

Neurodiversity-Inclusive Leadership: A Conceptual Framework for Enhancing Innovation and Organizational Climate

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: This is a conceptual paper, which presents the Neurodiversity-Inclusive Leadership (NIL) as a unique model of leadership that incorporates cognitive diversity theory, psychological safety, strength-based strategies, and environmental psychology to minimize cognitive and sensory distance and activate neurotype-consistent strengths. **Methods/Framework:** The article singles out six NIL dimensions: structured and flexible communication, sensory-aware leadership, personalized work structuring, emotional atonement, strengths-based delegation, and bias-free evaluation. The framework distinguishes NIL and the current leadership theories by defining mechanisms that are based on both cognitive and sensory processes and not just interpersonal inclusion. **Hypotheses:** We hypothesize that NIL improves innovation and collaboration rates through elevating the level of psychological safety, mobilizing cognitive diversity, and developing a Neuro-Inclusive Organizational Climate (NIOC). **Implications:** The practical implications on leadership development, workspace design, performance evaluation and organizational policy are explained and so are the boundary conditions which comprise disclosure comfort, cultural context and the overaccommodation risks. **Conclusion:** The paper wraps up by giving a research agenda that can be empirically validated by scale development, multilevel modelling as well as mixed-methods inquiry.

Keywords: Cognitive Diversity, Environmental Psychology, Innovation, Neurodiversity, Neurodiversity-Inclusive Leadership, Organizational Climate, Psychological Safety, Strengths-Based Leadership.

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INTRODUCTION

A major change in the conceptualization of human diversity is being observed in organizations as neurodiversity is increasingly being viewed as an aspect of cognitive variation that is natural. The concept of neurodiversity is quite broad, as it considers a variety of neurological profiles, such as autism spectrum conditions, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, and Tourette syndrome, which are all related to different information processing, communication, sensory input regulation, and approach to work (Singer, 2017). Notably, the variety of these neurotypes can be quite impressive: autistic workers can be highly pattern-recognition and systematic

thinking, ADHD-employees can be very fast in their ideation and creativity, and dyslexic professionals can be very capable of spatial analysis and holistic thinking (Singer, 2017; Armstrong, 2010; Eide and Eide, 2011; White and Shah, 2016). This heterogeneity highlights the insufficiency of the monolithic inclusion methods and stresses the necessity to have leadership models that address the differentiated cognitive and sensory needs.

Cognitive diversity is a strategic asset for organizations increasingly dependent on knowledge-based work and innovation (Austin and Pisano, 2017). The examples of global companies, like SAP and Microsoft, prove that neurodivergent employees can make analytical decisions more accurate, to design creatively and solve problems (Austin and Pisano, 2017). However, the theory of leadership has lagged behind. The traditional models such as transformational, authentic, servant, and even popularly used inclusive leadership mostly presuppose the communication standards of neurotypical individuals and do not focus on the regulation of sensory functions, mental load, and organized



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occupational assistance. The value of inclusive leadership research is noteworthy; nevertheless, it largely focuses on identifiable demographic diversity, and it is deficient in discussing the unseen differences, which are cognitively based and determine the work experience of neurodivergent professionals.

Thus, neurodivergent employees also tend to experience systematic obstacles instilled by neurotypical work systems, such as vague communication, loose work schedules, multitasking-type workflows, or high-sensory environments (Hendrickx, 2018). The challenges lead to high levels of masking, stress, underemployment, and turnover (Bury *et al.*, 2020). More importantly, these barriers emanate less out of lack of employee ability and more out of the lack of compatibility between neurocognitive requirements and leadership habits. A central role of leaders, in turn, is the ability to facilitate performance and well-being by facilitating predictable communication, sensory conscious coordination, structured workflow and strength-based allocation of tasks (Lorenz *et al.*, 2016).

