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Inclusive leadership as a valid assessment center dimension

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Abstract
As organizations are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of selecting inclusive leaders, this paper proposes measuring inclusive leadership proficiency as an assessment center (AC) dimension. We propose that ACs present a novel way to effectively assess inclusive leadership using interpersonal behavioral simulation exercises, such as role plays. It is argued that AC-measured inclusive leadership can provide incremental prediction of leader performance beyond commonly assessed AC dimensions; and that it positively predicts follower performance and follower demographic diversity. We conclude by suggesting ways future research might empirically investigate the validity and reliability of AC-measured inclusive leadership in organizational settings.

Keywords: Assessment centers; inclusion; inclusive leadership

Introduction

It has become commonplace for organizations to define themselves as diverse and inclusive. Despite being a respectable goal, the process for achieving diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is more involved than simply selecting more demographically diverse applicants (Ely & Thomas, 2021; Newman et al., 2014). Organizational leaders must actively display inclusive leadership behaviors to create an environment where employees feel a sense of belongingness and uniqueness, alongside feeling valued and respected (Brimhall & Palinkas, 2020). This raises the question of which assessment methods are best-suited for identifying a proclivity toward inclusive leadership behaviors. In this paper, we present the assessment center (AC) method as ideal for accomplishing this task. ACs have been widely used to assess relevant performance dimensions (Thornton et al., 2015). Here, we investigate how inclusion can be conceptualized as a behavioral leadership performance dimension, and how ACs can be utilized to select and develop inclusive leaders.

Our integrative review offers four important contributions to the science and practice of both DEI and ACs. First, we demonstrate how incorporating inclusion as a behavioral dimension within an AC framework allows for a more complete assessment of the leadership performance domain. Commonly assessed AC dimensions for leaders include organizing and planning, problem solving, drive, communication, consideration/awareness, influencing others, and tolerance for stress/uncertainty (Arthur et al., 2003; Meriac et al., 2008, 2014). Although these dimensions encompass a wide array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics (KSAOs) that engender success in leaders, these dimensions do not specifically capture a leader's ability to enact *inclusive* leadership behaviors, leading to employees feeling valued and experiencing belongingness (Shore et al., 2011). Because inclusion has been shown to positively

influence creativity and innovation (Carmeli et al., 2010; Randel et al., 2018) and negatively influence turnover (Nishii & Mayer, 2009; Randel et al., 2018; Xin et al., 2021), inclusion should be measured within the leadership performance domain. We argue that by 'including inclusion', a previously unassessed AC dimension, organizations stand to increase the predictive validity offered through their ACs.

Second, by extension, we show how inclusion as a leadership dimension can offer incremental validity for predicting leader performance, above and beyond traditional leadership dimensions. Leader performance can be defined and evaluated in different ways, but it is often measured by the leader's ability to promote organizational effectiveness (Zaccaro & Klimoski, 2001). Certain competencies (cognitive, social, personal, political, technological, financial, and staffing) have been posited to contribute to effective leadership (Howard, 2001). These competencies then enable leaders to increase financial, operational, and organizational effectiveness (Day, 2001). In addition to being evaluated based on the outcomes they influence, leaders' performance can also be measured based on assessments of their followers' behaviors (e.g., performance, commitment; Daniels & Daniels, 2007). A leader enacting inclusive behaviors can positively impact their followers' behaviors and performance, and consequently lead to positive financial, operational, and organizational outcomes. Therefore, adding inclusive leadership to traditional leadership performance taxonomies assessed via ACs can offer incremental validity for predicting leader performance.

Third, this paper contributes to research and practice by providing a concrete way for organizations to become more inclusive, and as a result, more diverse. That is, we position increased team demographic diversity as a positive distal outcome of implementing inclusion as a performance dimension assessed via ACs and selecting leaders with the ability to enact inclusive behaviors. Because inclusive leadership can contribute to increased employee well-being (Cao et al., 2022) and decreased turnover (Nishii & Mayer, 2009; Randel et al., 2018; Xin et al., 2021), and extending from the attraction-selection-attrition (ASA; Schneider, 1987) model, enacted inclusive leadership behaviors are more likely to contribute to recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce. Similarly, applicants with historically marginalized identities are more likely to seek out organizations they perceive to value diversity and inclusion (Avery & McKay, 2006). Furthermore, employees with historically marginalized identities will be more likely to remain in an inclusive environment where they feel valued, unique, and like they belong (Shore et al., 2018). Incorporating inclusive leadership as an AC dimension offers a novel venue for addressing implicit bias in organizations—which has further been offered as an important mechanism for increasing workplace diversity (Onyeador et al., 2021).

