



Dimensional Role of Inclusive Leadership on Task Performance: The Intervening Effect of Thriving at Work

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: August 12, 2025

Revised: September 25, 2025

Accepted: September 27, 2025

Published: September 30, 2025

Keywords:

Belongingness
Inclusive leadership
Task performance
Thriving at work
Uniqueness

ABSTRACT

The study offers a novel perspective on the mechanism by which thriving at work bridges the relationship between inclusive leadership and task performance, using self-determination theory. The current study examines the dimensional impact of inclusive leadership (Uniqueness, Belongingness) on task performance through thriving at work in the relatively understudied public healthcare sector of AJK, Pakistan, utilising three waves of data collection using a purposive sampling technique. Confirmatory factor analysis, validity and reliability assessment for 250 responses were conducted on AMOS. Hypotheses testing was done using Hayes Macro on SPSS. Results revealed a significant effect of both uniqueness and belongingness on employees' task performance through the mediation of thriving at work. The study offers insightful implications for healthcare by highlighting belongingness and uniqueness as crucial dimensions of inclusive leadership, enabling thriving at work and achieving desired task performance.

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INTRODUCTION

Although COVID-19 has been managed, the world continues to confront and grapple with the repercussions and challenges it poses (Fatima & Khan, 2025). The uncertain circumstances and relentless obstacles dictate strategies to seek resilience amid crises. In dynamic settings where unstructured problems are prevalent, organisations are left to regulate their responses and devise effective strategies to cope with the situation (Liu et al., 2025). Owing to the stressful times, the performance of healthcare personnel became highly significant, as the health of the people depended on their efficiency in completing tasks amid the pandemic (Martínez-Cabezas et al., 2025). Employee task performance in the healthcare sector is the determinant of vital patient care and overall efficiency (Gong et al., 2024). As healthcare emergencies brought a focus on employee

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How to Cite:

Ashiq, A., & Khan, M. A. (2025). Dimensional Role of Inclusive Leadership on Task Performance: The Intervening Effect of Thriving at Work. *International Journal of Trends and Innovations in Business & Social Sciences*, 3(3), 219–231. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17344320>

performance in healthcare, managers began to seek strategies to ensure optimal performance (Mehmood et al., 2025).

Alongside routine operating activities, public health emergencies augment the workload and obligations of healthcare employees, which exacerbates the performance issue (Hussain et al., 2025). Additionally, health sector professionals are required to execute their responsibilities with exceptional accuracy and dedication, regardless of external circumstances, as patients' lives depend on their actions (Ceschel et al., 2025). They must execute their jobs with maximum precision and punctuality, since their efficient task performance impacts not only their own effectiveness but also the overall performance of the organisation (Sherwani et al., 2023). Consequently, it is essential to understand the task performance of employees, particularly within the healthcare industry, and to identify methods for improvement.

Healthcare professionals in Pakistan, particularly in the public sector, are undercompensated and overburdened (Mahmood et al., 2024). Adverse working conditions, including extended hours, excessive patient loads, and insufficient administrative assistance, lead to burnout and demotivation among healthcare workers, hence impacting the performance of health sector staff (Mahmood et al., 2024). Similarly, in Azad Jammu and Kashmir, healthcare professionals who are essential in offering care to distressed patients consistently encounter high-pressure and trauma-laden work environments that impact their overall performance (Arif & Bannian, 2023). Moreover, the absence of leadership support to address the issues presented by hostile infrastructure exacerbates the status of the healthcare industry in AJK (Mehmood et al., 2021). Hassled work schedules, excessive workload, and a lack of effective leadership significantly impede the task performance of healthcare professionals, resulting in a discernible deterioration in the quality of patient care (Shakil & Butt, 2023). The interplay between increasing workload and increasing population demand results in overburdened healthcare personnel, leading to diminished performance (Liu et al., 2017). The decline in work-life balance amid increased workload creates a loop of poor employee task performance in the healthcare industry (Arif & Bannian, 2023).

