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**Towards Inclusive Workplaces: The Role of Identity Leadership in Fostering Inclusion**

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### **Abstract**

It is important for individuals to feel part of a group and feel accepted for who they are, also in the workplace. Felt inclusion has been linked to an array of positive outcomes, such as harnessing the positive effects of diversity in teams while mitigating their negative effects, therefore making inclusivity a vital aspect of today's and tomorrow's diverse workplaces. For fostering inclusion, leadership has been shown to have a big impact on employees' experiences as well as the general inclusivity climate in an organisation. The purpose of this study was to investigate the relation between identity leadership and felt inclusion, and the role that a perceived climate for inclusion plays in this relationship. This study adds to the current literature by using the concept of identity leadership, a newly emerging concept offering a fresh perspective on leadership more in line with current literature, and builds upon a highly relevant angle of social identity in leadership. The final sample consists of 75 working adults. In line with expectations, identity leadership predicted felt inclusion both directly as well as through the climate for inclusion. This means that the perception of a leader's identity leadership is an important factor in how included employees feel. To increase inclusivity, managers should therefore actively seek to engage in practices that lead their employees to perceive them as 'being one of us', 'doing it for us', 'crafting a sense of us', and 'making us better'. Theoretical implications, limitations as well as directions for future research are discussed.

*Keywords:* Inclusion, Felt Inclusion, Leadership, Identity Leadership, Perceived Climate For Inclusion

## Introduction

As our modern workplaces are becoming increasingly diverse, there is a simultaneous surge towards more inclusivity. Inclusive workplaces are ones where the benefits of a diverse workforce are being harnessed (Ashikali et al., 2021) while simultaneously mitigating possible negative consequences arising from diversity (Nishii, 2013). Because of the positive effects of inclusivity, much research is looking to pinpoint what constitutes people to feel included (e.g. Dhanani et al., 2024; Shore et al., 2018). Inclusion is often operationalised as consisting of two dimensions, belongingness and authenticity (Jansen et al., 2014). This means that people feel included when both their needs of being part of a group as well as their need to feel differentiated from others are being met.

In organisations, felt inclusion (FI) of employees - meaning to what extent employees feel like they belong to the group at work, as well as that they can be their authentic self - is of high importance, due to various reasons. First, FI, and especially authenticity, has been associated with higher psychological safety and psychological empowerment (Newman et al., 2017; Shore & Chung, 2022). Second, Jansen et al. (2014) claim that higher FI is related to better work outcomes, such as higher job satisfaction, lower work-related stress, lower turnover intention, higher career commitment and career advancement motivation. Third, individuals with high FI identify more strongly with their work group (Shore & Chung, 2022). This can be positive because as the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) posits, identifying with one's ingroup leads to the desire to not only be different from other groups (outgroups) but also do and be better than them. Thus, a stronger identification with one's workgroup can lead to employees motivated to outperform outgroups, and according to Haslam and Reicher (2016), to prioritise their group's interest over individual gain. The innate human need for group identification as well as the positive benefits of inclusivity for organisations, makes it highly relevant to strive towards workplaces in which all employees can feel included, through both workgroup belongingness as well as being able to be authentically themselves (Jansen et al., 2014).

Due to the importance of inclusion in the workplace, it is worth exploring how it can be fostered. One aspect that relates to felt inclusion is leadership. The vast influence of leadership on the experience of employees, and also specifically on diversity and inclusion policies, has been repeatedly demonstrated in previous literature (e.g. Adams et al., 2020; Shore & Chung, 2022; Zhang & Liao, 2015). By engaging in inclusive practices, building trust, modelling positive behaviours, and applying inclusive leadership theories, leaders create a supportive and inclusive workplace environment (Kuknor & Bhattacharya, 2022).

Further, leadership has been linked to employees' feelings of being a valued team member, and the extent to which they feel belonging to the organisation (Saria, 2020).

However, this literature often focuses on the leader themselves and their leadership style and personality (see e.g. Clapp-Smith et al., 2019), instead of how the leader is perceived by the employees they lead, and it also mostly focuses on the extent to which the leader is a member of the group (Haslam et al., 2024). This more traditional approach has led to inconsistent findings as different leadership styles correlate differentially with felt inclusion, and it neglects the interactive nature of leadership and the fact that leadership is context-dependent (Haslam et al., 2024).

As traditional leadership style theories are inconsistent in their findings regarding perceived inclusion, they represent an unsustainable approach to leadership. Therefore, the transition to a new perspective on leadership, called identity leadership, is crucial. Identity leadership (IL) is a newly emerging field of research with increasing scientific popularity (Haslam et al., 2022). Building upon the Social Identity Theory by Tajfel and Turner (1979), IL is a perspective on leadership that focuses on a shared identity between the leader and the group they lead (Haslam et al., 2022). It moves beyond the traditional approach to leadership by viewing leadership as being the product of a leader-member exchange, which can change across contexts (Haslam & Reicher, 2016). This is a novel approach to leadership, addressing the pitfalls of the traditional perspective, and making it more fitting to the fast-changing modern world.