Last, we offer a fourth contribution by expanding the taxonomy of dimensions and types of exercises that can be potentially assessed by the AC method (e.g., Meriac et al., 2014) and articulate how future research can further validate interpersonal dimensions (like inclusive leadership) and exercises that to date have not been explored. ACs provide the opportunity to assess interpersonal constructs that would be difficult to assess using other selection methods (Thornton et al., 2015). This paper adds inclusive leadership to the dimensions that can be assessed using an AC and can also prompt more research concerning interpersonal dimensions that can be evaluated using ACs, thereby increasing the breadth of KSAOs that can be measured by an AC.

The case for inclusion

Increasingly, organizations are searching for ways to recruit, hire, and retain a diverse workforce. As diversity in the workforce increases, research on the relationship between diversity and performance in organizations has served to illuminate the boundary conditions by which increased diversity leads to positive, rather than negative, workplace outcomes. Research has shown that focusing on *inclusion* in addition to diversity is more likely to contribute to positive workplace outcomes (Ferdman, 2014; Shore et al., 2018). In this way, inclusion can be conceptualized as moderating the relationship between demographic diversity and performance.

Table 1. Inclusive Leadership Construct as Described by Veli Korkmaz et al. (2022)

Fostering employee's uniqueness	
	Supporting employees as individuals
	Promoting diversity
	Empowering employees
	Contributing to employee's learning and development
Strengthening belongingness within a team	
	Ensuring equity
	Building relationships
	Sharing decision-making
Supporting organizational efforts	
	Being open to organizational change
	Promoting organizational mission on inclusion
Showing appreciation	
	Recognizing contributions

Brewer's (1991) theory of optimal distinctiveness allows a deeper understanding of the importance of inclusion being coupled with diversity in organizations. The basis of the theory is that individuals simultaneously need to feel *uniqueness* and *belongingness* in their environments. These needs motivate individuals to prefer a balance between assimilating and differentiating themselves within a social group. Optimal distinctiveness can be used to understand the importance of inclusion in the workplace. In essence, employees want to feel a sense of belonging while also feeling their uniquenesses are valued. Shore et al. (2011) presented a model of workgroup inclusion aligned with the theory of optimal distinctiveness by emphasizing both valuing uniqueness and facilitating belongingness. In their model, the outcomes of workgroup inclusion included increased job satisfaction, well-being, organizational citizenship behavior, job performance, creativity, and intention to stay, among others. In total, the model theoretically explained the benefits of coupling workgroup inclusion with diversity.

The role of leaders in creating inclusion

Leaders are uniquely positioned to encourage workgroup inclusion because of the power and influence they hold (Veli Korkmaz et al., 2022). As such, research has begun to integrate the diversity and leadership literatures to understand the mechanisms through which leaders can promote inclusion (Roberson & Perry, 2021). To create a multi-level model of inclusive leadership, Veli Korkmaz et al. (2022) expanded upon Shore et al.'s (2011) model of workgroup inclusion. This expanded model added to Shore et al.'s dimensions of uniqueness and belongingness the dimensions of demonstrating appreciation (i.e., commending the contributions of both individual employees and the team as a unit) and aiding in organizational efforts (i.e., supporting diversity by prioritizing the organization's inclusion goals and allowing changes to occur to achieve those goals). These dimensions are illustrated in Table 1. Veli Korkmaz et al.'s model provides a basis for understanding the components of inclusive leadership at employee, team, and organizational levels of analysis. Importantly, Nishii and Leroy (2022) extended the conceptualization of inclusive leadership by emphasizing that each employee's historically marginalized identity(ies) must be explicitly considered by leaders for inclusive leadership behaviors to be enacted.

Inclusive leadership is distinct from, yet similar to other leadership constructs. For example, transformational leadership is associated with a climate for inclusion. Further, both inclusive leadership and transformational leadership aim to help employees perform at their full potential (Brimhall & Palinkas, 2020; Randel et al., 2018). Nonetheless, inclusive leadership is a distinct construct and diverges from transformational leadership due to its focus on valuing each employee so they can feel comfortable bringing their ideas and perspectives to the table; in contrast to transformational leadership, which prioritizes supporting employees so they can fulfill organizational needs (Randel et al., 2018).

In addition to differing from transformational leadership, inclusive leadership is also distinct from other related interpersonal constructs. In considering Arthur et al.'s (2003) established framework of AC dimensions, consideration/awareness of others comes the closest. Even though both consideration/awareness of others and inclusive leadership are characterized by behaviors consistent with making group members feel as though they belong; inclusive leadership (but not consideration/awareness of others) additionally requires behaviors that show followers their value to the group.