Of all the strategies to enhance employee performance, the leadership approach is central in shaping employees' task performance (Siyal, 2023). Although several leadership strategies have been established to achieve employee-related outcomes, as healthcare professionals are trained experts in their field, inclusive leadership is the most suitable approach (Gong et al., 2024). Inclusive leadership is a distinct leadership style that emphasises openness, accessibility, and availability within a psychologically safe environment (Carmeli et al., 2010) and fulfils employees' needs for uniqueness and belongingness (Randel et al., 2018). This leadership style has the potential to contribute to various positive organisational outcomes and could be especially effective in diverse workplaces (Kim et al., 2024).

Inclusive leadership is known to have a favourable impact on various positive outcomes, including employee task performance (Gong et al., 2025). However, the mechanism through which it impacts needs to be further studied. Employees with higher energy levels and enhanced learning capabilities tend to perform their tasks more effectively than those with lower energy levels and less effective learning capabilities (Porath et al., 2022). This phenomenon is known as thriving at work (Porath et al., 2012). When leaders create an environment where employees feel at home and know that their individuality is valued, they thrive in such environments and have a positive impact on their task performance (Kim et al., 2023).

The current study makes a significant contribution to the existing literature on employee performance and inclusive leadership in several ways. Initially, it examines the influence of inclusive leadership on task performance via the mediation of thriving at work. This mechanism is both innovative and suggested by prior research (Biswakarma & Subedi, 2025; Burhan & Khan, 2024; Gürbüz et al., 2024; Okros & Vîrgă, 2025). Biswakarma and Subedi (2025) and Burhan and Khan (2024) suggested studying how leadership style impacts employee task performance through different mechanisms. Furthermore, Okros and Vîrgă (2025) proposed examining how different leadership styles lead to thriving at work, and Shafaei and Nejati (2024) recommended studying the link between inclusive leadership and thriving at work.

Historically, the aspects of inclusive leadership that have been most researched, as coined by Carmeli et al. (2010), include openness, availability, and accessibility. The current study aims to examine the dimensions of uniqueness and belongingness proposed by Randel et al. (2018) and suggested by Gürbüz

et al. (2024), which have received little attention in the past. The objective of the current study to study the impact of these two dimensions on task performance separately. The ultimate question which the current study aims to answer is whether uniqueness and belongingness have a significant impact on employee task performance mediated through thriving at work. The study provides novel insights into the mechanisms by which both facets of inclusive leadership impact thriving at work separately, ensuring a sense of belonging and appreciating their uniqueness, which consequently impacts task performance. Ultimately, the present study is undertaken in the health sector of AJK, which is underrepresented in mainstream research and has distinct organisational and geographical problems.

Theoretical Foundation

The current study is grounded in self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which posits that individuals react differently to various forms of motivation derived from their work. Individuals are more inclined to excel and behave autonomously when their motivation is intrinsic rather than influenced by external influences (Ryan & Deci, 2024). The theory asserts that individuals possess three fundamental psychological needs (autonomy, relatedness, and competence) whose fulfilment engenders positive employee outcomes (Gagné et al., 2018). Inclusive leadership instils a sense of belonging by seeking input and ensuring support when needed (Randel, 2025). They also value uniqueness in employees by facilitating and appreciating unique and unconventional inputs. Such attributes of inclusive leadership offer the fulfilment of psychological needs, which stimulate intrinsic motivation (Merlini et al., 2025). The satisfaction of fundamental psychological needs and innate motivation instil vitality and continuous learning in employees, leading to thriving (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Thriving at work, enabled by intrinsic motivation, enables employees to manage time, prioritise, and carry out job tasks effectively, which manifests as task performance (Bartram et al., 2023).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Inclusive Leadership (Uniqueness and Belongingness)

Inclusive leadership is characterised by leaders who advocate for their subordinates, provide equitable treatment, involve them in decision-making processes, and appreciate diverse perspectives (Randel et al., 2018). It involves imparting resources such as support, feedback, and direction to subordinates to facilitate the attainment of their performance objectives (Huang et al., 2025). The dimensions of inclusive leadership articulated by Carmeli et al. (2010) have predominated the study landscape for an extended period. However, Randel et al. (2018) introduced an alternative perspective on inclusive leadership that emphasises appreciating individuals in their roles, fostering a sense of belonging within the workplace, and concurrently recognising their uniqueness.

