

Reflective Reconfiguration Capability as a Micro-Foundation Linking Inclusive Leadership to Performance in Higher Education

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the mediating role of Reflective Reconfiguration Capability (RRC) in the relationship between inclusive leadership and employee performance among lecturers in private universities. RRC is conceptualized as an individual dynamic capability that enables personal adaptation through self-reflection and strategic realignment of internal resources. Using a survey of 193 respondents and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis, the results confirm that inclusive leadership positively influences employee performance both directly and indirectly through RRC. The findings contribute to the discourse on organizational quality by identifying RRC as a cognitive mechanism that bridges leadership behavior and sustainable performance outcomes. In the context of higher education excellence, this study highlights how fostering inclusive leadership and individual reflective capabilities can enhance academic performance and institutional competitiveness. The study offers theoretical and practical implications, particularly in advancing capability-based performance strategies in the higher education sector.

Keywords: inclusive leadership, reflective reconfiguration capability, employee performance, higher education

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Introduction

The performance of lecturers plays a vital role in enhancing the quality, competitiveness, and reputation of higher education institutions, particularly in the face of increasing global academic standards. In Indonesia, the Ministry of Education and Culture has urged universities to pursue excellence and international accreditation, aligning with the targets set by the national higher education quality assurance framework. Despite this, many higher education institutions under LLDIKTI Region VI Central Java are still facing performance-related challenges. One of the key indicators is the stagnation in functional academic ranks, where recent data indicate that a significant proportion of lecturers remain at the level of Assistant Lecturer, with only a small fraction achieving the rank of Associate Professor or Professor. This study addresses the issue of academic rank stagnation, particularly in

Indonesian private universities, where only around 10% of lecturers have reached the position of Associate Professor or above (LLDIKTI VI Report, 2023). This stagnation reflects broader concerns in lecturer performance and institutional quality. Improving lecturer quality is also crucial to achieving national standards such as BAN-PT accreditation and global benchmarks like QS ranking. Thus, enhancing internal capabilities beyond structural policies is essential. This phenomenon reflects a broader issue related to organizational capacity and individual lecturer development. Improving lecturer performance is not merely a matter of institutional policy but requires an understanding of the psychological, social, and leadership factors that influence individual productivity. Among these, leadership style particularly inclusive leadership has received growing attention for its

potential to create an empowering and motivating academic environment.

Inclusive leadership, characterized by openness, accessibility, and availability, is posited to improve employee outcomes through fostering psychological safety and trust. However, empirical findings regarding its direct influence on performance remain inconclusive. Some studies suggest that while inclusive leadership may boost creativity and engagement, its direct effect on performance can vary depending on context and individual characteristics (Xiaotao et al., 2018; Ashikali, Groeneveld and Kuipers, 2021). This inconsistency in research outcomes highlights the presence of a theoretical and empirical gap that calls for further exploration.

To address this gap, this study introduces Reflective Reconfiguration Capability (RRC) as a mediating construct. RRC is conceptualized as an individual's ability to reflectively and creatively reconfigure their own resources in response to environmental challenges. Drawing upon Dynamic Capability Theory (Teece, 2007) and Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 2001), RRC represents a dynamic personal capability that can bridge the relationship between leadership and performance, particularly within the academic profession, which demands adaptability, self-direction, and resilience.

The objective of this study is to examine whether RRC can mediate the relationship between inclusive leadership and employee (lecturer) performance. By investigating this relationship, the study aims to contribute to the development of individual-level dynamic capability theory and provide actionable insights for leadership development in the higher education sector.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Inclusive Leadership

Inclusive leadership is defined as behaviors that reflect openness, accessibility, and availability (Carmeli, Reiter-Palmon and Ziv, 2010). Such leaders actively seek input from employees, value diverse perspectives, and create an environment of psychological safety. In academic contexts, inclusive leadership has the potential to stimulate innovation, creativity, and

proactive behaviors among lecturers (Ashikali, Groeneveld and Kuipers, 2021).

Several studies highlight its role in fostering trust and engagement. For example, (Javed et al., 2019) found that inclusive leadership significantly improves employee learning behavior and voice behavior. However, findings on its direct impact on performance remain mixed. While some research reports a positive relationship (Carmeli, Reiter-Palmon and Ziv, 2010), others argue that contextual and individual differences moderate this effect (Xiaotao et al., 2018).

