessments, followed by testing the structural model (inner model). Hypothesis testing was performed using the bootstrapping method to examine path coefficients, t-statistics, and p-values for both direct effects and specific indirect effects across single mediation (H7 to H9 and H11) and sequential mediation (H10) pathways. The dataset supporting this research are openly available at <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20735108>.

4. Result and Discussion

Based on gender, the majority of the 200 respondents were women, totaling 107 (53.5%), while male respondents numbered 93 (46.5%). Furthermore, in terms of generational classification, the respondent group was strongly dominated by young workers classified as Generation Z (born 1997–2012), comprising 148 respondents (74.0%), followed by Generation Y or Millennials with 48 respondents (24.0%), and Generation X with the smallest share at 4 respondents (2.0%). Given that 74% of the respondents were Generation Z employees, the findings should be interpreted with caution, as the proposed sequential mediation mechanism may be more representative of younger workers who typically value inclusivity, learning opportunities, and psychological support more strongly than older generations.

In terms of highest level of formal education, the majority of respondents held a bachelor's degree (S1), totaling 134 people (67.0%), followed by high school/vocational school/Islamic high school graduates, totaling 31 people (15.5%), 12 respondents (6.0%) holding a master's degree (S2), and 11 respondents (5.5%) holding an associate's degree (D3), while the remainder were distributed across other educational levels. Regarding job classification profiles within the workplace, the largest group was at the Staff level, comprising 79 respondents (39.5%), followed by Interns/Internships at 40 respondents (20.0%). The remainder consisted of professional workers at the Officer level (9.0%), Senior Staff (8.5%), Manager (5.5%), and other levels of the organizational hierarchy.

Furthermore, in terms of employees' work experience or tenure, the majority of respondents had relatively short tenures at their current organizations. Work experience ranging from 1 to 3 years dominated the sample with a total of 90 respondents (45.0%), followed by those with less than 1 year of tenure (0–1 year) totaling 61 respondents (30.5%), and those with tenure ranging from 3 to 6 years totaling 49 respondents (24.5%).

Finally, in terms of the geographic distribution of respondents' places of residence, participation in this study covered a broad national scope, reaching 23 provinces throughout Indonesia. The region with the largest number of respondents was Banten Province with 48 respondents (24.0%), followed by DKI Jakarta with 43 respondents (21.5%), and West Java with 31 respondents (15.5%). In addition to these clusters, the data distribution was also significantly represented by workers from outside the Greater Jakarta area, namely Central Java and West Kalimantan provinces, each contributing 12 respondents (6.0%). The remaining contributions from 18 other provinces in Indonesia were grouped under the "Others" category, totaling 54 respondents (27.0%). This confirms that the distribution of the research sample comprehensively represents the diversity of the active workforce in Indonesia.

4.1. Result

Research findings indicate that Inclusive Leadership has a positive effect on Psychological Safety with a β value of 0.666, suggesting that inclusive leaders can create a work environment where employees feel safe to express their ideas and opinions. (Lin & Tang, 2022; Xintian & Peng, 2023) state that Inclusive Leadership is a key factor in fostering psychological safety. The R^2 value of 0.444 also indicates that Inclusive Leadership explains 44.4% of the variation in Psychological Safety.

Furthermore, Psychological Safety has a positive effect on Thriving at Work with a β value of 0.430, while Thriving at Work has a positive effect on Career Adaptability with a β value of 0.367. These results indicate that psychological safety encourages employees to be more active in learning and developing, thereby enhancing their career adaptability. Inclusive Leadership was also found to have a direct effect on Thriving at Work with a β value of 0.367 and on Career Adaptability with a β value of 0.256, highlighting the importance of leaders' roles in supporting individual development in the workplace.

Furthermore, the mediation results indicate that Psychological Safety and Thriving at Work act as mediating mechanisms explaining the relationship between Inclusive Leadership and Career Adaptability. The indirect effect of Inclusive Leadership on Career Adaptability, with a β value of 0.422, is even greater than its direct effect, with a β value of 0.256, highlighting the importance of these two mediating variables. Additionally, an R^2 value of 0.627 indicates that Inclusive Leadership, Psychological Safety, and Thriving at Work account for 62.7% of the variance in Career Adaptability, demonstrating that the research model has good explanatory power.