Uniqueness and Thriving at Work

Uniqueness is defined by an inclusive leader's embrace and promotion of varied perspectives, deriving insights from differing ideas, and enabling people to engage openly and productively by eliminating obstacles (Shafaei & Nejati, 2024). The acts and behaviours of inclusive leaders enhance employees' perceptions of uniqueness and individuality in the workplace (Korkmaz, et al., 2022). When inclusive leaders seek employee feedback, they communicate to their teams or organisations that each individual is distinct and that their perspectives are valued (Merlini et al., 2024). It enables employees to feel revitalised and thrive, as workplace autonomy promotes contentment, alleviates emotional exhaustion, and encourages peer learning (Porath et al., 2022). Employees are more likely to thrive in situations that foster learning and personal development, while also energising them via recognition of their accomplishments, which is fundamental to workplace thriving (Zeng et al., 2020). The uniqueness fostered by inclusive leaders promotes employee thriving by fulfilling essential psychological demands outlined in self-determination theory (Deci et al., 2017). Hence, it is hypothesised that:

H₁: Uniqueness has a significant and positive impact on thriving at work.

Belongingness and Thriving at Work

Belongingness signifies that inclusive leaders assist their subordinates, ensure equitable treatment, share decision-making authority, solicit input, and encourage people to approach leaders when necessary

(Randel et al., 2018). The assistance provided by inclusive leaders instils enthusiasm and profound commitment in individuals (Kim et al., 2023). These inclusive leadership strategies foster enthusiasm for continuous improvement, perpetual learning, and maintaining energy in the workplace (Man & Fan, 2025). Employees who possess a profound emotional connection and sense of belonging to the organisation are more likely to feel a heightened sense of vitality and compatibility, hence promoting their thriving (Manfreda et al., 2025). Employees engage with colleagues and share ideas, facilitated by the sense of security derived from their workplace belonging (Korkmaz et al., 2022).

Moreover, through their behaviours, inclusive leaders demonstrate to their employees that they are valued members of the workplace and essential to the team, thereby impacting the employees' learning process (Randel, 2025). Employees are compelled to engage in ongoing learning and skill enhancement to ensure the success and sustainability of their organisation (Kim et al., 2023). A sense of belonging provides employees with essential support to maintain motivation and cultivate a desire for ongoing learning and personal development, ultimately leading to thriving in the workplace (Porath et al., 2022). The theory of self-determination posits that the satisfaction of essential psychological needs influences the intrinsic motivation of employees, thereby fostering their development and thriving. Hence, it is hypothesised that:

H₂: Belongingness has a significant positive impact on thriving at work

Thriving at Work and Task Performance

Thriving at work is a crucial element within an organisational context, yielding numerous significant and beneficial outcomes for both individuals and the organisation as a whole (Manfreda et al., 2025). The state of thriving at work instils the eagerness and inclination to execute assigned tasks and responsibilities efficiently and effectively, which is reflected in task performance (Bartram et al., 2023). Employees and organisations strive to enhance task performance in order to achieve organisational goals and objectives (Malik et al., 2023). Employees who are satisfied and derive intrinsic motivation from their work are more likely to outperform those who are less intrinsically motivated. Thriving personnel exhibit elevated energy levels, which enhance their task performance and timeliness; they also possess a greater learning capacity that aids in the execution of their responsibilities (Elahi et al., 2020). According to self-determination theory, individuals whose fundamental psychological needs are fulfilled in a work environment and experience thriving at work are more likely to possess heightened innate motivation and elevated energy levels, thereby enhancing their task performance (Gerbasi et al., 2015). Hence, it is hypothesised that:

H₃: Thriving at work has a significant and positive impact on task performance.