When looking at felt inclusion in the workplace, another factor of interest often discussed in the literature is the perceived climate for inclusion (CFI). A CFI refers to a company's climate where employment practices are fairly implemented to reduce bias, differences are integrated, and employees are included in decision-making by leaders actively seeking out their diverse perspectives (Nishii, 2013). Leadership behaviours have been shown to influence employee perception of the organisation's climate (Maamari & Majdalani, 2017), and the climate in turn has a large influence on employees' experience (Kuenzi & Schminke, 2009). As Jansen et al. (2014) claim, felt inclusion does not happen in isolation, but once other members of the group are included, this increases one's own felt inclusion too. Therefore, a climate for inclusion seems to play an important role in translating leadership perceptions into employees' felt inclusion. Park et al. (2023) argue for focussing on a CFI rather than on diversity management - which is still often done - because the CFI looks at the employees' experience rather than policies that are created top-down. Furthermore, while

diversity in organisations is associated partly with relationship conflict, a CFI can buffer such conflicts (Nishii, 2013).

### **Theoretical Background and Hypotheses**

In the following, the literature highlights on the expected relationships of the current study's model will be presented.

#### ***Relationship of Identity Leadership and Felt Inclusion***

Based on the work of Haslam and colleagues (2011), Steffens et al. (2014) differentiate between four dimensions of IL: Identity prototypicality (the leader being 'one of us'), identity advancement (the leader is 'doing it for us'), identity entrepreneurship (the leader is 'crafting a sense of us'), and identity impresarioship (the leader is 'making us better'). Thus, identity leadership is the extent to which a leader is perceived to engage in the four dimensions above.

A relationship between all four aspects of identity leadership and employees' felt inclusion is expected for the following reasons. First, identity prototypicality may relate to a sense of belonging, as leaders who embody the group's ideals can strengthen employees' connection to the group, by observing and copying the behaviour of the leader who is role-modelling the ideal group member. Second, identity advancement could be associated with authenticity, given that leaders who encourage alignment with organisational goals allow for genuine self-expression. Third, identity entrepreneurship might influence both belonging and authenticity, as it nurtures an environment ripe for innovation and individual contribution. Furthermore, through crafting a 'sense of us' (Steffens et al., 2014.), a leader enhances the group feeling, which can increase FI, as suggested by the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Lastly, identity impresarioship might tie to belonging, through a leader's ability to integrate all members into the organisational process and recognise individual contributions.

#### ***Climate For Inclusion as a Mediator Between Identity Leadership and Felt Inclusion***

A climate for inclusion (CFI) might be a factor through which the relationship between identity leadership and felt inclusion is explained. This is because of the following reasons. Leadership in general has a big impact on the climate in an organisation, on how people perceive their work, and even influences if people quit or if they thrive in an organisation (DeConinck, 2009). Employees furthermore use the perception they have of their leaders as a base from which they derive their understanding of the norms valued within the organisation, and how people interact with one another in terms of diversity and inclusion (Maamari & Majdalani, 2017).

Furthermore, according to Boekhorst (2014) a leader who is role-modelling inclusive policies - which is connected to identity prototypicality - increases the CFI. This means that if a leader enacts inclusive policies, they are seen as contributing to a climate of inclusion, as they are role-modelling how all employees can increase felt inclusion in the workgroup. Moreover, strong identity entrepreneurship can increase the inclusive climate (Buengeler et al., 2018), because this aspect is centred around creating a group feeling for all individuals, with all their diverse backgrounds and perspectives (Steffens et al., 2014).

Concerning the relationship between a CFI and felt inclusion, there are multiple studies supporting this connection (e.g. Cunningham, 2023; Sahin et al., 2019). Interestingly, according to Sahin et al. (2019), a CFI increases felt inclusion not only for members of minority groups, but for members of majority groups as well. Impacting so many employees makes it even more relevant for companies. For the aforementioned reasons, a climate for inclusion is expected to mediate the relationship between identity leadership and felt inclusion.