Finally, cross-cultural competence (Deardorff, 2017) and cultural intelligence (Earley & Ang, 2003) have been suggested as similar constructs to inclusive leadership in that all three involve the consideration of group members' individual identities and the uniqueness that comes with each identity as affecting an individual's perspective. However, unlike inclusive leadership, cross-cultural competence and cultural intelligence focus on the agility with which the leader can navigate different cultural contexts; versus (as is the case with inclusive leadership) ensuring the belongingness and psychological safety of followers holding a range of identities and degrees of power in the workplace. Table 2 provides the definitions and discriminant validity evidence for inclusive leadership and each of these similar, yet distinct, constructs.

Defining the domain of inclusive leader behaviors

In this section, we review the current definitions and conceptualizations of inclusive leadership and incorporate information from the allyship literature in order to propose a measurable AC dimension. With the heightened focus on inclusive leadership in the workplace, recent research has sought to define inclusive leadership behavior as a construct. For example, Brimhall and Palinkas (2020) conducted a qualitative study to understand inclusive leadership behaviors, uncovering themes related to equitable consideration, shared power, collective motivation, universal belonging, and authentic transparency. Exemplary behaviors were provided for each theme (see Table 3). For example, the *equitable consideration* theme included behaviors such as "recognizes that everyone has different needs and abilities," "values the unique talents of others," and "gives the same amount of consideration to everyone's unique needs" (p. 364). These themes are consistent with Veli Korkmaz et al.'s (2022) model and are helpful in beginning to conceptualize the performance domain of inclusive leadership. However, the behaviors comprising this framework lack the necessary specificity to be uniquely representative of inclusive leadership, and easily identifiable within an AC context.

Thus, to develop these behaviors further, we turned to the allyship literature. Selvanathan et al., (2020), defined allies as "those who provide support for the disadvantaged group and engage in informed actions to challenge inequality" (p. 1344; see also Brown & Ostrove, 2013; Ostrove & Brown, 2018). In this conceptualization, the relative power of the advantaged and disadvantaged groups is emphasized, and members of each group have different needs, with advantaged group members pursuing moral acceptance, and disadvantaged group members pursuing empowerment and respect (Selvanathan et al., 2020). Collier-Spruel and Ryan (2022) argue that because the intent and impact of allyship may differ, it is important to consider the impact of allyship behaviors from the perspective of the disadvantaged group member. Equally important is

Table 2. Constructs Related to, Yet Distinct From, Inclusive Leadership

Construct	Definition	Similarities to Inclusive Leadership	Differences from Inclusive Leadership
Consideration/ awareness of others	"The extent to which an individual's actions reflect a consideration for the feelings and needs of others as well as an awareness of the impact and implications of the decisions relevant to other components both inside and outside the organization" (Arthur et al., 2003, p. 133).	Consideration/awareness of others includes making sure employees feel like they belong within the group.	Consideration/awareness of others does not specifically target increasing the saliency of each employee's uniqueness and does not denote the importance of demonstrating consideration/awareness of others towards those with historically marginalized identities.
Cross-cultural competence	"The ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Deardorff, 2017, pp. 247–248).	Cross-cultural competence includes understanding how each individual's uniqueness in relation to their culture impacts their understanding and approach to a situation.	Cross-cultural competence does not focus on ensuring each individual feels like they belong in the group, outside of communicating to the individual in an effective and appropriate manner.
Interpersonal skills	"Social sensitivity, relationship building, working with others, listening, and communication" (Lievens & Sackett, 2012, p. 460).[1]	Interpersonal skills involve effectively communicating and building relationships with employees.	Interpersonal skills do not capture explicitly taking into account the identities of employees and using such knowledge to enhance uniqueness and belongingness.
Cultural intelligence	"A person's capability to adapt effectively to new cultural contexts" (Earley & Ang, 2022, p. 59).	Cultural intelligence accounts for the need to consider each individual's identity before engaging in behaviors.	Cultural intelligence focuses on the actor's ability to adapt and succeed among individuals with different identities but does not clearly emphasize the importance of the other employees' attitudes with which one is interacting.
Transformational leadership	A leader who "helps followers grow and develop into leaders by responding to individual followers' needs by empowering them and by aligning the objectives and goals of the individual followers, the leader, the group, and the larger organization" (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. 3).	Transformational leadership is focused on developing individuals by helping them cultivate and accentuate their strengths. In turn, those strengths will help the organization (Randel et al., 2018).	Transformational leadership is growth-focused at both the employee and organizational level, whereas inclusive leadership encourages growth but prioritizes the belongingness and uniqueness of employees and considers their historically marginalized identities. Inclusive leadership does not explicitly consider how developing employees will benefit the organization.

considering allyship not as an identity, but as an action that must be repeatedly enacted (Carlson et al., 2020). Therefore, Collier-Spruel and Ryan (2022) categorized enacted allyship behaviors as either effective or ineffective as seen from the perspective of the disadvantaged group member.

