

Inclusive Leadership and Employee Performance: The Mediating Effect of Employee Engagement among Production Employees at PT. Laksana Bus Manufaktur Ungaran

Allysa Fara Hidayat¹, Sri Wartini²

¹ Department of Management, Universitas Negeri Semarang, Semarang, Indonesia

² Department of Management, Universitas Negeri Semarang, Semarang, Indonesia

Abstract. This study aims to analyze the effect of inclusive leadership on employee performance, with employee engagement as a mediating variable. This study used a quantitative approach with a survey method. The study population consisted of 503 production employees at PT Laksana Bus Manufaktur, with a proportional random sampling technique. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and questionnaires, and analyzed using SmartPLS 4.1. The results indicate that the direct effect of inclusive leadership on employee performance was rejected, the direct effect of inclusive leadership on employee engagement was accepted, and employee engagement directly affected employee performance. Employee engagement fully mediated the relationship between inclusive leadership and employee performance. These findings suggest that implementing inclusive leadership can increase employee engagement, ultimately leading to improved employee performance. Future research is expected to explore other variables and expand the scope of the study across various organizational sectors and cultural contexts.

Keywords: inclusive leadership; employee performance; employee engagement

1 Introduction

Human resources (HR) are a critical element in an organization because they serve as the primary agents who translate the organization's vision, mission, and strategy into concrete actions through daily work activities (Mahmud & Sopiah, 2022). An organization's success in achieving its goals is significantly influenced by the quality, competence, and behavior of employees in carrying out their duties and responsibilities. Employees who possess strong work capabilities, motivation, and high commitment tend to be able to make optimal contributions to both individual and organizational performance. Therefore, Biswakarma &

¹Corresponding author: hidayatallysa553@students.unnes.ac.id

Subedi (2025) state that HR can be considered a strategic factor capable of adding value while maintaining the organization's competitiveness amid the increasingly dynamic and competitive business environment. Furthermore, employee performance serves as a critical indicator in determining organizational success, as strong performance helps the organization achieve set targets and ensure its sustainability (Alamsyah & Ardiana, 2025; Yuwono et al., 2023).

Leadership is one of the key factors in efforts to improve employee performance, as it influences employees' work behavior. One leadership approach that has emerged in modern management studies is inclusive leadership. According to Purnamaningtyas & Rahardja (2021), inclusive leadership emphasizes a leader's openness, accessibility, and appreciation for every individual's contributions within the organization, regardless of background differences. Leaders who demonstrate inclusive behavior tend to be able to create a supportive work atmosphere and provide space for employees to express ideas and participate in decision-making (Srimulyani et al., 2023). These conditions can foster a sense of belonging, trust, and positive working relationships between leaders and employees, thereby driving improvements in employee performance (Ramadhan & Wulandari, 2025).

In addition to leadership, employee engagement is also a key factor influencing employee performance (Lewiuci & Mustamu, 2016). According to Vakira et al. (2023), employee engagement reflects the level of emotional and psychological attachment employees have toward their work, as well as their willingness to devote energy, dedication, and full focus to performing their duties. Employees with high levels of engagement tend to demonstrate greater enthusiasm, work spirit, and commitment to their work, enabling them to achieve optimal performance (Biswakarma & Subedi, 2025). Furthermore, employee engagement can also emerge as a positive response to the support and treatment provided by the organization to its employees (Ilyas et al., 2024).

The relationship between inclusive leadership, employee engagement, and employee performance can be explained through Social Exchange Theory. This theory posits that the relationship between individuals and organizations is formed through a mutually beneficial reciprocal process, in which positive treatment provided by the organization or leader encourages employees to reciprocate with positive work attitudes and behaviors (Blau, 1964). In an organizational context, when leaders demonstrate inclusive behaviors such as openness, support, and providing opportunities for employees to participate, employees will feel valued and supported by the organization. These feelings then foster higher work engagement and improved performance as a form of reciprocation for the positive treatment received from leaders.

Previous studies have examined the relationship between inclusive leadership, employee engagement, and employee performance. Some studies have found that inclusive leadership has a positive effect on employee performance and employee engagement (Bao et al., 2022; Cenkci et al., 2021; Vakira et al., 2023; Wibisana, 2025). However, other studies have shown different results, where inclusive leadership did not have a significant effect on either employee performance or employee engagement (Feryna et al., 2025; Ilyas et al., 2024). Additionally, research on employee engagement has also yielded mixed results. Some studies state that employee engagement has a significant effect on employee performance (Alamsyah & Ardiana, 2025; Hadi & Mahadika, 2019; Jimoh, 2025; Lewiuci & Mustamu, 2016; Nugroho & Ratnawati, 2021), while other studies indicate that employee engagement does not significantly affect employee performance (Diem et al., 2023; Hanifah Siti Sarah & Eryandra, 2024; Kinanti & Hermiati, 2023). These differing findings indicate inconsistencies in research results, opening opportunities for further studies on the relationship between these variables.

In addition to the research gap, empirical findings were also observed among production employees at PT Laksana Bus Manufaktur Ungaran. This company is one of Indonesia's bus

manufacturing firms, producing various types of bus bodies and boasting a substantial production capacity. Although the company has implemented several aspects of inclusive leadership, such as an open attitude and accessibility to employees, the performance of production employees is still not fully optimal, particularly regarding compliance with company regulations and punctuality in completing tasks. These conditions indicate that the implementation of inclusive leadership does not necessarily directly improve employee performance without the influence of other contributing factors, one of which is employee engagement in their work.