Reflective Reconfiguration Capability (RRC)

Reflective Reconfiguration Capability (RRC) is an emerging concept rooted in Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 2001) and Dynamic Capability Theory (Teece, 2007). It refers to an individual's capacity to consciously reflect on and adapt their internal resources skills, motivations, and work habits to respond to environmental change and task demands. In higher education, lecturers with high RRC can realign their competencies to meet dynamic academic expectations, such as publication output, grant acquisition, and digital pedagogy. Studies such as (Baía and Ferreira, 2019; Ferreira, Coelho and Moutinho, 2020) demonstrate that individual dynamic capabilities significantly impact innovation and adaptability. RRC thus serves as a micro-foundation for strategic renewal at the personal level and is critical for sustained academic performance. RRC differs from existing constructs such as adaptive performance or learning agility, as it emphasizes not only adjustment to change but also deliberate internal reconfiguration through reflective processes. Compared to personal resilience, which focuses on bouncing back from adversity, RRC involves proactive restructuring of cognitive and behavioral patterns to sustain high performance in dynamic environments.

Employee Performance

Employee performance in academia is typically measured through indicators like research productivity, teaching effectiveness, and community service involvement. Performance is multidimensional and affected by motivational, cognitive, and contextual factors

(Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova, 2006)). (Hee, Kamaludin and Ping, 2016) argue that leadership support, personal capability, and adaptive behavior strongly influence lecturer performance. In this regard, RRC may act as a capability that enhances performance through cognitive and behavioral reconfiguration aligned with institutional goals.

Hypotheses Development

Prior research (Carmeli, Reiter-Palmon and Ziv, 2010; Ashikali, Groeneveld and Kuipers, 2021) shows that inclusive leadership fosters psychological safety, trust, and team functioning, which in turn enhance individual performance outcomes.

Based on the above empirical findings, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Inclusive leadership has a positive effect on employee performance.

Inclusive leaders promote self-reflection and support developmental opportunities. (Javed et al., 2019, 2021) found that such leadership enhances employee adaptability and learning, which are antecedents of RRC.

Based on the above empirical findings, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

H2: Inclusive leadership positively influences reflective reconfiguration capability.

Individuals with high RRC can realign their efforts with changing academic demands, thereby improving effectiveness (Ferreira and Coelho, 2020). Thus, the hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Reflective reconfiguration capability positively influences employee performance.

As per (Teece, 2007) and (Javed et al., 2019, 2021), personal dynamic capabilities such as RRC can act as mediators that translate leadership into performance outcomes. Therefore, a hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Reflective reconfiguration capability mediates the relationship between inclusive leadership and employee performance.

Methodology

Data were gathered through an online structured questionnaire, distributed via institutional email and academic forums over a period of two months. The questionnaire was preceded by an informed consent statement, assuring participants of anonymity, confidentiality, and voluntary participation.

All constructs were measured using established scales adapted from previous literature, and translated into Bahasa Indonesia through a back-translation process to maintain semantic consistency. Inclusive Leadership was measured using a 9-item scale developed by (Carmeli, Reiter-Palmon and Ziv, 2010), capturing openness, accessibility, and availability. Reflective Reconfiguration Capability (RRC) was assessed through a 10-item scale developed and validated by the author, grounded in dynamic capability and social cognitive theory principles. Items reflected adaptive learning, self-evaluation, and change reconfiguration. Employee Performance was measured using a 6-item scale adapted from (Hee, Kamaludin and Ping, 2016), focusing on task performance and academic productivity.

All items used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted using AMOS 24 to assess the construct validity of the measurement model. All factor loadings exceeded 0.5, confirming convergent validity (Hair, Page and Brunsveld, 2015). Composite Reliability (CR) values ranged from 0.82 to 0.89 and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were all above the recommended threshold of 0.50.

The proposed structural model was tested using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with the maximum likelihood estimation method in AMOS. The analysis evaluated both direct and indirect relationships among variables, particularly testing the mediating effect of RRC. Model fit was assessed using several goodness-of-fit indices, including CFI (Comparative Fit Index), RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation), and χ^2/df .

Results

Descriptive analysis showed that the majority of respondents (58%) were male lecturers, with 42% female. Most were aged between 35–45 years (48%), followed by those aged 46–55 (31%). Regarding academic positions, 41% were Assistant Lecturers, 35% were Lecturers, and only 9% had attained the rank of Associate Professor. Most respondents held a Master's degree (62%), with 38% having a doctoral qualification.