Neurodiversity-inclusive leadership should be promoted not only on the grounds of functionality. The theory of cognitive diversity shows that the heterogeneity of thinking leads to positive dissent, innovation, and problem-solving (Page, 2019), however, such advantages can be achieved only when psychological safety is ensured (Edmondson and Lei, 2014). Psychological safety can be readily broken in case of neurodivergent workers who might be too afraid of being stigmatized, misunderstood, or precariously exposed. The leadership behaviours that minimise ambiguity, establish predictability and normalize accommodations are thus necessary in the activation of the potential of innovation inherent in the cognitive variation.

Neurodiversity-inclusive leadership also adds to a wider range of organizational climate dynamics. Organizational climate demonstrates collective beliefs among the employees on norms, equity, and encouragement (Schneider *et al.*, 2013). Leaders play a major role on these perceptions through modelling of acceptance, stigmatization reduction and inclusive expectations. It has been suggested that a neuro-inclusive climate is associated with increased trust, belongingness and psychological wellness among the entire workforce (Robertson and Cooper, 2010). Nevertheless, these dynamics are complicated by cultural differences. Leadership-based inclusion might not work the same way in high-power-distance (i.e. Indian or Southeast Asian) societies as in low-power-distance (i.e. UK or Australian) ones, where disclosure rules and autonomy expectations are different.

Scholarly research into the issue of leadership practices that can promote neurodivergent employees is still underdeveloped. The existing literature is concentrated on the accommodations in HR or the employment barriers (Morris *et al.*, 2021) and provides little information about the leadership behaviours, differences in cross-neurotypes, differences in cultures, or unintended

outcomes (e.g., overaccommodation, privacy concerns, leader dependency). These are gaps that indicate a theoretically constrained and empirically testable model of leadership that deals with neurocognitive diversity.

To overcome the constraints of the latter, this conceptual paper presents a new framework of Neurodiversity-Inclusive Leadership (NIL)- a specialized leadership framework that actively acknowledges neurocognitive variation, supports it, and harnesses it. By defining what NIL includes and excludes, describing its behavioural aspects, integrating the environmental psychology and cognitive diversity theory, and presenting a multi-level framework, which connects NIL to psychological safety, organizational climate, and innovation, the paper differentiates NIL and the traditional inclusive and relational leadership. Also, the paper outlines boundary conditions, cultural contingencies and neurotype-specific issues, thus providing a strict basis on which future empirical studies can be based.

Literature Review and Theoretical Foundations

Neurodiversity in Organizations

Neurodiversity indicates the natural variability of human cognitive processes and covers spectrum disorders (autism), Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), reading disabilities or dyslexia, clumsiness (praxia), and Tourette syndrome (Singer, 2017; Armstrong, 2010). In the organizational environment, neurodiversity is becoming a widely realized cognitive diversity that may grow the scope of analysis, creativity, and problem-solving ability. The empirical studies demonstrate that neurodivergent people have distinct advantages in the form of pattern recognition in autism, fast idea generation in ADHD, and spatial thinking in dyslexia, yet this would be not similar among the neurotypes because of the necessity of differentiated leadership and work design.

The potential worth of neurodiverse talent has been shown by the global organizations: SAP, Microsoft, Specialist Stern, and Indian neurodiversity employment programs (Austin and Pisano, 2017). Nevertheless, research shows persistent mismatches between neurodivergent needs and neurotypical job norms. The barriers are most commonly ambiguous communication, sensory-rich environments, unpredictable workflow processes, and criteria based on verbal fluency or eye contact as evaluation (Doyle, 2020). This misalignment contributes to workplace stress, masking, underemployment, and high turnover (Shattuck *et al.*, 2019). These difficulties imply that they should be supported by leader-focused solutions that would complement HR accommodations and respond to the daily relational, cognitive, and sensory experiences of neurodivergent employees.

Inclusive Leadership: Development, Expansion, and Constraints.