Table 1. Path Coefficient

Hypothesis	Relationships Between Variables	Orginal Sample	T-Statistic	P-Value	Result
H1	Inclusive Leadership → Psychological Safety	0.666	15.256	0.000	Accepted
H2	Psychological Safety → Thriving at Work	0.430	6.282	0.000	Accepted
H3	Thriving at Work → Career Adaptability	0.367	5.503	0.000	Accepted
H4	Inclusive Leadership → Thriving at Work	0.367	5.764	0.000	Accepted
H5	Inclusive Leadership → Career Adaptability	0.256	3.822	0.000	Accepted
H6	Psychological Safety → Career Adaptability	0.274	4.121	0.000	Accepted
H7	IL → PS → TW	0.286	5.755	0.000	Accepted
H8	IL → PS → CA	0.182	4.029	0.000	Accepted
H9	IL → TW → CA	0.135	4.017	0.000	Accepted
H10	IL → PS → TW → CA	0.105	3.710	0.000	Accepted
H11	PS → TW → CA	0.158	3.817	0.000	Accepted

The results of the indirect effect tests indicate that all mediation pathways in this study were significant ($p < 0.001$). The strongest indirect effect was found in the pathway Inclusive Leadership → Psychological Safety → Thriving at Work ($\beta = 0.286$; $t = 5.755$), suggesting that psychological safety is a key mechanism explaining how inclusive leadership enhances thriving at work. Furthermore, the indirect effects of Inclusive Leadership on Career Adaptability via Psychological Safety ($\beta = 0.182$; $t = 4.029$) and via Thriving at Work ($\beta = 0.135$; $t = 4.017$) were also found to be significant.

The research results also indicate a serial mediation effect along the path Inclusive Leadership → Psychological Safety → Thriving at Work → Career Adaptability ($\beta = 0.105$; $t = 3.710$). This finding suggests that inclusive leadership enhances career adaptability by increasing psychological safety, which in turn fosters thriving at work. Additionally, Thriving at Work was found to mediate the relationship between Psychological Safety and Career Adaptability ($\beta = 0.158$; $t = 3.817$).

4.1.1. Evaluation of the Measurement Model (Outer Model)

4.1.1.1. Convergent Validation Test

The SmartPLS output above shows that all Outer Loading values between each indicator and its construct are above 0.70, and all Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for each variable are above 0.50, confirming that the indicators used meet the requirements for convergent validity.

4.1.1.2. Discriminant Validity Test

The SmartPLS output shows that all Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations between the 2 constructs are below 0.90 therefore, it can be concluded that the indicators and variables used in this study meet the requirements for discriminant validity.