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[1]An alternative definition of interpersonal skills is provided by Klein et al. (2008): "goal-directed behaviors, including communication and relationship building competencies, employed in interpersonal interaction episodes characterized by complex perceptual and cognitive processes, dynamic verbal and nonverbal interaction exchanges, diverse roles, motivations, and expectancies" (p. 81).

Table 3. Inclusive Leadership Themes and Codes From Brimhall and Palinkas (2020)

Codes	Theme
Recognizes that everyone has different needs and abilities	Equitable consideration
Values the unique talents of others	Equitable consideration
Gives the same amount of consideration to everyone's unique needs	Equitable consideration
Seeks feedback/input from others when making decisions	Shared power
Ensures everyone has access to critical information	Shared power
Positive/optimistic about the future	Shared power
Encouraging others	Collective motivation
Inspires other to work together as a team	Collective motivation
Puts people first	Universal belonging
Encourages everyone to be involved	Universal belonging
Values those in low-powered positions just as much as those in high-powered positions	Universal belonging
Genuine/authentic	Authentic Transparency
Honest/transparent	Authentic Transparency
Humble	Authentic Transparency

Examples of effective allyship behaviors include amplifying the voice of a disadvantaged group member when they are being ignored and ensuring that the needs of a disadvantaged group member are taken into consideration (Collier-Spruel & Ryan, 2022). Enacted effective allyship behaviors fall under the umbrella of inclusive leadership behaviors, but inclusive leadership behaviors also include a broader range of behaviors. That is, whereas allyship behaviors are more concerned with using one's power to challenge inequity, inclusive leadership behaviors not only challenge inequity but also ensure that each employee feels like they belong, and their uniqueness is valued even when inequity is not salient.

Understanding that allyship behaviors can exemplify aspects of inclusive leadership provides further insight into the specific behaviors that fall within the inclusive leadership behavioral domain. For instance, informed by the allyship literature (Carlson et al., 2020; Collier-Spruel & Ryan, 2022; Selvanathan et al., 2020), oftentimes the historically marginalized identity of the individual impacted by the behavior is important in identifying the leader's behavior as inclusive. Importantly though, inclusive leadership behaviors can also be demonstrated towards those who do not hold historically marginalized identities or towards those whose historically marginalized identities are not visible or salient in a certain context.

Using ACs to identify inclusive leadership behaviors

ACs are a commonly utilized method for assessing employees, especially leaders (Kleinmann & Ingold, 2019). ACs comprise multiple assessment components, at least one of which is a behavioral simulation exercise. An AC may consist solely of simulation exercises, or combine them with other methods, such as interviews, personality inventories, and/or ability tests. The result is a comprehensive, partially or fully behavioral evaluation of an assessee's proficiency on a set of job-relevant, behaviorally defined performance dimensions. ACs can be used as a method of selecting leaders, as a diagnostic method to identify dimensions on which a leader can improve, and as a method to help leaders develop specific KSAOs (Thornton et al., 2015). Many AC exercises are explicitly interpersonal in nature, which provides an opportunity to rate (potential)

leaders on a variety of interpersonal dimensions, such as communication, consideration of others, and influencing others (Thornton & Rupp, 2012). Common types of AC simulation exercises of an interpersonal nature include role plays, leaderless group discussions, interviews, and inbox simulations (Povah & Povah, 2012).

Even though ACs can be costly and time consuming to administer compared to other selection methods, they offer advantages such as strong predictive validity, decreased adverse impact as compared to cognitive ability tests, and the ability to measure and combine ratings on a wide range of criteria—especially those that are interpersonal in nature (Eurich et al., 2009; Thornton et al., 2015). ACs measure dimensions multiple times through multiple exercises to increase the reliability of the measured dimensions. Meta-analyses have estimated the criterion-related validity of AC overall ratings to range from .27 to .47, demonstrating the method's strength as a predictor (Arthur et al., 2003; Gaugler et al., 1987; Hermelin et al., 2007; Monahan et al., 2013).

Contemporary research has led to the acknowledgment that the AC method offers flexibility, which is another benefit of using ACs. Specifically, research supports the use of the AC method to accurately measure an assessee's proficiency on a set of behavioral dimensions[2] (Thornton et al., 2015), as well as general performance within a behavioral simulation exercise (Hoffman et al., 2011; Monahan et al., 2013; Putka & Hoffman, 2013). Specifically, exercise scores could be used to predict performance when the exercise is contextually very similar to and has comparable situational cues to what is experienced in the focal job.