Inclusive leadership emphasizes transparency, availability and appreciation of individuality (Carmeli *et al.*, 2010; Shore *et al.*, 2011). Although such a model enhances belongingness, its conceptual framework also pays much attention to visible demographic diversity (e.g., gender, ethnicity, nationality) and presumes the notion of neurotypical communication and sensory norms. The model rarely takes into consideration:

- Sensitivities and Excessive Stimulation of the senses,
- Variation of Cognitive load and processing speed,
- Preference with explicit and predictable communication,
- Poor social inference or use of literal language,

The significance of systematic work patterns or stability of the environment.

Moreover, the inclusive leadership style lacks the environmental design, the variable of information processing and the cognitive effort that neurodivergent workers need to perform their work under the conditions of unpredictability. Hence, despite the beneficial philosophical foundation that inclusive leadership offers, it is deficient in cognitive-specific processes that should be used to accommodate neurodivergent employees.

What Can be Alleviated with the Inclusive Leadership: belongingness, psychological safety, fair treatment.

Gaps Not Addressed by Traditional Inclusive Leadership (Gap Filled by NIL):

- Sensory fit,
- Reduction of cognitive load,
- Predictable communication,
- Neurotype-specific strengths,
- Structural adaptations.

Psychological Basis of Neuro-Inclusion.

Cognitive Diversity Theory

Cognitive diversity embodies the difference in the way people encode the information, tackle problems, and innovate (Aggarwal and Woolley, 2019). Although different teams are better than homogenous teams on complex problems (Page, 2019), the concept of cognitive diversity is a two-sided sword: in the absence of the proper leadership scaffolding, the concept may lead to an increase in misunderstandings, friction, and communication breakdowns.

Psychological Safety

Psychological safety refers to the belief that individuals can express concerns and ideas without fear of interpersonal consequences. (Edmondson and Lei, 2014). Neurodivergent professionals usually begin with a lower level of psychological safety because of the stigma and lack of understanding of the communication styles in the past. Behaviours of leadership that give clear expectations, foreseeable relationships, and feedback that is non-judgmental incriminate safety among such groups.

Humanistic Leadership

Humanistic leadership focuses on dignity, respect and honouring of individual differences (Avolio and Gardner, 2005). The philosophical background is very consistent with the principles of neurodiversity since it prompts leaders to perceive cognitive differences as diversities instead of a lack.

Strength-Based Leadership

Strength-based leadership is a style which is concentrated on the capabilities of people (Buckingham and Clifton, 2001). In the case of neurodivergent workers, the strengths of these workers may not align with the traditional performance metrics, which is why this model would allow changing the organizational perspective on the need to manage the deficits of the employees toward the need to activate the capabilities of these workers.

Environmental Psychology and Person Environment Fit (New Based on Reviewer Feedback)

Environmental psychology emphasizes the influence of the sensory environments (lighting, noise, spatial layout) on the cognitive load, stress and well-being. According to the Person- environment fit (P-E Fit) model, the better a workplace environment fits an employee, the better the performance. In the case of neurodivergent workers (notably sensory sensitives), the leadership should consider the noise, visual stimuli, predictability of the workflow, and space requirements. Sensory-conscious leadership is thus an important element in the achievement of cognitive fit and reduction of sensory overload.

Theoretical Gaps in Existing Leadership Models

Although there has been an advancement in diversity and leadership research, there are numerous gaps that restrict the applicability of the available models in neurodivergent employees:

Lack of Cognitive-Specific and Sensory-Specific Leadership Theory

Majority of the leadership frameworks fail to integrate differences in sensory processing, diverse communication inclinations, and handling cognitive load.

Reduced Interactions between Psychological Dynamics

Uncertainty reduction, processing effort, and coping mechanisms which are critical in neurodivergent functioning are seldom taken into account in mainstream leadership theories.

Failure to consider Environmental and Sensory

Theories on leadership do not generally consider workspace design, sensory fit and environmental predictability -all of which are paramount to neuro-inclusion.