In addition to the research gap, empirical phenomena were also identified among production employees at PT Laksana Bus Manufaktur Ungaran (PT LBM), one of Indonesia's bus manufacturing companies. In carrying out its production activities, the company has implemented several aspects of inclusive leadership through open communication and leader accessibility toward employees, including the use of Daily Routine Meetings (DRM) as a platform for delivering work instructions and evaluating performance. However, the implementation of inclusive leadership has not yet fully contributed to optimizing the performance of production employees. Based on an unstructured interview with Mr. Deo Denaldo, an HRD staff member at PT LBM, several issues related to compliance with work standards were still identified, such as employees failing to use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) during the production process despite receiving regular guidance and reminders from leaders. Furthermore, punctuality in completing work tasks remains a challenge, particularly during the Finishing Pre-Delivery Inspection (PDI) stage, which is targeted to be completed within one week. In practice, delays still occur due to inspections that have not been carried out optimally.

Furthermore, employee attendance records provide an empirical indication of employees' work discipline and engagement levels, as punctuality reflects employees' commitment to fulfilling their work responsibilities. In the context of production activities, consistent attendance and punctuality are essential to ensure that operational targets and quality standards can be achieved. However, preliminary observations at PT LBM revealed an increasing trend of employee lateness among production employees during the August–November 2025 period. The details of employee lateness data are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Data on employee lateness

No.	Month	Quantity Workday	Quantity Employees	Quantity Lateness	Lateness Rate
1.	August	24	503	295	2%
2.	September	24	503	341	3%
3.	October	25	503	417	3%
4.	November	25	503	469	4%
Average					3%

Source: Primary data from PT. LBM (2026)

Based on the table, the lateness rate of production employees at PT Laksana Bus Manufaktur shows an increasing trend, with an average of 3%. This condition indicates that employee discipline and work enthusiasm require further attention, as they may affect overall performance achievement. Furthermore, a preliminary study involving 34 employees revealed that although employees generally demonstrated good performance levels, there was still a gap in task performance, particularly in their ability to complete tasks within the expected timeframe. The preliminary study also identified issues related to employee engagement, particularly in the vigor and absorption dimensions, as indicated by 41% of respondents who reported that they did not have optimal energy and enthusiasm in carrying out their work.

These findings suggest that inclusive leadership does not necessarily lead directly to improved employee performance but may require certain psychological mechanisms within employees. In this context, employee engagement becomes an important factor explaining how open, supportive, and participative leadership behaviors can encourage employees to develop stronger emotional attachment toward their work, thereby promoting more optimal work behaviors and performance outcomes.

Based on the above discussion, this study aims to examine the effect of inclusive leadership on employee performance with employee engagement as a mediating variable among production employees at PT Laksana Bus Manufaktur Ungaran. This study contributes to the literature by examining inclusive leadership and employee engagement within the context of the bus manufacturing industry, particularly among production employees who face high demands related to safety compliance, production timelines, and work quality standards. Furthermore, this study provides empirical evidence regarding the role of employee engagement as a mechanism that explains the relationship between inclusive leadership and employee performance, particularly in addressing practical workplace issues such as employee lateness, non-compliance with PPE usage, and the inability to consistently complete tasks according to production targets.

1.1 Literature Review

Building on previous studies cited in the literature, this study develops different indicators and focuses on a distinct research objective: examining the effect of inclusive leadership on employee performance, with employee engagement serving as a mediating variable. This study stems from the need to gain a deeper understanding of how the fundamental characteristics of inclusive leadership can foster employee engagement, which ultimately contributes to an overall improvement in employee performance.

1.1.1 Employee Performance

Employee performance reflects a series of activities carried out to complete tasks and responsibilities effectively and in accordance with organizational standards (Eshete et al., 2025b). Performance concepts and standards need to be continuously adjusted to align with the dynamics and changes occurring within the organization. According to Srimulyani et al. (2023), employee performance refers to activities that are officially considered components of the job that help in achieving organizational goals. One of the key factors determining an organization's success in achieving its goals is employee performance. Without effective management and administration, performance improvements cannot be achieved. Therefore, good management is essential for an organization to maintain and continuously improve its performance (Ramadhan & Wulandari, 2025). Furthermore, according to Almulaiki (2023), strong organizational performance can only be achieved if all employees actively participate in the decision-making process. Active employee participation in decision-making allows the organization to gain valuable insights from various levels, resulting in decisions that are more accurate, effective, and accountable.

According to Fauzi & Ekhsan (2024), performance is an evaluation of an individual's ability to complete their tasks, reflecting how well the work performed aligns with established targets. Employee performance includes completing tasks according to the established schedule, employee capabilities, and the level of effectiveness and efficiency in performing work. Employees whose work capabilities align with their job responsibilities tend to be more meticulous, which can drive performance improvement. This improvement in performance ultimately contributes to the organization's progress because the results achieved align with the established goals.

Based on several definitions of employee performance, it can be concluded that employee performance is the achievement of work results obtained by individuals or groups through the execution of their duties and responsibilities, which contribute to the achievement of the company's goals.

1.1.2 Inclusive Leadership

Inclusive leadership is defined as a leadership approach in which leaders demonstrate openness, approachability, and constant availability to interact with group members, while emphasizing participatory and transparent behavior (Nurliza et al., 2025). According to Asghar et al. (2023), the main characteristics of inclusive leadership lie in the traits of openness, accessibility, and availability. An inclusive leadership style can create a work environment that values inclusivity by fostering respect, team support, listening to aspirations, and providing social and emotional support to employees within an organization.