Validity testing using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) indicated that all factor loadings exceeded the 0.5 threshold, confirming convergent validity. Composite Reliability (CR) values ranged between 0.82 and 0.89, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were all above 0.50, demonstrating sufficient construct reliability and validity (Hair et al., 2019). The SEM analysis showed good model fit indices (e.g., CFI = 0.928; RMSEA = 0.053), indicating that the empirical model fits the data well. Hypothesis testing revealed that, Inclusive Leadership significantly influenced employee performance ($\beta = 0.298$, $p < 0.01$) and RRC ($\beta = 0.374$, $p < 0.001$). RRC significantly affected employee performance ($\beta = 0.411$, $p < 0.001$). RRC mediated the relationship between inclusive leadership and employee performance (indirect effect = 0.154, $p < 0.01$).

Discussion

These findings align with (Shore, Cleveland and Sanchez, 2018), who highlighted that inclusion not only fosters belongingness but also activates self-directed adaptation essential in academic roles. Thus, inclusive leadership when combined with reflective internal capabilities serves as a foundational pillar for achieving sustainable quality in higher education organizations. The findings confirm the mediating role of Reflective Reconfiguration Capability (RRC) in the relationship between inclusive leadership and employee performance. These results support previous research which argues that leadership behaviors alone may not directly improve performance unless individuals possess adaptive internal capabilities (Teece, 2007; Javed et al., 2019, 2021).

In the context of higher education, this study addresses a key performance gap particularly the stagnation of academic rank by introducing RRC as a cognitive-behavioral capability that enables change-oriented behavior among lecturers. The strength of the mediation effect suggests that inclusive leadership fosters a psychologically secure environment, encouraging lecturers to reorganize their work strategies and optimize personal resources in alignment with institutional goals.

By positioning RRC as a personal dynamic capability, this study extends the micro-foundation of Dynamic Capability Theory and connects it to leadership practice. This supports the idea that inclusive leadership must be complemented by individual reflective and adaptive competencies to translate leadership behaviors into improved performance (Ashikali, Groeneveld and Kuipers, 2021).

Managerially, institutions are encouraged to develop programs that not only train inclusive leadership behaviors but also foster reflective practices, self-efficacy, and learning agility among lecturers. Such dual-focus development strategies are essential to cultivate sustainable academic excellence in a rapidly evolving higher education landscape.

Conclusion

This study advances the understanding of how inclusive leadership can enhance employee performance in higher education by introducing Reflective Reconfiguration Capability (RRC) as a mediating variable. Drawing upon Social Cognitive Theory and Dynamic Capability Theory, RRC is proposed as a novel individual-level capability that enables lecturers to respond to complex academic challenges through self-reflection and adaptive resource deployment. The results empirically confirm that while inclusive leadership positively impacts employee performance, a significant portion of this effect is transmitted through RRC. This finding emphasizes that leadership behaviors no matter how supportive require an internal cognitive mechanism within employees to be effectively translated into performance outcomes. Thus, RRC functions as a critical link that aligns inclusive leadership practices with sustained individual excellence.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the growing literature on dynamic capabilities by extending the framework to the individual level. It also enriches the inclusive leadership discourse by identifying a previously underexplored mechanism RRC that explains how leadership influences performance in dynamic and cognitively demanding environments such as academia.

From a practical and managerial standpoint, higher education institutions should adopt a

dual-focus approach in talent and leadership development. On one hand, leaders should be trained to exhibit inclusive behaviors that foster psychological safety, openness, and empowerment. On the other hand, institutions should invest in training programs that enhance lecturers' reflective capacities, adaptability, and cognitive agility core elements of RRC. These findings are particularly relevant for Indonesian higher education, where performance improvement efforts often focus solely on structural reforms and compliance with functional academic positions. This study suggests that unlocking individual dynamic capabilities can be a complementary and perhaps more sustainable path toward academic excellence. The results hold significance for national educational goals and accreditation targets in Indonesia, suggesting that institutional quality begins at the level of individual capability. In this regard, reflective reconfiguration capability can be seen as a lever to elevate performance toward institutional excellence.

Limitations and future research directions include the cross-sectional nature of the study, which limits causal inference. Further research may explore the role of RRC in different sectors or test its development through longitudinal intervention-based studies. Additionally, future work may consider how organizational culture or institutional support systems moderate the development and activation of RRC among employees.

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