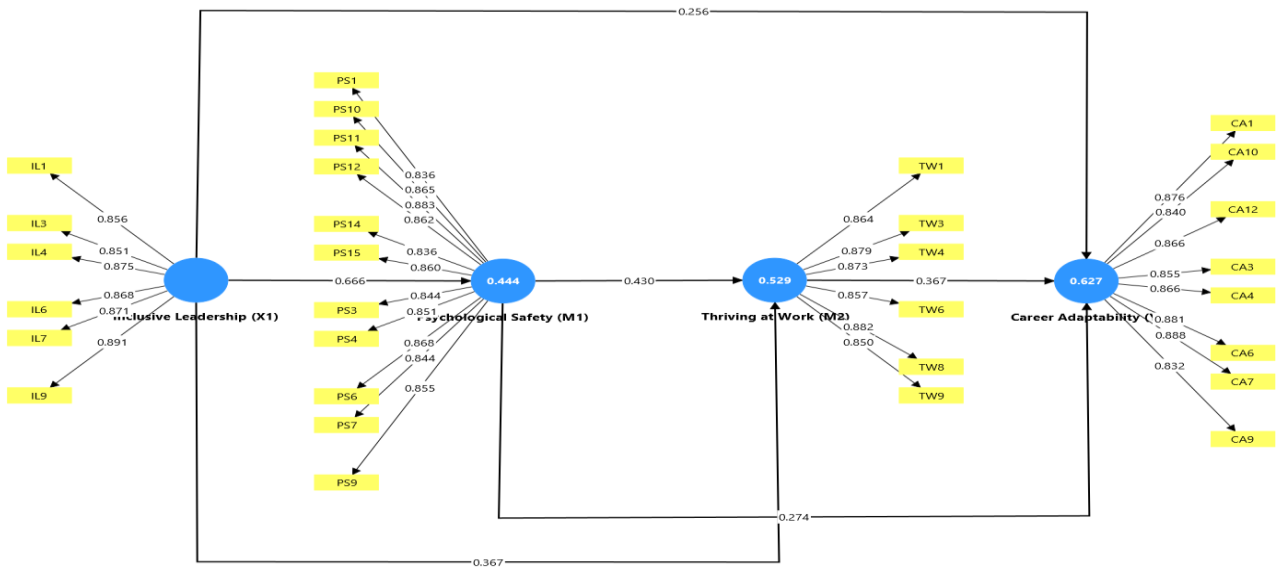


Figure 2. Outer Loadings

Table 2. Outer Loadings

Indicator	Career Adaptability (Y)	Inclusive Leadership (X1)	Psychological Safety (M1)	Thriving at Work (M2)
CA1	0.876			
CA10	0.840			
CA12	0.866			
CA3	0.855			
CA4	0.866			
CA6	0.881			
CA7	0.888			
CA9	0.832			
IL1		0.856		
IL3		0.851		
IL4		0.875		
IL6		0.868		
IL7		0.871		
IL9		0.891		
PS1			0.836	
PS10			0.865	

Indicator	Career Adaptability (Y)	Inclusive Leadership (X1)	Psychological Safety (M1)	Thriving at Work (M2)
PS11			0.883	
PS12			0.862	
PS14			0.836	
PS15			0.860	
PS3			0.844	
PS4			0.851	
PS6			0.868	
PS7			0.844	
PS9			0.855	
TW1				0.864
TW3				0.879
TW4				0.873
TW6				0.857
TW8				0.882
TW9				0.850

Table 3. Construct Reliability and Validity Construct Reliability and Validity

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Career Adaptability	0.951	0.952	0.959	0.745
Inclusive Leadership	0.935	0.936	0.949	0.755
Psychological Safety	0.963	0.964	0.968	0.731
Thriving at Work	0.934	0.935	0.948	0.753

Table 4. Discriminant Validity - HTMT

Variable relationship	Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT)	Description
Inclusive Leadership (X1) → Career Adaptability (Y)	0.716	Valid
Psychological Safety (M1) → Career Adaptability (Y)	0.722	Valid

Variable relationship	Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT)	Description
Psychological Safety (M1) → Inclusive Leadership (X1)	0.701	Valid
Thriving at Work (M2) → Career Adaptability (Y)	0.761	Valid
Thriving at Work (M2) → Inclusive Leadership (X1)	0.697	Valid
Thriving at Work (M2) → Psychological Safety (M1)	0.708	Valid

Tabel 5. Discriminant Validity - Fornell Larcker Criterion

	Career Adaptability	Inclusive Leadership	Psychological Safety	Thriving at Work
Career Adaptability	0.863			
Inclusive Leadership	0.678	0.869		
Psychological Safety	0.692	0.666	0.855	
Thriving at Work	0.719	0.653	0.674	0.868

Tabel 6. Discriminant Validity – Cross Loadings

	Career Adaptability	Inclusive Leadership	Psychological Safety	Thriving at Work
CA1	0.876	0.587	0.600	0.654
CA10	0.840	0.518	0.597	0.579
CA12	0.866	0.653	0.592	0.655
CA3	0.855	0.586	0.579	0.607
CA4	0.866	0.606	0.636	0.594
CA6	0.881	0.609	0.600	0.628
CA7	0.888	0.584	0.630	0.641
CA9	0.832	0.532	0.539	0.601
IL1	0.579	0.856	0.570	0.614
IL3	0.519	0.851	0.534	0.523
IL4	0.613	0.875	0.591	0.564
IL6	0.570	0.868	0.581	0.541
IL7	0.619	0.871	0.578	0.568