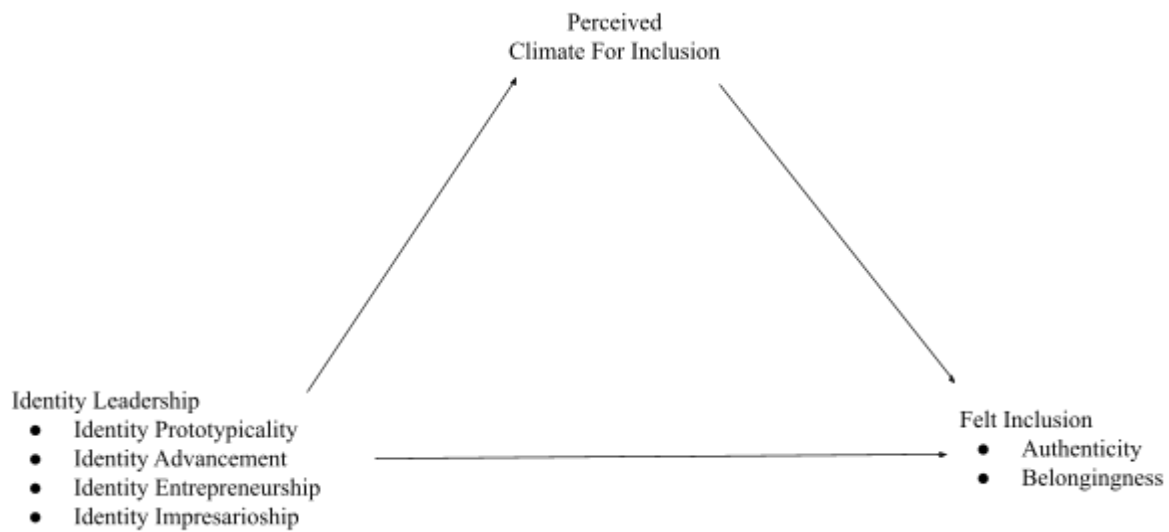
The aim of this research is to understand the relationship between identity leadership and felt inclusion and the role that a perceived climate for inclusion plays in it. Thereby, this study builds upon existing research while exploring a highly relevant gap in this research: the role of identity leadership in fostering felt inclusion.

### **Research Question**

Based on the abovementioned literature, the following research question is formulated: *How does identity leadership relate to employees' felt inclusion, and to what extent is this relationship mediated by the perceived climate for inclusion within the organisation?* From this research question, the following two main hypotheses emerge:

H1: There is a positive relationship between identity leadership and employees' felt inclusion.

H2: The perceived climate for inclusion mediates the relationship between identity leadership and employees' felt inclusion, such that higher levels of identity leadership are associated with a more positive perceived climate for inclusion, which in turn relates to higher levels of felt inclusion.

**Figure 1****Hypothesised Model****Methods****Participants**

The data for this study were collected between March and May 2024, targeting the general working population of the Netherlands and Germany. Inclusion criteria were working at least 12 hours per week, having a supervisor/leader, and being at least 18 years old. The type of work could be either paid or voluntary work. To be able to participate, people had to have a device with an internet connection, to fill in the online survey. Recruitment of participants was done via social media, posters were hung up at Utrecht University, and the researcher approached people in the city centre of Utrecht, The Netherlands. Thus, a convenience sample was used.

An a-priori analysis with *G\*Power 3.1.9* resulted in a required sample size of 81 (Power = .8; effect size = .1). The final sample consists of  $N = 75$  participants, after removing 49 responses due to not completing the survey or failing the control question, and one troll response was omitted. All participants gave informed consent. The sample had an age range of 22 to 60 ( $M = 31.7$ ,  $SD = 11.6$ ) and consisted of 26 men, 45 women, and 1 non-binary person. To get a further impression of the sample, more sample demographics can be seen in Table 1. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Ethics Review Board of the Faculty of Social & Behavioural Sciences at Utrecht University, approval number 23-2241.

**Table 1**  
*Demographic characteristics*

Baseline Characteristic	Full sample	
	n	%
Nationality		
German	30	41.7
Dutch	21	29.2
Other	21	29.2
Education		
Secondary School	2	2.8
Lower Vocational Education (Dutch MBO)	1	1.4
Higher Vocational Education (Dutch HBO)	2	2.8
Training	2	2.8
Bachelor's Degree	32	44.4
Master's Degree	29	40.3
PhD	4	5.6

## Materials

The online survey platform Qualtrics was used for this study. Participants could access the survey through a link sent via social media or text messages, or a QR code on a poster. To analyse the data, IBM's statistical software SPSS, version 29 was used.

## Measures

### *Identity Leadership*

Identity Leadership was measured with the Identity Leadership Inventory (ILI; Appendix A) developed by Steffens et al. (2014). The ILI consists of 16 items, with four items each measuring all four aspects of Identity Leadership: *Identity Prototypicality* (e.g. 'This leader is a model member of my organisation'); *Identity Advancement* (e.g. 'This leader acts as a champion for my organisation'); *Identity Entrepreneurship* (e.g. 'This leader creates a sense of cohesion within my organisation'); and *Identity Impresarioship* (e.g. 'This leader creates structures that are useful for my organisation'). Participants could answer each item



on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from ‘*Not at all representative*’ to ‘*Completely representative*’. Cronbach’s alpha shows good reliability ( $\alpha = .96$ ). The principle component analysis (PCA) with Oblimin rotation suggests one factor for IL instead of the abovementioned four (see pattern matrix in Appendix E).