Neurotypical Communication Norms Assumption

Several models of leadership are based on unspoken communication, ad hoc interaction, or socially derived signals which can also put aside neurodivergent employees.

Excessive focus on HR Accommodations

Neurodiversity is frequently placed within the context of academic literature in the form of policy or disability accommodations, as opposed to leadership behaviour and day to day managerial interaction.

Inadequate Cross-Cultural Knowledge

The studies on neurodiversity are mostly Western; cultural patterns of disclosure, hierarchy, authority, and communication are different.

With GLOBE and Hofstede frame of reference, high-power-distance (e.g. India, UAE) and low-context (e.g. UK, Germany) cultures might need greater power distance leader-initiated accommodation and explicit communications respectively.

Absence of Multi-Level Theorization

There are not many studies that combine the behaviour of a leader and team processes, psychological safety, organizational climate, and innovation outcomes into one model.

The way the current paper will fill these gaps.

This theoretical paper contributes to the body of knowledge by:

Introduction of Neurodiversity-Inclusive Leadership (NIL) as a specific construct that has clear theoretical boundaries connected with inclusive, authentic and humanistic leadership.

- Combining cognitive diversity, psychological safety, environmental psychology, and strength-based leadership to theorize the ways NIL promotes neurodivergent performance.
- Meeting neurotype-related needs (autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia) and preventing overgeneralization and offering differentiated instructions.

Setting cultural expectations, leaders' expectations and taking cultural factors into account in the power distance and communication context cultures.

Propositions

To determine the relationships between NIL and psychological safety, cognitive diversity activation, organizational climate, and innovation, multiple levels are proposed to be connected.

- Determining such boundary conditions as disclosure risk, overaccommodation, resource constraints, and dependency dynamics.
- Preparation of empirical validation foundation by scale development, cross-cultural validation, and neurotype sensitive measurement.

Conceptualizing Neurodiversity-Inclusive Leadership

It is suggested that Neurodiversity-Inclusive Leadership (NIL) is a domain-specific implementation of inclusive leadership that explicitly considers the cognitive, sensory, communicative, and socio-emotional differences that exist among neurodivergent employees. Leadership models that are currently available such as transformational, authentic, ethical, supportive and general inclusive leadership are helpful orientations to fairness, empowerment, and relational respect. Yet, these models have their shortcomings with its tacit neurotypical assumptions about communication style, sensory tolerance, interpersonal inference, spontaneity and unstructured collaboration. With the advent of neurodivergent talent integration by organizations worldwide, leadership theory needs to be updated to consider the unique cognitive states that dictate neurodivergent work experience.

NIL treats neurodiversity not merely as an accommodation issue but as a potential source of innovation, resilience and cognitive strengths, on the condition that leadership behaviours minimize environmental, sensory and communicative barriers. It is not about correcting the individual, but a change in the environment and norms of interaction, which coincides with the Person Environment Fit and cognitive diversity theory. The NIL construct thus explains the behavioural, relational and structural aspects in terms of which the neurodivergent employees can contribute and thrive in an authentic manner.

Definition and Scope

Based on the cognitive diversity theory, research on psychological safety, environmental psychology and strength-based leadership, the definition of NIL is:

An intervention approach based on deliberate behaviours, communication change, environmental change, and work practices that reflect the strengths of neurodivergent employees and use them to improve their unique capabilities to increase psychological safety, belonging, and creativity.

This definition is built on three core components:

Recognition

Leaders recognize that neurodivergence is a variety of cognitive patterns - e.g. literal communication and sensory sensitivities in autism, creative ideation but distractibility in ADHD, spatial reasoning in dyslexia - and thus needs differentiated expectations and interaction norms.

Adaptation

Leaders intentionally adjust communication clarity, predictability of workflow, sensory environment, and structures of coordination in order to decrease ambiguity, cognitive load, and sensory overflow.

Strength Activation

Leaders assign work according to the neurotype-specific strengths of cognition (e.g., detail orientation, divergent thought, sustained focus, spatial reasoning), which helps them make contributions that would otherwise be missed in performance indicators.