	Career Adaptability	Inclusive Leadership	Psychological Safety	Thriving at Work
IL9	0.628	0.891	0.613	0.589
PS1	0.543	0.568	0.836	0.552
PS10	0.575	0.556	0.865	0.601
PS11	0.615	0.599	0.883	0.633
PS12	0.616	0.552	0.862	0.585
PS14	0.575	0.548	0.836	0.521
PS15	0.555	0.580	0.860	0.553
PS3	0.626	0.568	0.844	0.568
PS4	0.596	0.601	0.851	0.588
PS6	0.636	0.567	0.868	0.567
PS7	0.556	0.528	0.844	0.589
PS9	0.605	0.592	0.855	0.575
TW1	0.603	0.611	0.584	0.864
TW3	0.628	0.542	0.566	0.879
TW4	0.654	0.584	0.617	0.873
TW6	0.607	0.543	0.561	0.857
TW8	0.657	0.567	0.635	0.882
TW9	0.587	0.549	0.538	0.850

Based on the results, all indicators have the highest loading values on the constructs they measure compared to their loadings on other constructs. For example, indicator CA7 has a loading of 0.888 on the Career Adaptability construct, which is higher than its loadings on Inclusive Leadership (0.584), Psychological Safety (0.630), and Thriving at Work (0.641). The same pattern is also observed for all indicators of Inclusive Leadership, Psychological Safety, and Thriving at Work, where the loading values on the original construct are consistently higher than their correlations with other constructs. Thus, it can be concluded that the research model meets the criteria for discriminant validity based on cross-loading. Consequently, all indicators are deemed valid and suitable for further analysis in the structural model.

4.1.1.3. Reliability Test

Tabel 7. Construct Reliability and Validity

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Career Adaptability	0.951	0.952	0.959	0.745
Inclusive Leadership	0.935	0.936	0.949	0.755

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Psychological Safety	0.963	0.964	0.968	0.731
Thriving at Work	0.934	0.935	0.948	0.753

The SmartPLS output above shows that all Cronbach’s Alpha and Composite Reliability values for each variable are above 0.70, confirming that the variables used meet the reliability requirements.

4.1.1 Common Method Bias

To assess the potential presence of common method bias (CMB), a full collinearity variance inflation factor (VIF) test was conducted following Kock (2017). Common method bias is considered unlikely when all full collinearity VIF values are below the recommended threshold of 3.3. As shown in Table 8, all constructs exhibited VIF values below 3.3, indicating that common method bias is not a serious concern in this study.

Table 8. Full Collinearity VIF

Construct	Full Collinearity VIF
Inclusive Leadership	2.184
Psychological Safety	2.563
Thriving at Work	2.421
Career Adaptability	2.775
Maximum VIF	2.775

4.1.2 Evaluation of the Structural Model (Inner Model)

Tabel 8. R-Square

	R-Square	R-Square Adjusted	interpretation
Career Adaptability	0.627	0.621	moderate - strong
Psychological Safety	0.444	0.441	moderate
Thriving at Work	0.529	0.524	moderate

Based on the R-Square test results, the R² value for Career Adaptability is 0.627, indicating that Inclusive Leadership, Psychological Safety, and Thriving at Work account for 62.7% of the variation in Career Adaptability, while the remaining 37.3% is explained by other factors outside the research model including career self-efficacy, psychological capital, learning agility, proactive personality, career resilience, and individual readiness for technological change. Furthermore, the R² value for Psychological Safety is 0.444, indicating that 44.4% of the variation in Psychological Safety can be explained by Inclusive Leadership. The R² value for Thriving at Work is 0.529, meaning that 52.9% of the variation in Thriving at Work can be explained by Inclusive Leadership and Psychological Safety. According to Hair et al. (2022), an R² value of 0.75 is categorized as substantial, 0.50 as moderate, and 0.25 as weak. Therefore, this research model has predictive power that ranges from moderate to strong.