### ***Felt Inclusion***

To measure this variable, the perceived group inclusion scale (PGIS; Appendix B) by Jansen et al. (2014) was used. This is a 16-item questionnaire measuring inclusion on the two dimensions of perceived belongingness and authenticity (Jansen et al., 2014). Answer options were measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from ‘*Completely disagree*’ to ‘*Completely agree*’. The scale shows a Cronbach’s alpha of .97, and thus high reliability. The PCA showed loading of the FI items on the expected factors, namely one factor attributed to belongingness, and one to authenticity.

### ***Climate for Inclusion***

Boezeman and colleagues (in preparation) measurement of the perceived climate for inclusion was used, consisting of six items (Appendix C). In this scale, people shared their perception of how people in their organisation who are visibly or invisibly different from others are being treated. Participants answered these items using a 7-point bipolar Likert scale. The scale shows high reliability (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .87$ ).

### ***Control Question***

An attention-check item was added, stating: ‘*This is a control question. Please select the first circle (Not at all representative) to show that you are paying attention.*’. This item was placed in the ILI questionnaire, between questions four and five. Five participants failed the attention check and were therefore excluded from the data set.

### **Procedure**

Upon opening the survey link, participants gave informed consent (Appendix D). A timer of 25 seconds was added before the ‘next’ button appeared, to ensure that the consent form was consciously read. Next, the questionnaires were presented in the following order: Climate for Inclusion (Appendix C), Felt Inclusion (Appendix B), and Identity Leadership Inventory (Appendix A). Lastly, demographics were asked, and participants were thanked for their time and contribution.

### **Data Analysis**

Statistical analyses were conducted using IBM’s software *SPSS 29.0*. Multiple linear regression analyses were conducted to test direct relationships between the main variables, controlling for age, gender, level of education, nationality, duration of employment, number

of working hours per week, and supervision of other employees. *PROCESS model 4* was used to test the mediation model.

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics & Correlation Analysis

The descriptive statistics of the study variables can be seen in Table 1. There was no need to control for demographic variables because as Table 2 shows, they do not seem to be correlated with the variables of the model, except for nationality. In the sample, being German is associated with higher felt inclusion. As this demographic variable does not significantly correlate with all three variables of main interest and is not known to be associated with them in theory, we decided not to control for this variable either. Table 3 shows the correlation matrix with the bivariate correlations between the three variables, indicating significant correlations between all three at the .01 level.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive statistics*

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Identity Leadership	4.97	1.25
Climate for Inclusion	4.80	1.10
Felt Inclusion	5.21	1.24

**Table 2***Correlation Matrix of Control Variables and Main Study Variables*

Variable	Age	Gender (0 = female, 1 = male)	Edu- cation level	Dutch (0 = no, 1 = yes)	German (0 = no, 1 = yes)	Duration of employment	Number of weekly working hours	Supervision of other employees
IL	.064	.147	.048	-.058	.049	-.014	.042	.073
CFI	.050	.134	.028	-.005	.114	.028	.004	.068
FI	.125	.202	.055	-.158	.294*	.019	-.008	-.060

*Note.* \* correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

**Table 3***Correlation Matrix Study Variables*

Variable	IL	CFI	FI
IL	-		
CFI	.556**	-	
FI	.539**	.588**	-

*Note.* \*\* correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed). IL=Identity Leadership; CFI=Climate For Inclusion; FI=Felt Inclusion

**Factor Analysis**

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFI) with Direct Oblimin rotation was performed to test the hypothesis that the measured variables in this study represent a specific number of latent factors, as suggested by the theoretical framework. The CFI supports the proposed variables of the model (see pattern matrix in Appendix E). Inter-item correlations of Identity