Inclusive leadership may appear similar to other leadership models that also promote openness and employee empowerment. Unlike the research conducted by Rahman et al. (2023), inclusive leadership is defined as an approach that focuses on recognizing individual uniqueness and strengthening a sense of belonging within the organization, so that superiors and subordinates can build positive relationships at various levels that can drive the achievement of long-term goals. Inclusive leadership plays a crucial role in aligning various elements through a high capacity for adaptation to diverse perspectives and an open-minded approach to achieve optimal results. In line with the research by Wang et al. (2025), leaders who adopt an inclusive leadership style will strive to meet followers' needs for a sense of belonging and recognition of individual uniqueness in work interactions, thereby fostering responsibility, appreciation, and respect within the organizational environment.

An inclusive leadership style can benefit employees. When employees feel cared for and supported by their leaders, they tend to be more motivated to exhibit behavior aligned with the organization's expectations (Piwowar-Sulej et al., 2025). Supported by research by Hafid & Kistyanto (2025), which states that a work atmosphere with inclusive leadership has been proven to improve employee well-being and engagement, particularly in the context of the modern era, which demands flexibility and respect for diversity.

Based on several definitions of inclusive leadership, it can be concluded that inclusive leadership is a leadership approach focused on ensuring that every individual deserves to feel accepted, heard, and valued regardless of their background, identity, or characteristics. This approach also emphasizes that in the decision-making process to achieve shared goals, employees must be involved to ensure that every individual is entitled to the opportunities available to them.

1.1.3 Employee Engagement

Employee engagement reflects an individual's level of commitment to their work that goes beyond merely fulfilling formal obligations. Employees who are engaged in an organization demonstrate high dedication by prioritizing task completion, utilizing their time productively through diligent work, and striving to complete tasks in accordance with established targets and deadlines (Alamsyah & Ardiana, 2025). This is supported by Letsoin & Ratnasari (2020) who state that employee engagement is closely linked to performance levels. Psychologically, engagement reflects a state in which employees feel a sense of responsibility and care for the organization's success. In such a state, employees are driven to give their best and are motivated to work beyond established standards or job requirements.

This concept consists of three main dimensions: vigor, dedication, and absorption. High levels of employee engagement generally indicate strong loyalty to the organization where

they work. Within an organization, employees are not only motivated by financial rewards or promotion opportunities but are also driven by a sense of responsibility and commitment to making a tangible contribution to the organization's overall success. Quoted from Bramer (2016), employee engagement can be understood as an individual's willingness to consistently and continuously contribute to the organization. In other words, this engagement reflects the extent to which employees are committed and motivated to support the achievement of organizational goals through optimal performance and active participation in various work activities.

Overall, employee engagement can be defined as a positive psychological state that motivates employees to fully commit to their work, characterized by enthusiasm, dedication, and immersion. This commitment reflects employees' willingness and ability to contribute consistently toward achieving the organization's goals.

1.1.4 Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory (SET) serves as the primary foundation for analyzing the conceptual framework proposed by the author. This concept was first proposed by Homans (1958) and later developed by Blau (1964). The theory aims to explain that social interaction is based on the principle of exchanging things considered valuable between individuals (Biswakarma & Subedi, 2025). According to Cenkci et al. (2021), SET explains that a series of interactions occurring between two parties, such as between a leader and a follower, tends to create reciprocal obligations from one party to the other. From the perspective of this theory, individuals will establish and maintain relationships with others in the hope of obtaining certain benefits and rewards (Wang et al., 2025).

According to Wang et al. (2025), Social Exchange Theory explains that employee performance outcomes result from leadership behaviors that employ relational mechanisms. Through inclusive leadership behaviors, leaders demonstrate their investment and commitment to building higher-quality working relationships. At the same time, inclusive leaders are able to enhance the performance efficiency of their followers while respecting the uniqueness of each individual through an empathetic and unbiased approach. Social Exchange Theory explains that employee engagement is the result of a reciprocal exchange process between employees and the organization, in which employees tend to increase their participation when they receive valuable treatment, support, and resources from the organization (Vakira et al., 2023). This theory views employee engagement as a response to a cost-benefit analysis within the employment relationship, where employees will be more engaged when the benefits received and perceived outweigh the sacrifices made. Social Exchange Theory explains that involving employees in decision-making processes led by supervisors can drive improvements in employee performance (Eshete et al., 2025a). Leaders who understand employees' needs and expectations and are able to communicate rewards commensurate with performance will encourage employees to demonstrate their best performance.

According to the SET principle, when employees feel strong support from the organization, they tend to demonstrate greater commitment and effort in achieving organizational goals, while also maintaining their individual resilience in the face of workplace challenges (Aldabbas et al., 2023).