The results of the effect size test (f²) indicate that the effect of Inclusive Leadership on Psychological Safety has an f² value of 0.797, which falls into the “large” category, making it the relationship with the strongest contribution in the research model. Furthermore, the effects of Psychological Safety on Thriving at Work (f² = 0.218), Thriving at Work on Career Adaptability (f² = 0.170), and Inclusive Leadership on Thriving at Work (f² = 0.159) fall into the moderate category. Meanwhile, the effects of Inclusive Leadership on Career Adaptability (f² = 0.085) and Psychological Safety on Career Adaptability (f² = 0.092) fall into the small category. Based on the criteria of Hair et al. (2022), an f² value of 0.02 indicates a small effect, 0.15 a moderate effect, and 0.35 a large effect. Thus, Inclusive Leadership makes the

largest contribution to increasing Psychological Safety, while the other relationships make small to moderate contributions to the endogenous variables in the research model.

Tabel 9. F-Square

	Career Adaptability	Inclusive Leadership	Psychological Safety	Thriving at Work
Career Adaptability				
Inclusive Leadership	0.085		0.797	0.159
Psychological Safety	0.092			0.218
Thriving at Work	0.170			

4.1.3 Hypothesis Testing

Tabel 10. Hypothesis Test

Hypothesis	Relationships between variables	Orginial Sample	T-Statistic	P-Value	Result
H1	Inclusive Leadership → Psychological Safety	0.666	15.256	0.000	Accepted
H2	Psychological Safety → Thriving at Work	0.430	6.282	0.000	Accepted
H3	Thriving at Work → Career Adaptability	0.367	5.503	0.000	Accepted
H4	Inclusive Leadership → Thriving at Work	0.367	5.764	0.000	Accepted
H5	Inclusive Leadership → Career Adaptability	0.256	3.822	0.000	Accepted
H6	Psychological Safety → Career Adaptability	0.274	4.121	0.000	Accepted
H7	IL → PS → TW	0.286	5.755	0.000	Accepted
H8	IL → PS → CA	0.182	4.029	0.000	Accepted
H9	IL → TW → CA	0.135	4.017	0.000	Accepted
H10	IL → PS → TW → CA	0.105	3.710	0.000	Accepted
H11	PS → TW → CA	0.158	3.817	0.000	Accepted

Overall, all research hypotheses (H1–H11) were accepted because they had p-values < 0.05 and t-statistics > 1.96. These findings indicate that Inclusive Leadership plays a significant role in enhancing Career Adaptability, both directly and through Psychological Safety and Thriving at Work as mediating variables. Furthermore, the study’s results also confirm the existence of a serial mediation mechanism linking Inclusive Leadership to Career Adaptability through Psychological Safety and Thriving at Work.

4.2 Discussion

Results of this study show that inclusive leadership is a crucial antecedent of career adaptability through psychological safety and thriving at work. This study model explained 62.7% of the variance in career adaptability ($R^2 = 0.627$), which emphasizes the significance of leadership and organizational psychological environment in developing employees' career adaptability. These findings are consistent with the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, which suggests that contextual resources might foster the accumulation of psychological resources that lead to favorable outcomes (Hobfoll et al., 2018). This work also offers a more holistic view on the mechanisms of career adaptability thus filling a gap in the previous research that mainly studied these mechanisms in isolation (Fang et al., 2021; Qasim et al., 2022). The findings highlight the need of developing an inclusive and psychologically secure work environment that promotes employee development to build career adaptability in the context of Indonesia that is undergoing digital transformation and rapid changes in the world of work.

The connection between inclusive leadership and psychological safety explains 44.4% of the variance of psychological safety among employees ($R^2 = 0.444$). The findings indicate that open, accessible, and appreciative leaders foster an environment in which employees feel safe to voice their ideas, ask questions, and take interpersonal risks (Li & Tang, 2022). These findings align with Fu et al. (2022) and Mohase et al. (2025) who showed that inclusive leadership contributes positively and consistently to psychological safety in various work contexts. Strong hierarchical relationships in Indonesian workplaces often discourage employees from speaking up and sharing their ideas or concerns with supervisors (Gustiawan et al., 2023) and Dai et al., (2022).