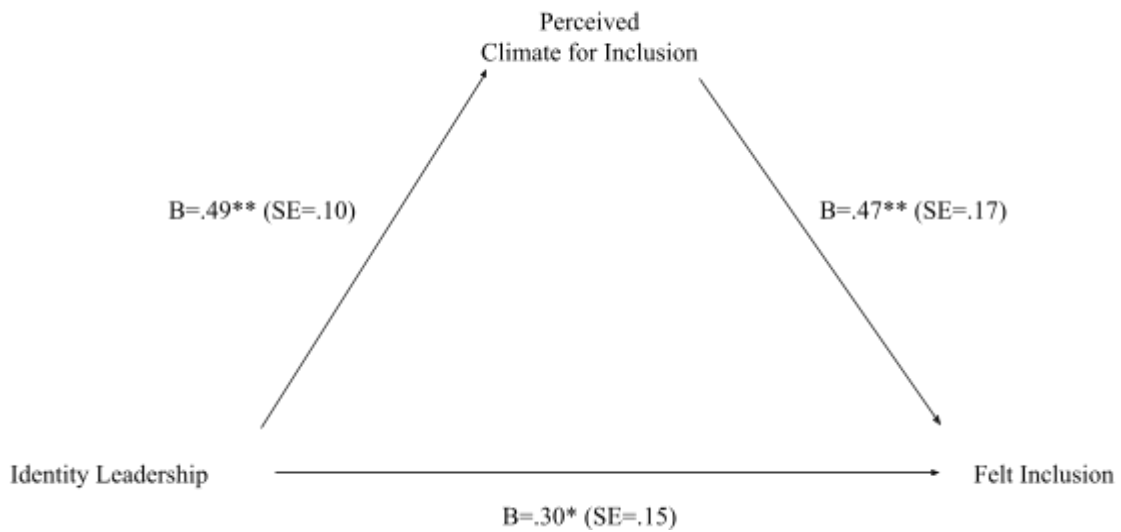
Leadership (IL) items showed high correlation, and a principal component analysis (PCA) suggested one aspect in this scale, thus IL was treated as one factor. For Felt Inclusion (FI), two factors were found, in line with the findings of Jansen et al. (2014), differentiating between *authenticity* and *belongingness*. Only one item loaded on a different item than expected: ‘*The people at work care about me*’ on *authenticity* instead of *belongingness*, and one FI-item showed cross-loading: ‘*The people at work treat me as an insider*’, loading on both *authenticity* as well as *belongingness*. Removing those items did not significantly change the results, thus they were kept in the analyses.

### Mediation Analysis

To test the hypothesised model, *PROCESS model 4* was used in SPSS, variables were centred beforehand and a homoscedasticity correction was used (Davidson-MacKinnon; see Figure 2). The model showed to be a good fit with the data ( $R^2 = .41$ ). A significant direct effect of IL on FI was found, with  $B = .30$ ,  $SE = .15$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $95\%CI[0.01, 0.60]$ , suggesting that higher IL predicts higher FI. Moreover, an indirect effect was found, with  $B = .23$ ,  $SE = .08$ ,  $95\% CI[0.08, 0.40]$ , whereas higher IL predicts higher CFI, which in turn predicts higher FI. This suggests that there is a direct positive effect of identity leadership on felt inclusion and that this relationship is positively mediated by the perceived climate for inclusion, therefore supporting both hypotheses H1 and H2.

### Additional Analyses

As the factor analysis showed a differentiation between the two factors of felt inclusion, belongingness and authenticity, the mediation model was tested doing separate PROCESS analyses. Both the belongingness model and the authenticity model explain a significant amount of the variance with  $R^2_{bel.} = .35$ , and  $R^2_{aut.} = .39$ , indicating a good model fit. For belongingness, a direct positive effect of IL on belongingness ( $B = .29$ ,  $SE = .14$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $95\% CI[0.01, 0.56]$ ) as well as an indirect positive effect were found ( $B = .18$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $95\% CI[0.04, 0.33]$ ). For authenticity, no direct effect was found, with  $B = .33$ ,  $SE = .18$ ,  $p > .05$ ,  $95\% CI[-0.03, 0.68]$ . The indirect effect with CFI as a mediator is significant and positive ( $B = .29$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $95\% CI[0.11, 0.47]$ ).

**Figure 2***Mediation Model*

Note. **\*\*** correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed), **\*** correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

### Discussion

With a surge towards more inclusive workplaces, the role that leaders play in fostering inclusivity is an increasing point of interest for businesses, policymakers, researchers and society at large. The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between identity leadership and felt inclusion, and the role of perceived climate for inclusion in this relationship.

#### Identity Leadership and Felt Inclusion

As expected, higher identity leadership predicted higher felt inclusion, meaning that if employees perceive their leader to engage in identity leadership, they are more likely to feel included in their work group. This is in line with Saria (2020) who argues for the crucial role of leadership in feelings of inclusion, and Steffens et al. (2014) who explicitly integrate the factor of everyone feeling included into their concept of identity entrepreneurship. Moreover, Brimhall et al. (2017) also claim that the perception of leaders, and especially perceiving the contact with their leader as meaningful is crucial for felt inclusion.

However, identity leadership only seems to predict belongingness, not authenticity. This means that IL alone only predicts how much employees feel like they belong to their work group, but not how free they feel to be their authentic selves in this group. Whereas we did expect to find a relationship between IL and authenticity, we suggest the following

alternative explanation for this finding. While IL incorporates aspects which were expected to link to authenticity, such as identity advancement, its focus on creating a shared identity within the workgroup could be more strongly linked to belongingness. For example, identity entrepreneurship strives to let people, in this case employees, have the common feeling of ‘us’ (Steffens et al., 2014), which therefore fosters a feeling of belonging to the workgroup.