Mediating Role of Thriving at Work

Uniqueness and Task Performance through Thriving at Work

The uniqueness dimension of inclusive leadership allows leaders to demonstrate the significance of diverse perspectives and mutual learning (Randel et al., 2018) by surmounting barriers that impede unique contributions, thereby ensuring participation from all members (Merlini et al., 2025). Inclusive leaders who prioritise individuality foster lifelong learning, as employees perceive their skills as acknowledged, which drives them to pursue further learning opportunities (Randel, 2025). Inclusive leaders who prioritise employee input cultivate a stimulating workplace that promotes personal development and flexibility to the organisation's changing requirements (Kim & Scullion, 2025). Employees thrive in settings that foster learning and personal development while invigorating them through the acknowledgement of their accomplishments (Manfreda et al., 2025). In line with self-determination theory, when employees' fundamental psychological needs are satisfied, they exhibit heightened energy levels and improved learning in the form of thriving at work (Manfreda et al., 2025), which is linked to several organisational and individual level positive outcomes (Jiang & Wei, 2024). When employees experience thriving at their workplace, their interest and inclination to complete the designated tasks are heightened (Bartram et al., 2023). In accordance with self-determination theory, a positive state of thriving leads to self-regulated involvement in executing specified tasks, resulting in enhanced task performance. Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

H₄: Thriving at work mediates the relationship between uniqueness and task performance.

Belongingness and Task Performance through Thriving at Work

Inclusive leaders foster a sense of group membership and belonging, stimulate emotional commitment to the organisation, and augment employees' engagement and participation inside the organisation (Merlini et al., 2025; Randel, 2025). In these environments, employees engage with colleagues and share ideas freely, bolstered by the sense of belonging and connection that inclusive leadership fosters (Korkmaz et al., 2022). Moreover, inclusive leaders who demonstrate via their actions that employees are valued members of the organisation and essential to the team enrich the employees' learning experience (Randel et al., 2018). Inclusive leadership promotes thriving through continuous learning and vitality to support their organisation's success and sustainability by imparting a sense of belongingness in employees (Kim et al., 2024).

Thriving at work is enhanced by an environment that fosters a sense of belonging, cultivated by inclusive leaders who motivate employees to perform their tasks more effectively, resulting in heightened energy levels and improved learning (Jha et al., 2024). In line with self-determination theory, the basic need fulfilment enabled by the relentless pursuit of learning and vitality, which is integral to workplace thriving, stimulates employees to perform work tasks efficiently and effectively (Ryan & Deci, 2024). Hence, it is hypothesised that:

H₅: Thriving at work mediates the relationship between belongingness and task performance.

Based on the above discussion, Figure 1 depicts the developed research model.

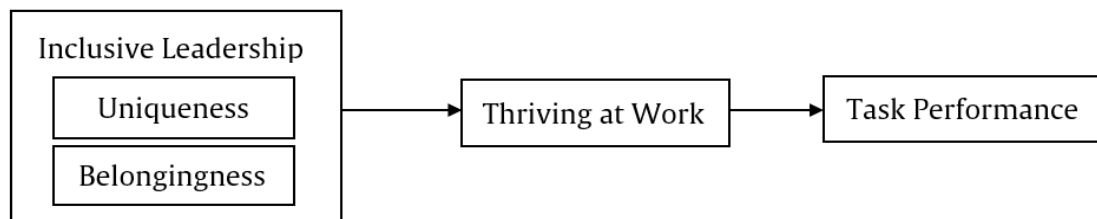


Fig. 1. Research Model

METHODOLOGY

The role of the healthcare sector has emerged as central to enabling nations' health in current times. Therefore, the study focused on frontline healthcare professionals, including doctors, nurses, and paramedics of AJK, for data collection. In line with positivist philosophy, a purposive sampling strategy was used to collect data from public sector hospitals within the tehsil and district headquarters of AJK. Although purposive sampling strategy limits generalizability but it was the most fitted for the current study, because it allows the researcher to choose the respondents based on their relevance to the study like experience, and education etc. This sampling choice allowed the researcher to approach and collect data from employees having at least five years of experience, which would not have been possible with any other sampling technique.