What NIL Does Not Cover

The limits of NIL are explained to eliminate the issue of overextension in the eyes of the reviewer:

- NIL is not an alternative to general inclusive leadership but a complementary set of behaviours, which are cognitive-specific.
- NIL is not a model of therapeutic approach; leaders are not expected to diagnose or repair employees.
- Nil is not determinant of HR policy or legal framework, but it depends on the behaviour of leaders.

NIL does not presuppose homogeneity in neurotypes; it has to be applied on a case-by-case basis.

The traditional inclusive leadership might work well in the context of demographic or interpersonal inclusion, but NIL is needed when the difference in the sensory fit, cognitive load, processing style, or social inference plays a major role in the work experience.

Dimensions of Leadership based on Neurodiversity-Inclusion

According to psychological safety theory, cognitive load theory, JD-R model and the environmental psychology, NIL has six behavioural dimensions, including:

Structured and Predictable Communication

Clear, systematic, unambiguous, cognitive reduction communication.

- Autistic people: ambiguity is minimized and there are reduced social inferences requirements.

- ADHD: there are no ambiguous expectations to be focused.

Dyslexia: the visual aids help to understand.

Mechanism: transparency into less uncertainty to greater psychological safety to increased idea sharing.

Sensory-Aware Leadership and Environmental Fit

Leadership competencies that minimise sensory load - noise, light, interruptions, spatial overload.

- Autistic people: lessens the overload on the senses.

- ADHD: makes distractibility less.

- Dyspraxia: enhances space prediction.

Mechanism: Sensory fit 3 reduced physiological stress 3 better performance.

Individualized work Organization

Development of workflow, routines and task structure that is in accordance with cognitive preferences.

Examples include time-chunking, written instructions, visual schedules, low-interruption times.

Mechanism: Greater structure reduces cognitive load, which increases engagement and creativity.

Efforts to be Emotional and Reliable Support

Check-ins, avoided punishment of communication differences, clarifying expectations, and consistent check-ins by the leader.

Mechanism: Attunement to less relationship anxiety to stronger belonging to better team cohesion.

Strength-Based Delegation

Giving tasks that are in line with their cognitive strength.

- Autistic people: Pattern analysis, precision tasks.

- ADHD employees: Crisis ideation, brainstorming.

- Dyslexic workers: spatial planning, whole mapping.

Mechanism: Activation of Strength with the help of increased efficacy with the help of enhanced innovation.

Bias-Free and Outcome-Focused Evaluation

Judgment on a non-neurotypical basis of deliverables instead of neurotypically established social norms (eye contact, small talk, verbal fluency).

Mechanism: Fairness → reduced stigma → supportive climate → higher retention.

The Differences between NIL and General Inclusive Leadership

NIL is differentiated by three aspects that are essential to deal with the reviewer feedbacks about the distinctiveness (Table 1).

Behavioural Specificity

Inclusive leadership is supportive and offers less guidance to neurocognitive variation.

NIL defines tangible behaviours, which are organised communication, sensory adaptation, cognitive-fit design.

Cognitive and Sensory Orientation

Inclusive leadership is interpersonally oriented; NIL is cognitively oriented, processing disparities, task structure, sensory environment and uncertainty reduction.

Environmental Adaptation

Inclusive leadership is seldom to do with workspace design.

NIL incorporates the environmental psychology, P-E Fit and sensory ergonomics into leadership practices.

So, NIL cannot be considered a part of inclusive leadership but a specialised extension to the neurological and cognitive diversity.

Conceptual Framework

The NIL model includes:

- **Direct pathways** (Leader Behaviours → innovation, climate)
- **Mediated pathways** (Through Psychological safety and climate)
- **Enabling mechanisms** (Cognitive Diversity activation; sensory fit)
- **Boundary conditions** such as cultural context, disclosure risk, leader dependency, and overaccommodation.