We argue that ACs present a ripe opportunity to assess inclusive leadership for multiple reasons. First, many organizations already utilize ACs for leader assessment and development. Additionally, inclusive leadership is distinct from other commonly assessed AC dimensions. Furthermore, the types of behaviors that define inclusive leadership (at various levels of proficiency) can be induced via interpersonal behavioral simulation exercises. Finally, because inclusive leadership is not typically assessed within ACs, adding an exercise (or adding additional behavioral prompts into existing exercises; see Lievens et al., 2006) to measure inclusive leadership has the potential to provide incremental validity above and beyond current methods. Despite this potential, in reviewing the literature on AC dimensions (Arthur et al., 2003; Meriac et al., 2008, 2014), inclusive leadership has yet to be included within AC dimension taxonomies.

Inclusive leadership (assessed as an AC dimension) predicts follower performance

We argue that inclusive leadership, assessed as an AC dimension at the same level as other common AC dimensions such as oral communication or persuasion, can positively predict follower performance. Randel et al. (2018) proposed a model whereby inclusive leadership, enacted through valuing uniqueness and facilitating belongingness, leads to followers perceiving their leader's behaviors as inclusive. This perceived leader inclusivity was further proposed to promote higher creativity and job performance among workgroup members as well as reduced turnover within the workgroup. Empirical research has further supported aspects of Randel et al.'s model. For example, inclusive leadership was positively related to employees' innovative work behavior through the mediating mechanism of psychological empowerment (Javed et al., 2019). Similarly, Carmeli et al. (2010) found that inclusive leadership contributed to creativity at work, mediated by psychological safety.

Other research has explored the extent to which inclusive leadership interacts with other variables in predicting employee outcomes. For example, in a study of neonatal unit health

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[2]Sackett and Dreher (1982) asserted that assessors' ratings were heavily influenced by exercises, rather than dimensions, spurring on a decades-long debate. Later, Kuncel and Sackett (2014) critiqued Sackett and Dreher (1982) and argued that overall dimensions ratings, which are a composite measure of individual dimension ratings, rather than exercises explain the most variance in assessors' ratings. Furthermore, Sackett (2021) remarked that he originally "got it wrong," in Sackett and Dreher (1982), as dimensions reliably and validly explain variance in ratings (p. 2).

professionals, Nembhard and Edmondson ([2006](#)) found an interaction between inclusive leadership (measured as follower-reports of the leader's attitudes and behaviors) and employee status/power in the prediction of psychological safety, such that if a leader was high in inclusiveness, then even low-status employees felt psychologically safe in the workplace, which led to an increased likelihood to engage in quality improvement work. Additionally, Nishii and Mayer ([2009](#)) found that when leader-member exchange, operationalized as an aspect of inclusive leadership, was high, the positive relationship between demographic diversity of a workgroup and turnover decreased.

Together, this research suggests that inclusive leadership should positively impact follower creativity and innovation (Carmeli et al., [2010](#); Javed et al., [2019](#); Randel et al., [2018](#)), as well as psychological safety and employee well-being (Cao et al., [2022](#); Nembhard & Edmondson, [2006](#)), which have been shown to create competitive advantage for organizations in the form of increased performance among followers (Anderson et al., [2014](#); Kundi et al., [2021](#); Newman et al., [2017](#)). Therefore, we expect that inclusive leadership, assessed as an AC dimension, will positively predict follower performance.

Proposition 1. *Inclusive leadership, as a single AC dimension, will positively predict follower performance.*

Inclusive leadership (assessed as an AC dimension) incrementally predicts leader performance

Next, we propose that adding inclusive leadership as a dimension to an operational AC can add incremental validity to the prediction of leader performance. Specifically, when an inclusive leadership dimension score is combined with other dimension scores to create the overall assessment rating (OAR), the OAR will better predict performance than when inclusive leadership is not included in the OAR.

Leader performance can be assessed in many ways (Howard, [2001](#); Zaccaro & Klimoski, [2001](#)). In addition to measuring leader performance via follower success as described above, it can be assessed via a number of subjective and objective indicators of goal attainment and success. Consistent with leadership theory, organizational success hinges upon leaders guiding, empowering, and motivating followers to work at their full potential. Therefore, it is through their impact on followers (through inclusive leadership alongside other performance dimensions) that their success and impact are determined. Consequently, we propose that assessing inclusive leadership through an AC will contribute incremental validity to the prediction of leader performance above and beyond the predictive ability offered through the typical dimensions measured using ACs.