1.1.5 Hypothesis Development

The Relationship Between Inclusive Leadership and Employee Performance

Inclusive leadership refers to a leader's openness, accessibility, and willingness to interact with employees whenever needed (Wang et al., 2025). This approach emphasizes the importance of creating a work environment where every individual feels accepted, heard, and valued regardless of differences in background, identity, or personal characteristics. According to Ramadhan & Wulandari (2025), inclusive leadership influences the improvement of employee performance, as its implementation has the potential to enhance performance and drive employees toward more optimal work outcomes. Skills in inclusive leadership stem from the ability to build positive relationships and provide strong support between leaders and subordinates (Purnamaningtyas & Rahardja, 2021). Social Exchange Theory can explain the influence of inclusive leadership on employee performance, assuming that when leaders demonstrate inclusive behavior, employees will feel accepted and receive emotional support from their leaders. Previous studies have found that inclusive leadership influences employee performance (Dirjo, 2024; Tabara, 2023). Thus, the proposed hypotheses are as follows:

H1: Inclusive leadership has a positive effect on employee performance

The Relationship Between Inclusive Leadership and Employee Engagement

Leadership is recognized as a key factor in enhancing employee engagement in the workplace. Specifically, inclusive leadership has been shown to have a significant impact on increasing employee work engagement (Cenkci et al., 2021). According to Ilyas et al. (2024), employees who feel valued, trusted, and supported by the organization will demonstrate high levels of work engagement, characterized by enthusiasm, dedication, and full focus on their work. This engagement serves as a form of reciprocity for the positive treatment employees receive. Social Exchange Theory explains that organizational relationships are based on the principle of reciprocity, where positive actions from one party encourage a positive response from the other. Through the SET approach, inclusive leadership strengthens the relationship of mutual trust and respect between leaders and subordinates. Previous studies have found that inclusive leadership influences employee engagement (Bao et al., 2022; Deepalakshmi et al., 2025; Jazuli & Vedy, 2025; Khalil et al., 2023; Vakira et al., 2023; Wibisana, 2025). Thus, the proposed hypothesis is as follows:

H2: Inclusive leadership has a positive effect on employee engagement

The Relationship Between Employee Engagement and Employee Performance

Employee engagement represents an emotional and intellectual commitment to the organization, which is reflected in the level of voluntary effort employees put into performing their work (Biswakarma & Subedi, 2025). In a study by Jimoh (2025), it is explained that employees who are emotionally and cognitively engaged demonstrate dedication, enthusiasm, and a willingness to go beyond formal job requirements. This occurs because employees perceive the organization as valuing their contributions. Social Exchange Theory assumes that the relationship between employees and the organization is based on the idea that positive actions from one party will encourage positive responses from the other. When organizations treat employees positively, employees feel obligated to reciprocate with higher performance. Several previous studies have found that employee engagement influences employee (Alamsyah & Ardiana, 2025; Hadi & Mahadika, 2019; Jimoh, 2025; Lewiuci &

Mustamu, 2016; Nugroho & Ratnawati, 2021). Therefore, the proposed hypothesis is as follows:

H3: Employee engagement has a positive effect on employee performance.

The Relationship Between Inclusive Leadership and Employee Performance with Employee Engagement as a Mediating Variable

Research conducted by Dirjo (2024) reveals that inclusive leadership has a positive influence on both employee engagement and employee performance. One of the key factors determining an organization's success in achieving its goals is the performance of its employees (Ramadhan & Wulandari, 2025). Inclusive leaders tend to demonstrate behaviors that fulfill employees' needs for uniqueness and a sense of belonging, thereby encouraging them to become fully engaged in their work (Bao et al., 2022). Employee engagement plays a crucial role in this context, as individuals who feel engaged are more likely to collaborate enthusiastically, support one another, and contribute to shared goals (Deepalakshmi et al., 2025). Such collaboration fosters team spirit, enhances morale, and positively impacts overall employee performance. Several studies consistently show that employee engagement serves as a driver of leadership effectiveness within organizations while also producing positive outcomes for employees. This is supported by Bao et al. (2022), who state that inclusive leadership has a significant effect on the level of employee engagement. Therefore, the proposed hypothesis is as follows:

H4: Inclusive leadership has a positive effect on employee performance, with employee engagement as a mediating variable.

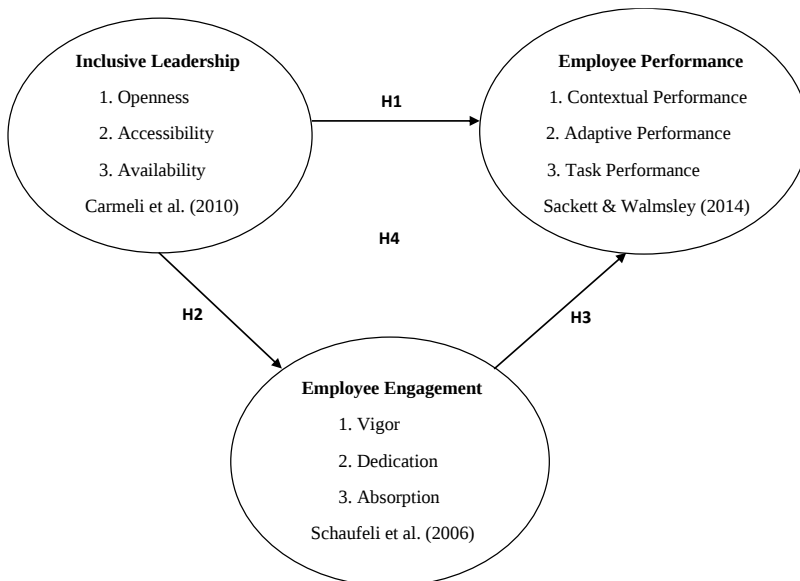


Fig 1. Framework

2 Method

This study employs a quantitative research method, an approach that emphasizes the objective calculation and measurement of variables, thereby enabling the research findings to be analyzed using statistical techniques. The approach used in this study is an explanatory survey, which examines causal relationships or cause-and-effect links between variables by

testing the extent to which the independent variable (X) influences the dependent variable (Y) (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

2.1 Population and Sample

The population of this study consisted of 503 production employees at PT Laksana Bus Manufaktur Ungaran. The sampling technique applied was proportional random sampling, which ensures that each production department is represented proportionally based on the number of employees in each department. The sample size was determined using the Slovin formula, resulting in a total of 223 respondents.