A self-administered questionnaire was used to solicit responses from targeted employees, yielding 250 accurate and timely responses. Furthermore, the manifestation of effects of uniqueness, belongingness and thriving at work dictate some time, therefore, the data collection fixated on three-time intervals, each three weeks apart. Time lagged approach also mitigates the risk of common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). To mitigate the non-responsive bias, 355 questionnaires were distributed, and 312 accurate responses were collected during the first interval. During the second interval, 312 questionnaires were distributed, yielding 283 fully completed responses. In the third interval, 257 questionnaires were returned, with 7 incomplete submissions rejected. During the initial phase of data collection, information on demographic and independent variables was gathered, while mediating and dependent variables were acquired in the subsequent second and third phases, respectively.

Measurement

For data collection, all well-established scales were adopted from previous studies. The dimensions of uniqueness and belongingness in inclusive leadership were measured using the scale developed by Merlini et al. (2025), which consisted of four and six items, respectively. Thriving at work was assessed

using a ten-item scale developed by Spreitzer et al. (2005). Task performance was evaluated using a scale developed by Ramos-Villagrasa et al. (2019), which comprises five items. Due to data collection from a single source, the potential for common technique bias exists; therefore, the remedies proposed by Podsakoff et al. (2024) were employed. Furthermore, Herman’s single factor was also conducted to test the variance, and it showed no CMV as the variance was less than 50%.

RESULTS & FINDINGS

The current study used quantitative data analysis techniques to analyse data. SPSS and AMOS were used to enter and analyse data, and to derive the results for the current study. SPSS was used to analyse the data and conduct demographic analysis, which is presented in Table 1. While AMOS was used to conduct confirmatory factor analysis, validity and reliability assessment. Hayes process macro was used for hypotheses testing on SPSS.

Table 1
Demographics

	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	155	62
	Female	95	38
Age	26 to 35 Years	76	30.4
	36 to 45 Years	73	29.2
	46 to 55 Years	53	21.2
	Above 55 Years	48	19.2
Education	Up to Bachelors (14 Years)	66	26.4
	Bachelors/Masters (16 Years)	145	58
	MS/M.Phil. (18 Years)	39	15.6
Experience	6 to 10 Years	53	21.2
	11 to 15 Years	62	24.8
	16 to 20 Years	45	18
	21 to 25 years	58	23.2
	Above 25 Years	32	12.8

Table 2 depicts descriptive analysis. Skewness and kurtosis fall within the acceptable threshold of ± 2 , indicating normality (Hair et al., 2014).

Table 2
Descriptive Analysis

Variables	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
TAW	3.627	.918	-1.071	.452
BEL	3.637	.874	-.798	.344
UNIQ	3.740	.803	-.797	-.060
TP	3.580	.917	-1.162	.407

TAW= Thriving at work, BEL= Belongingness, UNIQ= Uniqueness, TP= Task Performance

Table 3 contains composite reliability, average variance extracted, and discriminant validity. The average variance extracted (AVE) represents the proportion of variance that is uniquely attributable to the variable itself. Furthermore, the values on the diagonal represent convergent validity and should be higher than the values in other areas. Composite reliability adheres to the standard set by Hair et al. (2014), i.e., above 0.8. The value of AVE for all constructs was ≥ 0.5 , compliant with the guidelines of Fornell and Larcker (1981). The table illustrates compliance with the criteria, indicating the suitability of the data.

Table 3
Validity Analysis

Convergent and Discriminant Validity								
Variables	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	1	2	3	4
TAW	.932	.580	.287	.934	.761			
BEL	.846	.500	.191	.852	.437***	.693		
UNIQ	.928	.763	.287	.931	.535***	.271***	.873	
TP	.855	.544	.120	.867	.294	.247	.347	.738

After validity analysis, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to analyse whether items of the different variables load on their respective constructs and whether the items measure what they are

supposed to measure. All items loaded accurately on their respective constructs, with values ranging from 0.591 to 0.905, as shown in Table 4. Values for fit indices also lie within an acceptable range. Furthermore, Figure 2 provides a pictorial illustration of the measurement model.