The current study adds to the literature by exploring how specifically identity leadership relates to felt inclusion, thereby focusing on the perception of leadership rather than the actual behaviour of the leader themselves, as well as incorporating the increasingly relevant social identity approach (Haslam & Reicher, 2016). Lastly, it is exploring specifically identity leadership in this relation, rather than only focusing on one aspect of identity leadership such as leader prototypicality which earlier studies mostly focused on (Steffens et al., 2014).

### **The Role of Climate For Inclusion as a Mediator**

Conforming to expectations, climate for inclusion (CFI) significantly mediated the relationship between identity leadership (IL) and felt inclusion (FI), such that higher IL predicts higher CFI, and higher CFI predicts higher FI. This means that if employees perceive their leader as an identity prototype, identity entrepreneur, etc., then they tend to perceive the climate to be more inclusive, which leads to them feeling more included as well. This finding is in line with previous research looking into the role of leadership in creating an inclusive climate (Boekhorst, 2014; Buengeler et al., 2018), and the positive relationship between CFI and FI (e.g. Sahin et al., 2019). This finding adds to the literature by focusing on perceived CFI rather than CFI measures. Employees’ perception is crucial to consider because different employees perceive the inclusivity climate differently (Sia & Bhardwaj, 2008; Li et al., 2019).

### **Theoretical Implications**

The following theoretical implications can be drawn from the current study. To begin, we used a newly emerged theory of leadership, identity leadership (IL), which adds to the current understanding of leadership by focusing on the shared identity of leaders and people the lead. To this new perspective on leadership, we added the dimension of felt inclusion (FI), to understand how the latter can be fostered. To better understand the mechanisms in the relationship between IL and FI we added the factor of climate for inclusion. Thereby, we examined how IL influences FI and hence expand the understanding of their relationship. In this relationship, we show the relevance of the mediator of CFI, which future literature should take into account too.

Furthermore, this study supports the notion that leaders play an important role in the inclusive climate of an organisation, and that this is in turn leading to employees feeling included themselves. The theoretical model adds to the literature by integrating the concept of identity leadership into the workplace inclusivity literature.

Moreover, merely one aspect of identity leadership was found instead of four, meaning that identity leadership seems to be one overarching concept. This is contrary to expectations, compared to findings by Steffens et al. (2014). More research is needed to find out if IL is better clustered into four categories or should be viewed as one, but the findings of this study challenge the distinctiveness of the four factors by Steffens et al. (2014).

### **Practical Implications**

Several practical implications can be deduced from this study's findings. First, to increase employees' felt inclusion, leaders should focus on being perceived as someone who is a member of the group, who is crafting a 'sense of us', who is making the group better, and who is committed to working for the group.

Second, while it is important for a leader to engage in IL, it is also crucial that a perceived climate for inclusion is fostered alongside this. For this, a leader should ensure that their IL practices are perceived as such so that a climate of perceived inclusion can result from it. This could be achieved by making leaders' efforts explicit, by showing constant efforts and by applying identity leadership practices in every aspect of the work environment.

Third, using the Identity Leadership Inventory by Steffens et al. (2014), leaders can gauge their employees' perception of them, and consequently increase those aspects that it suggests are lacking. For example, a leader could increase their perceived IL by defining and communicating clearly what it means to be a member of the group and visibly modelling this behaviour towards employees, or by creating events that help the group function effectively (see ILI in Appendix A). To facilitate input from employees about their leader, the organisation's board should implement feedback options to indicate to what extent leaders in that organisation are seen as identity leaders.

Fourth, organisations should provide training to their managers and people in leadership positions on how to increase their IL. Ideally, those trainings should be individualised so that each leader can focus on those aspects of IL that their employees perceive to be low.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

Several strengths can be noted concerning the current study. For example, it looked at the perception of the employees, at every level, from the IL, the CFI and the FI. According to

the ABC model (Ellis, 1984), people's attitudes and behaviours are more determined by the interpretations of stimuli around them rather than the objective events and behaviours themselves. This means that it is more important to look at how a leader is perceived than what leadership style behaviours they assume.

Furthermore, Haslam et al. (2024) talk about multiple myths and pitfalls of the public consensus on leadership. They discuss that a common problem is that there is an overemphasis on the leaders, instead of looking at how leaders are perceived by the people they lead. The follower's perception is what is important (Haslam et al., 2024). The current research caters to this new line of research, focusing on the followers, in this case employees.

Moreover, by building upon the concept of identity leadership, which is rooted in the Social Identity Theory, this study expands on a new perspective on leadership (Haslam & Reicher, 2016). A shared identity of *we/us* instead of *I* is crucial when it comes to the functional dynamics of leading and following (Haslam & Reicher, 2016) because leaders and followers engage in a dyadic exchange rather than a one-way relationship.