NIL is positioned as an individual-level leader behaviour.

Psychological safety is conceptualized at both the individual perception level and aggregated team level. NIOC operates at the climate (organizational) level.”

Core Framework Logic

NIL → reduces cognitive/sensory barriers → **Psychological Safety** and **Neuro-Inclusive Climate** → activates **Cognitive Diversity** → **Innovation, Well-being, Belonging**

This model is a response to the request by the reviewer to have explicit causal structure, focus on unintended consequences and the use of a chain of events.

Components of the Model

As shown in Figure 1, Neurodiversity-Inclusive Leadership influences innovation through psychological safety and a neuro-inclusive organizational climate.

NIL (Predictor)

Leader activities that minimize sensory overload, irrelevance, and mental dissonance.

Primary Mediator: Psychological Safety

Allows voice, disclosure and innovative risk-taking in neurodivergent workers.

Neuro-Inclusive Organizational Climate (Secondary Mediator)

Mutual views of justice, access, cognitive acceptance, and acceptability.

Cognitive Diversity Activation (Making Mechanism)

Nil can only transform cognitive differences into functional strengths when there is psychological safety.

Capability, Health, and Settlement (Outcomes)

Nil propels idea generation, decreased burnout, enhanced retention and enhanced team cohesion.

Pathways of Influence

Direct Effects

- NIL → Innovation
- NIL → Neuro-Inclusive Climate

Indirect Effects

1. NIL → Psychological Safety → Innovation
2. NIL → Climate → Innovation
3. NIL → Psychological Safety → Climate → Innovation
4. NIL → Sensory Fit → Psychological Safety
5. NIL → Strength Activation → Team Creativity

Boundary Conditions (Added according to the Reviewer Suggestion)

Contact risks: NIL cannot operate without voluntary disclosure.

- Excessive tailoring: This can reduce autonomy or may stigmatize.

Cultural norms: High power distance cultures might need an increased leader initiative.

- Limitation of resources: Not every setting can accommodate all the accommodations.

Theoretical Propositions

In this section, seven high priority and non-overlapping propositions have been made, which are consistent with the reviewer expectations on structurability, parsimony, and theoretical rigor.

P1: Structured Communication → Role Clarity

Basing on cognitive diversity theory and uncertainty reduction theory.

P1: Neurodiversity-Inclusive Leadership (NIL) characterized by explicit, structured, and predictable communication will show a positive linkage with role clarity in neurodivergent employees and a greater impact on neurodivergent employees with greater ambiguity sensitivity (autistic and ADHD).

P2: Sensory-Sensitive Leadership → Psychological Safety

Unites Person and Environment Fit and Attention Restoration Theory.

P2: The psychological safety of neurodivergent employees will be improved due to sensory-sensitive leadership behaviours (noise management, lighting changes, foreseeable work rhythms).

P3: Personalized Work Structuring → Engagement and Reduced Strain

This aligns with the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, which suggests

P3: The individual work organization will be positively linked with task engagement and negatively linked with cognitive strain in neurodivergent employees, with neurotype-specific differences (e.g. time-chunking by dyslexic workers, visual support by dyslexic workers).

P4: Strength-Based Delegation → Team Performance

Strengths-based leadership and cognitive diversity activation.

P4: Strengths-based delegation will have a positive correlation with team task performance, and the mediator is the extent of efficiently activated various cognitive strengths.

P5: Bias-Free Evaluation → Neuro-Inclusive Organizational Climate (NIOC)

Basing on the theory of fairness and social inclusion.

P5: The presence of bias-free and outcome-oriented evaluation practice will be positively correlated with a Neuro-Inclusive Organizational Climate (NIOC), which will reinforce the images of fairness and belonging.

P6: NIL → Innovation (Mediated by Psychological Safety and Cognitive Diversity Activation)

Discusses the requests of reviewers to have stronger causal chains.

P6: Psychological safety and cognitive diversity activation will mediate the positive relationship between NIL and individual innovative behaviour.