Proposition 2. *Incorporating inclusive leadership as a behavioral dimension into an AC will provide incremental validity in the prediction of leader performance above and beyond other constructs assessed through the AC.*

Inclusive leadership (as an AC dimension) predicts diversity among followers

Enacting inclusive leadership behaviors can increase follower diversity by creating an environment where employees with diverse and historically marginalized identities feel uniqueness and belongingness (Shore et al., [2011](#)). According to the attraction-selection-attrition model, organizations are more likely to attract, select, and retain individuals who hold similar values as organizational members (Schneider, [1987](#)). A leader who enacts inclusive leadership behaviors can help promote an inclusive climate within their team (Shore et al., [2018](#); Winters, [2014](#)). Therefore, when a leader signals the importance of inclusion within a workgroup, individuals who also value inclusion are more likely to be attracted, selected, and retained. Although not always the case, individuals from historically marginalized groups generally prefer inclusive environments where they feel respected, valued, and a sense of belongingness (Ferdman,
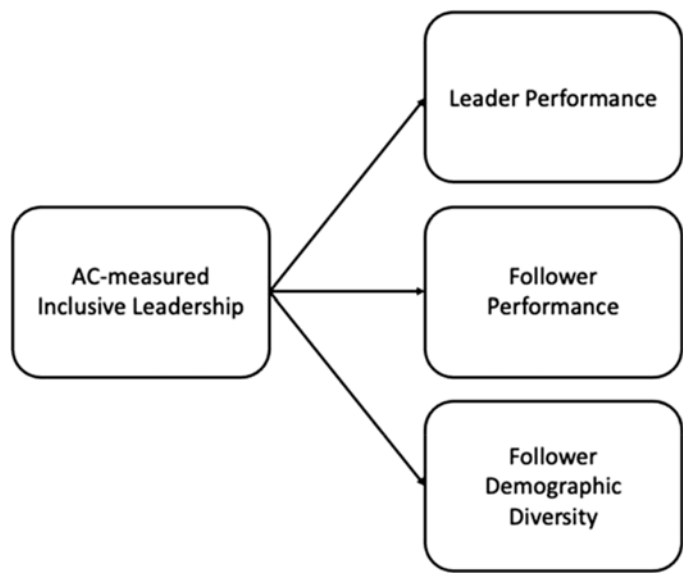
Figure 1. Proposed Theoretical Model.

2014). We therefore propose that inclusive leadership, assessed as an AC dimension, will positively predict follower diversity. We expect the effect of inclusive leadership on follower diversity to be small, as we acknowledge that many factors influence team composition, such as organizational culture and individual job-related qualifications, which are outside of a leader's control.[3]

Proposition 3. *Inclusive leadership, assessed as an AC dimension, will positively predict demographic diversity among followers, but this effect will be small.*

Summary and operationalization of leader inclusion as an AC dimension

We illustrate the theoretical propositions posed in this paper within Figure 1. As is shown, we expect inclusive leadership, assessed as an AC dimension, to have utility in predicting a wide range of both leader and follower outcomes. Further, we expect inclusive leadership to complement other, traditionally assessed AC dimensions in predicting not only diversity-related outcomes, but also more general outcomes such as individual and group performance.

To test our propositions, the question becomes, how might inclusive leadership be best operationalized in an assessment center context? The first step would be to provide a behavioral definition of inclusive leadership, as well as example behaviors at varying levels of proficiency (Thornton et al., 2015). Consistent with Veli Korkmaz et al. (2022) we behaviorally define inclusive leadership as using the resources a leader has access to, including status and power, to foster employees' uniqueness, show appreciation for individual employees and for the team as a whole, increase the belongingness team members experience, and support organizational inclusion efforts. Furthermore, for a leader's behaviors to be conceptualized as inclusive, they must be indicative of fostering uniqueness, showing appreciation, and increasing belongingness for employees both with and without historically marginalized identities. For example, we might

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[3]We acknowledge that the effect of inclusive leadership behaviors on team or follower demographic diversity is a distal outcome that will likely have a small effect size; however, we posit that a natural experiment within an organization with an ongoing, established developmental assessment center (DAC) program in place that collects regular program evaluation information would present an opportunity to test this proposition. Consequently, we encourage organizations with such a DAC in place to partner with researchers to investigate this effect.