The questionnaire distribution process in this study was carried out through several stages. First, the preparation stage was conducted by ensuring that the research instrument was appropriate and relevant to the characteristics of production employees at PT. Laksana Bus Manufaktur Ungaran. The respondents were determined based on the research criteria, namely production employees who were included in the proportional random sampling procedure. Before the main data collection process, the questionnaire was reviewed to ensure that each statement item was understandable and capable of measuring the intended research variables. Administrative preparation, including research permission from the institution, was also completed before data collection.

Second, the distribution stage was conducted using a direct (offline) approach. The questionnaires were distributed face-to-face to selected respondents at PT. Laksana Bus Manufaktur Ungaran according to the predetermined sample allocation for each production department. This approach was selected to ensure that respondents received clear instructions and to achieve a high response rate. Third, during the implementation stage, the researcher provided explanations regarding the purpose of the study, the procedure for completing the questionnaire, and the confidentiality of respondents' answers. Respondents were informed that participation was voluntary and that the collected data would only be used for academic purposes. The researcher monitored the questionnaire completion process to ensure that all responses were properly filled in.

Finally, after the questionnaires were collected, data screening was conducted to verify the completeness and consistency of responses. Questionnaires with incomplete answers or inconsistent response patterns were excluded from further analysis. The completed and valid questionnaires were then processed and analyzed using the SmartPLS 4.1 software.

2.2 Instrument/ Data collection

This study used primary data obtained directly from production employees at PT Laksana Bus Manufaktur Ungaran. Data were collected through questionnaires distributed to selected respondents based on the proportional random sampling procedure. The questionnaire was distributed directly to respondents with the assistance of company representatives to ensure that each selected employee received and completed the questionnaire according to the research requirements.

The research instrument was developed based on established measurement scales from previous studies. Inclusive leadership was measured using indicators developed by Carmeli et al. (2010), consisting of 9 items. Employee performance was measured using the scale developed by Sackett & Walmsley (2014), consisting of 23 items. Meanwhile, employee engagement was measured using the instrument developed by Schaufeli et al. (2006), consisting of 17 items.

All variables were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire items were designed to measure respondents' perceptions regarding inclusive leadership practices, employee engagement

levels, and employee performance. The data collection process was conducted for four month, from December 2025 to Mach 2026. Before data collection, respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, the confidentiality of their responses, and that participation was voluntary. The researchers ensured that all collected data would only be used for academic purposes and that respondents' identities would remain confidential.

2.3 Data Analysis

In this study, two data analysis techniques were employed: descriptive statistical analysis and inferential statistical analysis. Descriptive statistical analysis utilized a Likert scale with a minimum score of 1 and a maximum of 5. Scoring was based on respondents' answers, evaluated using normative criteria. The inferential analysis technique used in this study was Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with the Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach using SmartPLS version 4.1 software, which includes hypothesis testing, the measurement model (outer model), and the structural model (inner model).

3 Results and Discussion

This section contains the results of empirical or theoretical studies, presented in a systematic, critical, and informative manner. The use of tables, figures, and other elements is limited to supporting or clarifying the discussion and is restricted to supporting substantial information, such as statistical test tables, model testing results, and others.

3.1 Results

This study involved production employees of PT. Laksana Bus Manufaktur Ungaran as research respondents. The characteristics of the 223 respondents are presented in Table 2 as follows:

Table 2. Characteristics Respondent

Respondent Characteristics	Frequency	Presentage (%)
Gender		
Man	223	100%
Total	223	100%
Age		
<20 years	12	5,38%
21-30 years	151	67,71%
31-40 years	52	23,32%
41-50 years	5	2,24%
>50 years	3	1,35%
Total	223	100%
Educational Background		
SD	3	1,35%
SMP	13	5,83%
SMA/K	202	90,58%
D3/S1	5	2,24%
Total	223	100%
Department		
Body Rangka	65	29,15%
Finishing	59	26,46%
Komponen	11	4,93%

Dempul & Cat	28	12,56%
Komponen Preparation	12	5,38%
Komponen Vacuum ABS	13	5,83%
Komponen Jok	9	4,04%
Komponen Frame Jok	13	5,83%
Komponen Kabel Set	7	3,14%
Komponen Body Rangka	6	2,69%
Total	223	100%
Length of Service		
<1 years	36	16,14%
1-5 years	156	69,96%
6-10 years	21	9,42%
>10 years	10	4,48%
Total	223	100%

Source: Primary data analyzed in SmartPLS 4.1 (2026)

The results of the questionnaire distribution show that all 223 respondents were male. Furthermore, the largest age group consisted of 151 respondents aged 21–30, indicating that the current workforce is dominated by individuals of working age. Based on highest level of education, the respondents were predominantly high school or vocational school graduates (202 people), indicating that the company is staffed by a majority of employees who are competent in their respective fields. The largest group of respondents, based on work experience, had 1–5 years of experience (156 people), indicating that the company has a sufficiently experienced workforce.