This study also has some limitations which should be discussed. First, a convenience sample was used recruiting predominantly young adults new to the workforce, meaning the sample is not able to represent the general population of the Netherlands and Germany as well as a randomised sampling would. Another limitation is that the current study found one factor of IL instead of four as suggested by previous literature (Steffens et al., 2014). A possible explanation for this is that the sample size was not large or representative enough to detect multiple factors. On the other hand, it might also be that indeed there is only one global factor for IL, thus this study adds to the literature by challenging the original model of IL. Another limitation is that the added timer at the beginning of the questionnaire filtered out a large number of people, which consequently led to 75 participants instead of the aimed-for 81. Those filtered-out participants perhaps read the consent form quicker and then thought the questionnaire link was dysfunctional leading them to quit. It should be mentioned, however, that this ensured that participants indeed read the consent form and the conditions for participating, leading to a more accurate sample.

Besides the abovementioned limitations, its strong points make this study a relevant addition to the literature on the role of leadership in fostering inclusive workplaces, and specifically expanding on the significance of identity leadership.

### **Directions for Future Research**

Future research should investigate if identity leadership can indeed be seen as one global factor, or rather multiple factors. Moreover, future research should explore possible



discrepancies between identity leadership perception by employees, and the actual behaviour and intentions of the leader themselves to engage in IL. This might give further insights into what constitutes perceived IL in employees, so that leaders can implement specific actions which foster a more inclusive climate, and higher felt inclusion for their followers.

Furthermore, future studies could explore the extent to which nationality might have an influence on felt inclusion. In the current sample, Germans were more likely to feel included in their work group. This could be investigated further, by looking at potential cultural differences between individualistic and collectivistic cultures. The study should be replicated, using a larger and more diverse sample.

### **Conclusion**

Making workplaces more inclusive is crucial for better job outcomes and more ethical and engaging work conditions. To foster inclusion, leaders play a pivotal role, especially in how they are perceived by the people they lead. Through increasing a leader's perceived identity leadership, workplace inclusion can be increased. A good climate for inclusion is an essential aspect as well, whereby a CFI can increase felt inclusion for both minority as well as majority group members. This makes it interesting for managers and leaders who wish to foster the various benefits of workplace inclusion. The future of our professional world is one where people can be themselves and at the same time can belong to the group they are surrounded by. Identity leadership offers promising prospects for a more inclusive workplace, and thus a more ethical and productive work environment for all.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Identity Leadership Inventory (ILI)

The following questions are about your direct boss/supervisor/leader.

Again, there are no right or wrong answers, this is purely about your perception of this leader.

Indicate for each statement how much it applies.

#### *Identity prototypicality: 'Being one of us'*

- 1. This leader embodies what my company stands for.
- 2. This leader is representative of members of my company.
- 3. This leader is a model member of my company.
- 4. This leader exemplifies what it means to be a member of my company.

#### *Identity advancement: 'Doing it for us'*

- 5. This leader promotes the interests of members of my company.
- 6. This leader acts as a champion for my company.
- 7. This leader stands up for my company.
- 8. When this leader acts, he or she has my company's interests at heart.

#### *Identity entrepreneurship: 'Crafting a sense of us'*

- 9. This leader makes people feel as if they are part of the same group.
- 10. This leader creates a sense of cohesion within my company.
- 11. This leader develops an understanding of what it means to be a member of my company.
- 12. This leader shapes members' perceptions of my company's values and ideals.

#### *Identity impresarioship: 'Making us matter'*

- 13. This leader devises activities that bring my company together.
- 14. This leader arranges events that help my company function effectively.
- 15. This leader creates structures that are useful for my company.

*Note.* A 7-point Likert scale was used for the answer options

## Appendix B: Felt Inclusion

The following questions are about your subjective experience at work.

There are no right or wrong answers, just go with the answer that feels the most accurate.

Inclusion in the workplace means employees have a feeling of belonging and can be themselves, even when they differ from most other employees.

Indicate for each statement to what extent you agree or disagree.

The people at work

1. ...give me the feeling that I belong
2. ...give me the feeling that I am part of this group
3. ...give me the feeling that I fit in
4. ...treat me as an insider
5. ...like me
6. ...appreciate me
7. ...are pleased with me
8. ...care about me
9. ...allow me to be authentic
10. ...allow me to be who I am
11. ...allow me to express my authentic self
12. ...allow me to present myself the way I am
13. ...encourage me to be authentic
14. ...encourage me to be who I am
15. ...encourage me to express my authentic self
16. ...encourage me to present myself the way I am

*Note.* A 7-point Likert scale was used for the answer options

## Appendix C: Questionnaire Climate For Inclusion

Different types of people work in your organization. There are people with different genders, from different cultural backgrounds and age groups, with different sexual orientations, work styles and political beliefs.