Table 4. Behavioral Examples of Inclusive Leadership Components

Inclusive leadership	Low proficiency behavior	High proficiency behavior
Fostering uniqueness	Discourages an employee with a historically marginalized identity from sharing their perspective that does not align with the group's consensus	Encourages employees (both with and without historically marginalized identities) to share and expand upon their perspectives that do not align with the group's consensus
Showing appreciation	Fails to acknowledge team members with marginalized identities' efforts	Recognizes and highlights the efforts of team members both with and without marginalized identities
Increasing belongingness	Prohibits team members with marginalized identities from any level of responsibility in decision-making processes	Distributes some level of responsibility to each team member, with and without marginalized identities, in decision-making processes
Supporting organizational efforts	Does not communicate the importance or value of engaging in organizational DEI initiatives to team members	Invites team members with and without historically marginalized identities to join organizational DEI initiatives

expect leaders highly proficient in inclusive leadership to encourage employees with and without historically marginalized identities to share and expand upon their perspectives that do not align with the group's consensus. In contrast, we might expect leaders low in inclusive leadership proficiency to discourage an employee with a historically marginalized identity from sharing their perspective that does not align with the group's consensus. Table 4 provides our operational definition of inclusive leadership as an AC dimension, with behavioral examples of high and low effectiveness for each component.[4]

Figure 2 takes our operationalization one step further by providing a sample behaviorally anchored rating scale (BARS) for this dimension. Both this and our behavioral examples in Table 4 are general in nature, and don't contain exercise-specific behaviors that might be expected in the context of an actual AC. As has been advocated for in the literature, our operationalization considers how the features of the situation may or may not elicit a behavioral expression of an individual's underlying trait (Lievens et al., 2008). That is, trait activation theory can explain when behavioral manifestations of traits are more likely to occur (Tett & Guterman, 2000). In the context of ACs, trait activation theory posits that the relevance of a particular behavior to the exercise increases the likelihood that it can be observed. Second, trait-relevant cues within each exercise can increase the likelihood that an underlying trait is manifested in observable behavior within the AC.

As an example, consider a hypothetical simulation exercise in which inclusive leadership is one of the dimensions assessed, where specific behavioral cues have been built in to provide behavioral opportunities to display inclusive leadership behaviors. This could be an intra-group simulation with an assigned leader. In the simulation, the group has been tasked with reviewing brief grant proposals and allocating funds. Four distinct dimensions, one of which is inclusive leadership, will be assessed to increase the accuracy of assessor judgments (Gaugler & Thornton, 1989). The group is composed of the assigned leader and five other role players who are trained in their individual roles. The group will be given twenty minutes to review background information, task instructions, and brief grant proposals. The leader will be instructed to use the next thirty minutes to guide the group through a discussion to reach a consensus concerning the allocation of funds. To elicit behaviors of inclusive leadership proficiency, situational cues will be provided through

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[4]Following the guidance of Thornton et al. (2015), although inclusive leadership is proposed as unidimensional, we provide subdimensions as means to cover its full content domain, and to increase the reliability of measurement.

Inclusive leadership	Definition: Using the resources a leader has access to, including status and power, to foster employees' uniqueness, show appreciation for individual employees and the team as a whole, increase the belongingness team members experience, and support organizational inclusion efforts (Veli Korkmaz et al., 2022). Furthermore, for a leader's behaviors to be conceptualized as inclusive leadership behaviors, they must be fostering uniqueness, showing appreciation, and increasing belongingness for employees both with and without historically marginalized identities.	Observation notes
Rating	Examples of Behavioral Anchors	
5	Encourages employees, both with and without historically marginalized identities, to share and expand upon their perspective that does not align with the group's consensus	
4	Provides encouragement to employees, both with and without historically marginalized identities, who share their perspective that does not align with the group's consensus	
3	Acknowledges the perspective of employees, both with and without historically marginalized identities, whose views differ from the group consensus	
2	Listens to an employee, both with and without historically marginalized identities, who shares a perspective that differs from the group consensus	
1	Does not allow an employee with a perspective that differs from the group consensus to share their view	

Figure 2. Example of a Behaviorally Anchored Rating Scale for the Dimension of Inclusive Leadership.

group member actions (Lievens et al., 2006). For example, a confederate group member with a historically marginalized identity cued through either a salient visible identity or shared personal experience, such as race, disability status, pregnancy status, or gender identity, will share their perspective that differs from the group consensus. The leader's behavioral response to this group member will then be recorded by assessors using the BARS provided in Figure 2.

Importantly, those constructing ACs used to measured inclusive leadership should make power differences among individuals salient to elicit inclusive leadership behaviors. An assessee demonstrating proficiency in inclusive leadership should be able to engender belongingness and uniqueness among employees with historically marginalized identities, who have less power in the organization, as well as individuals with more power in a certain context. To make less powerful identities salient, situational cues must be utilized to evoke relevant behaviors (Lievens et al., 2006; Schollaert & Lievens, 2012). Careful thought must be devoted to ensuring that these cues feel realistic to assessees. For instance, AC participants may interpret a confederate wearing a gay pride t-shirt as contrived and manufactured, thereby potentially decreasing the relevant behaviors elicited and decreasing the face validity of the exercise.