3.1.1 Analysis of Measurement Model Testing (Outer Model)

Convergent Validity

Convergent validity is met when each indicator of a construct has a strong correlation with its construct, as indicated by an outer loading value >0.70 (Hair et al., 2014). In addition, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value must also be >0.50 as evidence that the construct is able to explain more than half of the variance of its indicators. The results of the outer loading values for 223 respondents are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Outer Loading

Item	Inclusive Leadership (X)	Employee Engagement(Z)	Employee Performance (Y)	Description
EE1		.797		Valid
EE10		.756		Valid
EE11		.725		Valid
EE14		.787		Valid
EE2		.784		Valid
EE3		.758		Valid
EE4		.802		Valid
EE5		.811		Valid
EE6		.809		Valid
EE7		.808		Valid
EE8		.884		Valid

EE9		.859		Valid
EP10			.733	Valid
EP11			.705	Valid
EP12			.756	Valid
EP17			.733	Valid
EP18			.738	Valid
EP20			.774	Valid
EP21			.748	Valid
EP22			.721	Valid
EP3			.807	Valid
EP4			.742	Valid
EP5			.772	Valid
EP6			.742	Valid
EP7			.756	Valid
EP8			.833	Valid
IL1	.837			Valid
IL2	.843			Valid
IL3	.863			Valid
IL4	.842			Valid
IL5	.863			Valid
IL6	.861			Valid
IL7	.857			Valid
IL8	.850			Valid
IL9	.788			Valid

Source: Primary data analyzed in SmartPLS 4.1 (2026)

Next, the results of the convergent validity test using Average Variance Extracted (AVE) are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Variable	AVE	Description
Employee Engagement (Z)	.639	Valid
Employee Performance (Y)	.570	Valid
Inclusive Leadership (X)	.714	Valid

Source: Primary data analyzed in SmartPLS 4.1 (2026)

Based on Table 4, the AVE values for each latent variable are above 0.50. Thus, all constructs in this study can be considered valid because they meet the criteria for convergent validity.

Discriminant Validity

According to Hair et al. (2014), an instrument is considered to have good discriminant validity if the cross-loading value for each indicator is >0.70 . The results of the discriminant validity test for 223 respondents are presented in Table 5 below.

Based on the cross-loadings in Table 5, each item shows a value >0.70 . Therefore, it can be concluded that all indicators for each variable have met the criteria for discriminant validity.

Table 5. Cross Loading Factor

Item	Employee Engagement(Z)	Employee Performance (Y)	Inclusive Leadership (X)	Description
EE1	.797	.671	.350	Valid
EE10	.756	.662	.312	Valid
EE11	.725	.616	.272	Valid
EE14	.787	.648	.350	Valid
EE2	.784	.666	.380	Valid
EE3	.758	.539	.327	Valid
EE4	.802	.667	.387	Valid
EE5	.811	.635	.400	Valid
EE6	.809	.649	.350	Valid
EE7	.808	.665	.364	Valid
EE8	.884	.723	.412	Valid
EE9	.859	.724	.399	Valid
EP10	.662	.733	.283	Valid
EP11	.579	.705	.312	Valid
EP12	.649	.756	.316	Valid
EP17	.664	.733	.290	Valid
EP18	.596	.738	.436	Valid
EP20	.631	.774	.307	Valid
EP21	.591	.748	.288	Valid
EP22	.597	.721	.326	Valid
EP3	.673	.807	.378	Valid
EP4	.556	.742	.221	Valid
EP5	.606	.772	.299	Valid
EP6	.603	.742	.248	Valid
EP7	.609	.756	.348	Valid
EP8	.647	.833	.363	Valid
IL1	.381	.373	.837	Valid
IL2	.367	.355	.843	Valid
IL3	.370	.364	.863	Valid
IL4	.381	.376	.842	Valid
IL5	.371	.352	.863	Valid
IL6	.409	.344	.861	Valid
IL7	.395	.354	.857	Valid
IL8	.420	.385	.850	Valid
IL9	.319	.267	.788	Valid

Source: Primary data analyzed in SmartPLS 4.1 (2026)

Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

To further assess discriminant validity, the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) was employed. HTMT evaluates the degree of distinction between constructs by comparing correlations across different constructs. A construct is considered to have adequate

discriminant validity when the HTMT value is below the recommended threshold. The results of the HTMT analysis are presented in the following table.

Table 6. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	Employee Engagement (Z)	Employee Performance (Y)	Inclusive Leadership (X)
Employee Engagement (Z)			
Employee Performance (Y)	0.849		
Inclusive Leadership (X)	0.454	0.456	

Based on the results of the HTMT test in Table 6, all inter-construct values <0.90. This shows that each construct has good discriminant validity and is able to measure different concepts.

Fornell-Larcker

In addition to HTMT, discriminant validity was also examined using the Fornell-Larcker Criterion. This approach compares the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of each construct with its correlations with other constructs. Discriminant validity is established when the square root of AVE is greater than the corresponding inter-construct correlations. The results of the Fornell-Larcker analysis are presented in the following table.

Table 7. Fornell-Larcker

	Employee Engagement (Z)	Employee Performance (Y)	Inclusive Leadership (X)
Employee Engagement (Z)	0.740		
Employee Performance (Y)	0.819	0.705	
Inclusive Leadership (X)	0.442	0.435	0.845

The results of the Fornell-Larcker test in Table 7 showed that the square root value of AVE in each construct was higher than the correlation with the other constructs. Thus, the research model has met the discriminant validity.