Table 4
Confirmatory Factor Analysis

	Constructs & Items	Estimates
Belongingness	BEL1	0.591
	BEL2	0.669
	BEL3	0.735
	BEL4	0.758
	BEL5	0.712
	BEL6	0.680
Uniqueness	UNIQ1	0.836
	UNIQ2	0.888
	UNIQ3	0.863
	UNIQ4	0.905
Thriving at Work	TAW1	0.774
	TAW2	0.690
	TAW3	0.806
	TAW4	0.783
	TAW5	0.759
	TAW6	0.767
	TAW7	0.809
	TAW8	0.724
	TAW9	0.789
	TAW10	0.702
Task Performance	TP1	0.732
	TP2	0.705
	TP3	0.810
	TP4	0.802
	TP5	0.623

Extraction method: Principal Axis Factory
 Rotation method: Promax with Kaiser Normalisation. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.
 Measurement Model fit statistics: $\chi^2=586.805$, $DF=269$, $\chi^2/df=2.181$, $CFI=.915$, $SRMR=0.064$, $RMSEA=.069$, $GFI=.839$, $TLI=.878$

Note: χ^2 =Chi-Square, df = Degree of freedom, CFI = comparative fit index, $SRMR$ = Standardized root mean square residual, $RMSEA$ = Root mean square error of approximation, GFI = goodness of fit, TLI = Tucker-Lewis Index

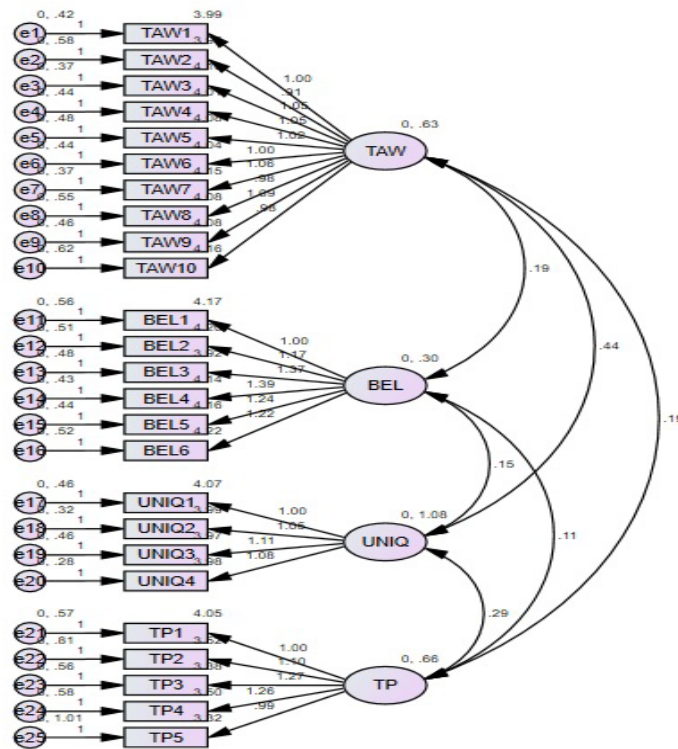


Fig. 2. Measurement Model

Table 5
Hypotheses Testing

Relationship		Estimate	S.E	t-value	P		
UNIQ	TAW	0.362	.040	8.986	***		
BEL	TAW	0.393	.065	6.082	***		
TAW	TP	0.335	.072	4.653	***		
Indirect Hypothesis							
Relationship		Total Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Bootstrap S.E	LLCI	ULCI
UNIQ	TAW TP	.2733	.2016	.0718	.0399	.0054	.1624
BEL	TAW TP	.2976	.1908	.1067	.0456	.0254	.2041