While some differences are immediately visible, other differences are not.

How are people who are in some way (visibly or invisibly) different from most of their colleagues treated at your work?

**People who are in one way or another (visibly or invisibly) different from most others at work:**

Are looked down upon	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Are admired
Are seen as a burden	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Are seen as an asset
Are disadvantaged (e.g. with work tasks, development, working times)	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Are taken into consideration (e.g. with work tasks, development, working times)
Have bad things said about them	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Have good things said about them
Are left out	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Are included
Are considered of little importance	<input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Are considered of much importance

## Appendix D: Informed consent form

Dear participant,

Thank you for being part of this study. Filling out this survey will only take 5-10 minutes, and your participation is much appreciated!

Topic and goal of the study:

Diverse teams are beneficial to foster creativity and innovation, increase performance, and improve social justice. Striving towards a more diverse workplace, felt inclusion and a climate for inclusion can be important aspects. But what constitutes employees to feel included?

One possible driver for such a climate for inclusion, and that people themselves feel included, is leadership. How a manager/leader is seen by the people they lead, might have a big impact on the inclusion level.

This study will therefore focus on the role of leadership in fostering a climate for inclusion, and higher felt inclusion, thus an inclusive workplace.

To be able to participate, you have to

- be above 18 years old, and
- currently be employed for more than 15 hours per week.

This study is conducted as part of a master's thesis project at Utrecht University.

If you complete this questionnaire, the following conditions apply:

- Participation in this study is voluntary. By completing and submitting the questionnaire, you give us permission to use your data for our research.
- You can stop the questionnaire at any time. If you do not complete the questionnaire, the answers you gave will be stored and used in the study.
- Your data will be stored anonymously, meaning you cannot be (directly) identified.
- Your questionnaire responses will be used for a master's thesis, and possibly for scientific research and publications.
- The research data will be stored by researchers at Utrecht University for at least 10 years after the research.
- The research data can be shared with other researchers in an anonymized form.

If you have any questions regarding this survey or the study in general, please send an email to Aiko Unterweger: [a.j.unterweger@students.uu.nl](mailto:a.j.unterweger@students.uu.nl).

Supervisor of the project: Yonn Bokern: [y.n.a.bokern@uu.nl](mailto:y.n.a.bokern@uu.nl)



I have read and understood the abovementioned conditions of participation, anonymous data handling, that my participation is voluntary, and that I can stop this survey at any time.

Yes, I give consent

No, I do not give consent

## Appendix E

a) Factor Loadings of the Principle Component Analysis on all items (Principal Axis Factoring, Direct Oblimin Rotation, Factor Loadings > .40)

	Component			
	1	2	3	4
People who are in one way or another (visibly or invisibly) different from most others at work: ...Are looked down upon:Are admired			.690	
... Are seen as a burden:Are seen as an asset			.771	
...Are disadvantaged (e.g. with work tasks, development, working times):Are taken into consideration (e.g. with work tasks, development, working times)			.657	
...Have bad things said about them:Have good things said about them			.682	
... Are left out:Are included			.592	
... Are considered of little importance:Are considered of much importance			.667	
The people at work give me the feeling that I belong				.639
The people at work give me the feeling that I am part of this group	.410			.626
The people at work give me the feeling that I fit in				.641
The people at work treat me as an insider	.444			.516
The people at work like me				.801
The people at work appreciate me				.796
The people at work are pleased with me				.770
The people at work care about me	.537			
The people at work allow me to be authentic	.940			
The people at work allow me to be who I am	.886			

The people at work allow me to express my authentic self	.838
The people at work allow me to present myself the way I am	.790
The people at work encourage me to be authentic	.876
The people at work encourage me to be who I am	.868
The people at work encourage me to express my authentic self	.897
The people at work encourage me to present myself the way I am	.873
This leader embodies what my organisation stands for.	.716
This leader promotes the interests of members of my organisation.	.758
This leader makes people feel as if they are part of the same group.	.817
This leader devises activities that bring my organisation together.	.752
This leader is representative of members of my organisation.	.572
This leader acts as a champion for my organisation.	.602
This leader creates a sense of cohesion within my organisation.	.926
This leader arranges events that help my organisation function effectively.	.756
This leader is a model member of my organisation.	.855
This leader stands up for my organisation.	.760

This leader develops an understanding of what it means to be a member of my organisation.	.893
This leader creates structures that are useful for my organisation.	.783
This leader exemplifies what it means to be a member of my organisation.	.832
When this leader acts, they have my organisation's interests at heart.	.680
This leader shapes members' perceptions of my organisation's values and ideals.	.747

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Eigenvalue	18.05	4.89	2.18	1.60
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Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization.

#### b) Factor intercorrelations

Factor	1	2	3	4
1	1			
2	.424	1		
3	.348	.414	1	
4	.564	.345	.244	1

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