When considering that exercises and situational cues need to feel realistic to assesses to cue relevant behaviors, the issue of assessee and assessor wellness becomes salient. A well-constructed AC exercise that measures the inclusive leadership dimension will produce variance in behavior so

that some assessees demonstrate high proficiency in inclusive leadership whereas others demonstrate low proficiency, which could offend others participating in the exercises (including role players and assessors). As industrial-organizational psychologists, it is our responsibility to always support the wellness of AC participants, including when they experience discriminatory behaviors (Lefkowitz & Lowman, 2010). Therefore, we propose suggestions that simultaneously address aims to create realistic situational cues of historically marginalized identities and also promote the wellness of those involved.

First, participants in the AC should have the option to participate in a debriefing session following the conclusion of the AC to discuss any low-inclusion behaviors witnessed. Second, AC exercises can consist of one-on-one conversations between two managers about selection, promotion, termination, etc. of an applicant/employee who holds a marginalized identity but is not present for the conversation. In this example, an individual with a marginalized identity does not have to witness any potential low-inclusion behaviors, thereby mitigating wellness concerns. Alternatively, an assessee in an AC exercise could have a selection, promotion, termination conversation with an employee with a historically marginalized identity who is visually represented by animation technology and is not physically present, thereby decreasing well-being concerns on behalf of the confederate. In summary, consideration of AC participants' well-being should be a priority throughout all exercises and stages of the process.

Future research directions

With an operational definition, BARSs, and exercise design parameters, research into the validity (and incremental validity) of inclusive leadership as an AC dimension is within reach, and collaboration with organizational partners would best facilitate the testing of our theoretical model. Future research should first examine the interrater reliability of assessors' ratings of inclusive leadership behaviors, the internal consistency validity of the subdimensions (i.e., items) of inclusive leadership, the convergent validity of AC-measured inclusive leadership with other ratings of inclusive leadership (such as other-reported leader inclusion), and the discriminant validity of inclusive leadership as an AC dimension with similar dimensions and constructs (i.e., those listed in Table 1). Then, research should empirically investigate the criterion-related validity of inclusive leadership in predicting follower performance, leader performance, and follower diversity; and to include the incremental validity of leader inclusion above and beyond other common AC dimensions.

AC exercises, such as a single intra-group simulations, commonly measure maximum (rather than typical) performance (Thornton et al., 2017). Because inclusive leadership should be consistently enacted to influence important outcomes, future research should assess inclusive leadership through multiple simulations over time to ensure an accurate estimate of leaders' motivation to perform typical-level inclusive behaviors.

Future research can also examine whether a low, moderate, or high level of fidelity in a simulation maximizes the predictive validity of AC-measured inclusive leadership. Although high-fidelity simulations are often recommended for training individuals, low to moderate levels of fidelity can be suitable when using a simulation to select employees, because all participants may not have the same familiarity with the organizational and job context (Thornton et al., 2017). Furthermore, research could explore how utilizing different components of the simulation, such as the stimuli, response, content, and difficulty at varying levels of fidelity can affect the simulation's validity (Fluckinger et al., 2014).

In this paper, we mainly discuss adding the dimension of inclusive leadership to an AC to increase the predictive validity of the OAR. However, ACs can also be used for purely diagnostic or developmental purposes (Thornton et al., 2015). Therefore, we recommend future research evaluate adding an inclusive leadership dimension to diagnostic and developmental assessment

centers. In these contexts, inclusive leadership ratings would not be combined with other dimension ratings, but rather used together to create a profile of strengths and developmental opportunities, which can be further developed through subsequent training/coaching or feedback and further practice facilitated by additional AC exercises. In this situation, validity of the inclusive leadership dimension would not be demonstrated by cross-sectional correlations to performance indicators, but rather further explorations into the factor structure of the AC dimensions (as having utility for diagnostic purposes) as well as training evaluations to demonstrate learning and development over time.

Finally, we suggest that future research incorporate refining exercises with situational cues that occur in the focal job to best elicit inclusive leadership behavior relevant to a certain context. Ratings of exercise performance (rather than ratings of dimension performance across several exercises) could then be used as a situationally specific measure of inclusive leadership behavior and could be used to predict performance.

Conclusion

We advocate that because of the ability to assess interpersonal dimensions, ACs should be used to measure inclusive leadership proficiency as a means to predict leader performance, follower performance, and follower demographic diversity. Utilizing ACs to assess, select, and potentially develop leader inclusion provides organizations with a concrete method for fostering both effective leadership and workplace inclusion.

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