Note: S.E= Standard error, ULCI= Upper confidence Interval, LLCI= Lower confidence interval, ***=P<0.01

Hypothesis testing was conducted after the measurement model, and it showed that uniqueness and belongingness predict 36.2% and 39.3% of the variation in thriving at work, respectively. Thriving at work is responsible for 33.5% of variations in task performance. Therefore, all three direct hypotheses are supported. Although direct, indirect and total effect revealed the presence of mediation, and acceptance of hypotheses 4 and 5, VAF is used for the determination of nature of mediation.

$$VAF = \text{Indirect effect} / \text{Total Effect}$$

Mediation is said to be partial if the value is less than 0.8 which is the case for both uniqueness (.2627) and belongingness (.3585). Therefore, it is concluded that thriving at work partially mediates the relationship between both uniqueness and belongingness with task performance.

Discussion

The study enriches the literature by elaborating on the significance of the belongingness and uniqueness dimensions of inclusive leadership, highlighting the role of a sense of belonging and authorisation to express individuality in terms of skills and abilities in fostering a learning-oriented, energetic work setting rooted in thriving at work. The study fills the gap in the literature by delving into understudied pathways to attain task performance, utilising the dimensional role of inclusive leadership. The study provides insight into the separate roles of uniqueness and belongingness in fostering a constructive state of thriving at work in healthcare, which enables the direly needed behaviours in the healthcare sector.

The results of the present study align with those of research conducted by Gong et al. (2024) and Siyal (2023), which elaborate on the role of inclusive leadership in employee performance. Inclusive leadership fosters a psychologically safe workplace in which employees feel a sense of belonging and their uniqueness is acknowledged, thereby enhancing constructive conditions such as psychological empowerment to augment employee performance (Siyal, 2023). Moreover, the findings reaffirm that thriving at work enables elevated energy and learning that drive task performance (Bartram et al., 2023). The constructive outcomes of thriving at work make it essential for the dynamic business setting (Manfreda et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the impact of the uniqueness and belongingness dimensions of inclusive leadership on the task performance of healthcare staff in AJK, through the mediation of thriving at work. The task performance of healthcare staff is essential for delivering quality care, which relies on both human and organisational factors. Data for the current study were gathered from healthcare staff, including doctors, nurses, and paramedics. The findings indicated that both uniqueness and belongingness significantly influence task performance, with thriving at work partially mediating this link. This work is significant both theoretically and practically, offering meaningful insights into inclusive leadership.

Theoretical and Managerial Implications

The study offers several theoretical and practical implications. Past studies have highlighted the bridging role of thriving at work in enabling positive outcomes, such as job performance (Huang & Zhou, 2024) and life satisfaction (Jha et al., 2024), that flow from inclusive leadership. However, the dimensional effect encompassing both belongingness and uniqueness, explored by the current study, had remained unexplored. The study fills the gap highlighted by a recent study that utilises self-determination theory

to explore the dimensional effect of inclusive leadership (Gürbüz et al., 2024). The study reinforces the leaders' contribution in fulfilling employees' fundamental psychological needs, which enable a positive state of thriving (Ryan & Deci, 2024), consequently augmenting task performance. The current study highlights the central role of enabling belongingness and uniqueness (Randel et al., 2018) in shaping their energy levels and inclination towards learning, which manifests as thriving among healthcare employees.

Limitations and Future Directions

As with all research, the present study had its limitations. The present study examined the influence of inclusive leadership on the performance of healthcare staff employed in public sector hospitals in AJK, given the underdevelopment of the private health sector relative to the public healthcare sector in the region. The present study examined the two dimensions of inclusive leadership: uniqueness and belongingness. Future research could explore additional dimensions and assess their effects. The study exclusively examined task performance; future research could investigate additional types of performance, such as adaptable, creative, and contextual performance. The study examined the mediating effect of thriving at work; future research should incorporate more variables in this relationship through a sequential process.

Competing Interests

The authors declared no competing interests.

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