Psychological safety is a crucial element for thriving at work. These findings show that the combined effect of inclusive leadership and psychological safety contributes to development of employees' thriving at work ($R^2 = 0.529$). Gerlach and Gockel (2022) stated that psychological safety provides employees the opportunity to experiment, learn from mistakes and build new competencies without fear of negative repercussions. This aligns with the main characteristics of thriving at work: learning and vitality (Kleine et al., 2023). Xu and Suntrayuth (2022) and Hao et al. (2022) reported similar findings, in that knowledge sharing and learning in psychologically safe situations lead to more energy and engagement at work. Further, Hussain et al. (2022) showed that employees who experience thriving are more resilient when dealing with job-related stress and organizational change. This finding is particularly relevant for young employees in Indonesia who are entering an increasingly dynamic labor market and must continuously adapt to rapid technological changes.

Thriving at work also plays an important role in enhancing career adaptability. Employees who continuously learn and maintain high levels of energy at work are more likely to adapt effectively to changing career demands and work environments (Yang et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2022). This finding is consistent with Rudolph et al. (2017), whose meta-analysis demonstrated that psychological resources that foster learning and vitality are strong predictors of career adaptability across different contexts. Although inclusive leadership has a direct effect on both thriving at work and career adaptability, the indirect effect through psychological mechanisms is stronger than the direct effect. This suggests that inclusive leadership alone may not be sufficient to develop career adaptability without a supportive psychological environment. Such findings align with the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory, which emphasizes that leadership resources promote employee growth through psychological processes rather than through direct influence alone (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Similar evidence was reported by Suryani et al. (2023), Sugiono et al. (2023), and Dai and Fang (2023), while Chen et al. (2024) highlighted that career adaptability requires multiple contextual resources to develop optimally.

The mediation results further highlight the importance of psychological mechanisms in explaining how inclusive leadership enhances career adaptability. Psychological safety emerged as a stronger mediator than thriving at work, suggesting that feeling safe to express ideas, ask questions, and take interpersonal risks has a more direct influence on employees' ability to adapt to changing career demands. This finding is consistent with Du et al. (2022), who argued that psychological resources foster flexibility and openness toward career exploration, and Edmondson and Bransby (2023), who linked psychological safety to individuals' readiness to navigate change and career transitions. Patil et al. (2023) further noted that psychological safety supports team learning and individual effectiveness, both of which contribute to adaptability in dynamic work environments. At the same time, thriving at work remains an important mechanism connecting leadership to positive employee outcomes (Alwahhabi et al., 2023), while Topino et al. (2022) highlighted the role of accumulated psychological resources in strengthening career adaptability. Overall, the findings support the view that supportive psychological conditions represent a key pathway through which leadership influences employee development and adaptation (Li & Peng, 2022).

The most important contribution of this study is the confirmation of the sequential mediation pathway linking inclusive leadership, psychological safety, thriving at work, and career adaptability. This finding supports the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, which suggests that resources accumulate over time, with one resource facilitating the development of another and generating positive outcomes (Hobfoll et al., 2018). It also aligns with the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory, which emphasizes that leadership resources promote employee growth through a series of psychological processes (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). More importantly, this study helps explain how inclusive leadership contributes to career adaptability by demonstrating that psychological safety and thriving at work operate as interconnected rather than independent mechanisms. While Fang et al. (2021) identified thriving at work as a mediator, the present study extends this perspective by showing that psychological safety serves as an important antecedent that facilitates the development of thriving. This finding is consistent with Lee and Seo (2024) and Rudolph et al. (2017), who suggested that career adaptability develops through the gradual accumulation of psychological resources rather than through a single direct pathway.