Reliability Test

Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability. Cronbach's Alpha serves to assess the minimum reliability threshold, while Composite Reliability describes the actual construct reliability. An instrument is considered reliable if both Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values are >0.70 Hair et al. (2014). The results of the reliability test for 223 respondents are presented in Table 8 below.

Table 8. Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Description
Employee Engagement (Z)	.950	.957	Reliable
Employee Performance (Y)	.948	.955	Reliable
Inclusive Leadership (X)	.942	.949	Reliable

Source: Primary data analyzed in SmartPLS 4.1 (2026)

Based on Table 8, all latent variables exhibit Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values greater than 0.70. This indicates that all statement items fall into the reliable category and can therefore be used as accurate and consistent measurement instruments.

3.1.2 Structural Equation Modeling Analysis (Inner Model)

Model Fit (Normed Fit)

The Normed Fit Index (NFI) value of a model is obtained by comparing the Chi-square value of the estimated model with that of the null model. The NFI value ranges from 0 to 1, where a value closer to 1 indicates a better model fit. The NFI values in this study are presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Fit Summary

	<i>Saturated model</i>	<i>Estimated model</i>
Chi-square	1248.576	1248.576
NFI	.816	.816

Source: Primary data analyzed in SmartPLS 4.1 (2026)

Based on Table 9, the Normed Fit Index (NFI) value for the research model is 0.816, or 81.6%. This indicates that the research model exhibits a fairly good level of fit between the observed data and the expected values.

F² for Effect Size

The F-Square (effect size) values in this study were obtained through PLS algorithm processing using SmartPLS 4.1 software and classified based on their level of influence: weak (0.02), medium (0.15), and large (0.35). The calculation results are presented in Table 10 below.

Table 10. Effect Size

Variable	<i>Effect Size</i>	Categori
Inclusive Leadership → Employee Performance	.009	Low
Inclusive Leadership → Employee Engagement	.255	Medium
Employee Engagement → Employee Performance	1.568	Strong
Average	.610	Strong

Source: Primary data analyzed in SmartPLS 4.1 (2026)

The average effect size in this study was 0.610. This result indicates that the magnitude of the relationship between variables in this research model falls into the “large” effect size category.

Predictive Relevance (Q²)

In evaluating the Q² value, it is stipulated that if $Q^2 > 0$, then the variable is considered to have good predictive ability. The results of the Q² value calculations in this study are presented in Table 11 below.

Table 11. Predictive Relevance (Q²)

Variable	<i>Q²predict</i>
Employee Engagement (Z)	.190
Employee Performance (Y)	.160

Source: Primary data analyzed in SmartPLS 4.1 (2026)

Based on Table 11, the Q² values for the employee engagement variable and the employee performance variable are 0.190 and 0.160, respectively. Since both values are greater than ($Q^2 > 0$), the research model is deemed to have good predictive validity.

R² for Endogenous Latent Variables

The coefficient of determination (R-squared) is used to measure the extent of the simultaneous influence of exogenous variables on endogenous variables, with values ranging from 0 to 1. R-squared values are categorized as 0.75 (strong), 0.50 (moderate), and 0.25 (weak). The results of the coefficient of determination test are presented in Table 12 below.

Table 12. Endogenous Latent Variables

Variable	R-Square
Employee Engagement (Z)	0.203
Employee Performance (Y)	0.679

Source: Primary data analyzed in SmartPLS 4.1 (2026)

Based on Table 12, the R-Square value of Employee Engagement (0.203) indicates a relatively weak explanatory power, suggesting that inclusive leadership alone is insufficient to explain employee engagement comprehensively. This finding implies the presence of other important determinants of engagement that were not included in the current model. In contrast, the R-Square value of Employee Performance (0.679) demonstrates substantial explanatory power, indicating that inclusive leadership and employee engagement jointly explain a considerable proportion of employee performance variance. The stronger explanatory power for employee performance suggests that employee engagement functions as an important mechanism through which inclusive leadership translates into improved performance outcomes.

Hypothesis Testing

The researcher used a significance level of 5%, so the acceptable p-value must be <0.05. Additionally, the hypothesis testing is based on a comparison between the T-statistic value and the t-table value. In this study, the t-table value used was 1.96; therefore, the t-statistic value from the hypothesis testing must be >1.96 for the hypothesis to be accepted. The results of the hypothesis testing are presented in Table 13.

Table 13. Hypothesis Test Results

Variable		Original Sample (O)	T-Statistics (O/STDEV)	P-Values	Description
Inclusive Leadership → Employee Performance	H1	.061	1.351	.177	Rejected
Inclusive Leadership → Employee Engagement	H2	.450	4.901	.000	Accepted
Employee Engagement → Employee Performance	H3	.795	22.233	.000	Accepted
Inclusive Leadership → Employee Engagement → Employee Performance	H4	.358	4.527	.000	Accepted

Source: Primary data analyzed in SmartPLS 4.1 (2026)

3.2 Discussion

Based on the results of the path coefficient tests for both direct and indirect effects, a discussion regarding the acceptance or rejection of the research hypotheses can be presented. This discussion is outlined as follows.