While the positive relationships among inclusive leadership, psychological safety, thriving at work, and career adaptability are broadly consistent with findings reported in Western and other Asian contexts, the Indonesian setting provides several distinctive cultural characteristics that may shape the strength and significance of these relationships. Beyond relatively high power-distance norms, Indonesian workplaces are also characterized by collectivistic values and paternalistic leadership expectations, where harmonious interpersonal relationships and guidance from leaders are highly valued. In such contexts, employees may depend more strongly on leaders to create an environment that legitimizes participation, voice behavior, and learning. Consequently, inclusive leadership may play a particularly important role in fostering psychological safety and thriving at work compared with more individualistic Western settings, where employees may be more accustomed to expressing opinions independently. Furthermore, Indonesia's ongoing digital transformation and the predominance of younger employees in the workforce create additional pressures for continuous learning and career adaptation, making the sequential pathway from inclusive leadership to career adaptability especially relevant in the Indonesian context.

Theoretically, this study enriches the leadership and career development literature by providing a clearer mechanistic understanding of how inclusive leadership shapes career adaptability through layered psychological pathways. Consistent with previous studies, inclusive leadership fosters psychological safety (Fu et al., 2022; Mohase et al., 2025; Lee & Seo, 2024), which in turn facilitates thriving at work and strengthens career adaptability (Rudolph et al., 2017). Practically, the findings suggest that organizations should not only develop inclusive leadership competencies but also cultivate psychologically safe and supportive work environments that enable employees to learn, grow, and adapt to changing career demands. Without such conditions, the benefits of inclusive leadership may not be fully realized. For leaders, being open to feedback, valuing contributions, and actively encouraging growth carry cumulative effects on employees' long-term career development that extend well beyond short-term team performance. This perspective is supported by Ma et al. (2024) and Qasim et al. (2022), who emphasized the role of inclusive leadership in shaping employees' career trajectories. Future studies may extend this model by examining boundary conditions such as AI readiness, psychological capital, learning agility, or career locus of control (Li & Peng, 2023).

Like any empirical study, this research has several limitations. First, the sample was dominated by early-career employees, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to employees at different career stages. Second, the cross-sectional design restricts the ability to draw causal conclusions and does not capture the cumulative development of psychological resources over time as suggested by the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Third, the use of self-reported data may increase the risk of common method bias. In addition, while the Indonesian context provides valuable insights, cultural characteristics such as high-power distance may limit the transferability of the findings to other settings (Dai et al., 2022; Gustiawan et al., 2023). Future studies may replicate this model in different cultural contexts and examine additional variables, such as AI readiness, psychological capital, learning agility, or career locus of control, to further explain employees' career adaptability in the digital era (Li & Peng, 2023).

Overall, this study highlights that career adaptability does not develop in isolation but is shaped by organizational conditions that foster psychological safety and thriving at work. The findings suggest that inclusive leadership plays a critical role in creating an environment where employees can continuously learn, grow, and adapt to changing career demands. In the context of Indonesia's rapidly evolving workplace, these findings provide valuable insights for organizations seeking to build a workforce that is not only capable of meeting current challenges but also prepared for future uncertainties.

5. Conclusion

This study confirms the important role of inclusive leadership in fostering career adaptability through psychological safety and thriving at work. All proposed hypotheses were supported, suggesting that inclusive leadership contributes to employees' career adaptability both directly and indirectly. More importantly, the findings show that career adaptability develops through a gradual process in which employees first feel psychologically safe, then experience greater learning and vitality at work, and ultimately become better equipped to cope with changing career demands. This finding highlights that developing adaptive employees requires more than leadership practices alone. Organizations need to create environments where employees feel comfortable speaking up, asking questions, sharing ideas, and learning from mistakes. When such conditions are established, efforts to promote employee growth and career development are more likely to be effective and sustainable.

The findings also open several directions for future research. While inclusive leadership showed a particularly strong relationship with psychological safety, it remains unclear whether this pattern would be equally strong in organizations characterized by more rigid hierarchies or stronger power-distance norms. The relatively smaller direct effect of inclusive leadership on career adaptability also suggests that other psychological factors, such as career self-efficacy, psychological capital, proactive personality, or learning agility, may further explain how employees develop adaptive career capabilities. In addition, because the sample was largely composed of early-career employees, future studies should examine whether similar patterns emerge across different career stages. Longitudinal studies and cross-cultural research in other Southeast Asian contexts would also help provide a deeper understanding of how inclusive leadership shapes career adaptability over time and across different organizational environments.

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