3.2.1 *The Effect of Inclusive Leadership on Employee Performance*

Based on the results of the hypothesis test, a t-statistical value of 1.351 (<1.96) and a p-value of 0.177 (>0.05) were obtained. These results show that H1 stating that inclusive leadership directly has a positive effect on employee performance is rejected. These findings show that although PT. Laksana Bus Manufaktur Ungaran has implemented inclusive leadership practices, such as open communication, leader accessibility, and opportunities for employees to express their opinions, these practices do not directly improve employee performance.

This condition may occur because the characteristics of production work at PT. Laksana Bus Manufaktur Ungaran require employees to prioritize compliance with operational procedures, production standards, safety regulations, and task completion targets. In a manufacturing environment, employee performance is not only determined by the relationship between leaders and employees but is also strongly influenced by employees' internal motivation, work involvement, and commitment to their responsibilities. Therefore, leadership behavior alone may not be sufficient to directly improve performance when employees have not fully internalized work responsibilities and organizational expectations.

The findings also indicate that the influence of inclusive leadership on employee performance may operate through employee psychological mechanisms, particularly employee engagement. Leaders who demonstrate inclusive behaviors may create a supportive environment, but the impact on performance occurs when employees respond by developing emotional attachment, dedication, and willingness to contribute beyond their formal duties. These findings do not fully support the direct mechanism explained by Social Exchange Theory, which assumes that positive treatment from leaders will immediately encourage employees to reciprocate through improved performance (Ramadhan & Wulandari, 2025). Instead, the results suggest that the reciprocal process requires an intermediate stage, namely employee engagement, before producing performance improvements.

3.2.2 *The Effect of Inclusive Leadership on Employee Engagement*

Based on the hypothesis testing results, a t-statistic value of 4.901 (>1.96) and a p-value of 0.000 (<0.05) were obtained. These results indicate that H2, which states that inclusive leadership has a positive effect on employee engagement, is accepted. This finding explains that inclusive leadership practices implemented at PT. Laksana Bus Manufaktur Ungaran are able to increase employee engagement. Inclusive leadership practices, such as providing opportunities for employees to communicate with management, involving employees in discussions, and creating openness through Daily Routine Meetings (DRM), encourage employees to feel valued and supported. These conditions strengthen employees' psychological attachment toward their work, which is reflected through enthusiasm, dedication, and willingness to focus on completing their responsibilities.

This finding supports Social Exchange Theory, which explains that employees tend to respond positively to supportive treatment from leaders by demonstrating positive work attitudes and behaviors (Ilyas et al., 2024). In this context, inclusive leadership acts as a form of organizational support that encourages employees to increase their engagement with their work.

3.2.3 *The Effect of Employee Engagement on Employee Performance*

Based on the hypothesis testing results, a t-statistic value of 22.233 (>1.96) and a p-value of 0.000 (<0.05) were obtained. These results indicate that H3, which states that employee

engagement has a positive effect on employee performance, is accepted. This finding indicates that employees with higher levels of engagement tend to demonstrate better performance. At PT. Laksana Bus Manufaktur Ungaran, employee engagement is reflected through employees' dedication, enthusiasm, sense of responsibility, and willingness to complete challenging tasks. Employees who are emotionally and cognitively engaged tend to show greater effort in achieving work targets, maintaining work quality, and completing tasks according to production standards.

These findings support Social Exchange Theory, which explains that employees who receive positive experiences from their work environment will reciprocate through positive behaviors, such as increased commitment and performance (Jimoh, 2025). Therefore, employee engagement becomes an important psychological mechanism that transforms positive leadership practices into improved employee performance.

3.2.4 The Effect of Inclusive Leadership on Employee Performance with Employee Engagement as a Mediating Variable

Based on the hypothesis testing results, the indirect effect analysis obtained a t-statistic value of 4.527 (>1.96) and a p-value of 0.000 (<0.05). These results indicate that H4, which states that inclusive leadership has a positive effect on employee performance through employee engagement as a mediating variable, is accepted. The mediation results indicate that employee engagement acts as a full mediation variable in the relationship between inclusive leadership and employee performance. This is demonstrated by the insignificant direct effect of inclusive leadership on employee performance (p-value = 0.064), while the indirect effect through employee engagement is significant. Therefore, inclusive leadership does not directly improve employee performance but influences performance through increasing employee engagement.

This finding explains that inclusive leadership at PT. Laksana Bus Manufaktur Ungaran functions primarily by creating a supportive work environment that encourages employees to become more psychologically attached to their work. Through openness, communication, and leader support, employees develop higher levels of dedication, enthusiasm, and responsibility, which subsequently contribute to improved performance. These results strengthen Social Exchange Theory by demonstrating that reciprocal relationships between leaders and employees occur through a gradual process. Employees do not immediately respond to inclusive leadership behaviors with improved performance; instead, they first develop positive psychological states, namely employee engagement, which then encourages better work outcomes (Biswakarma & Subedi, 2025).

4 Conclusion

Based on the results of the study of 223 production employees at PT. Laksana Bus Manufaktur Ungaran, it can be concluded that inclusive leadership does not directly influence employee performance. Furthermore, inclusive leadership directly influences employee engagement, and employee engagement directly influences employee performance. The mediating variable of employee engagement mediates the indirect effect of inclusive leadership on employee performance. This study remains focused on the automotive manufacturing sector; therefore, future researchers are encouraged to expand the scope of their research to include different organizational sectors and cultural contexts to achieve a broader level of generalizability. Future researchers may include additional variables such as organizational culture, other leadership styles, and personality.

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