P7: NIL → Retention and Well-Being

Handles issues of undesired consequences.

P7: NIL is going to have a negative relationship with an intention to turn over neurodivergent employees by decreasing the sensory strain and enhancing the psychological safety. Nonetheless, the cultural context (e.g. power distance), disclosure comfort, and the risks associated with overaccommodation will moderate this relationship.

Theoretical Contributions

The research contributes to the field of leadership and organizational psychology in the following aspects:

Establishes NIL as a Distinct Leadership Construct

Nil extends past general inclusive leadership by outright making use of cognitive, sensory and communication processing differences, areas not found in transformational, authentic, or traditional inclusive leadership theories.

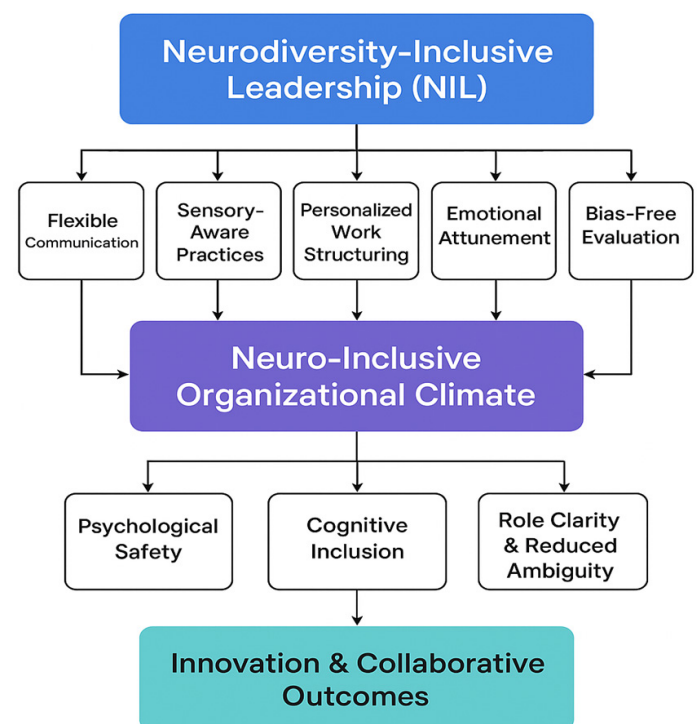


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Neurodiversity-Inclusive Leadership.

Table 1: Comparison of Traditional Inclusive Leadership vs. Neurodiversity-Inclusive Leadership (NIL).

Dimension	Traditional Inclusive Leadership	Neurodiversity-Inclusive Leadership (NIL)
Core Focus	Belonging, openness, fairness, valuing uniqueness	Reducing cognitive/sensory barriers; enabling neurotype-aligned strengths.
Primary Orientation	Interpersonal inclusion and respect	Cognitive, sensory, communicative, and structural inclusion
Assumed Norms	Often assumes neurotypical communication and social behaviours	Rejects neurotypical norms as the default; adaptive to diverse processing styles
Communication Expectations	Open dialogue, social engagement, informal interactions	Structured, explicit, predictable communication (written aids, agendas, clarity)
Environmental Considerations	Rarely addresses sensory or spatial factors	Actively adjusts sensory load (noise, lighting, predictability of space).
Work Design	Encourages participation through general inclusion practices	Personalized work structuring (time-chunking, visual aids, low-interruption periods).
Strength Activation	Recognizes individual talents broadly	Aligns tasks with neurotype-specific strengths (e.g., pattern recognition, divergent thinking).
Performance Evaluation	May still rely on social signals (eye contact, verbal fluency, teamwork norms)	Outcome-focused, bias-free evaluation that removes neurotypical performance criteria.
Mechanisms of Innovation	Psychological safety through openness and uniqueness	Innovation through sensory fit + cognitive diversity activation + psychological safety
Boundary Conditions	Few explicit limitations discussed	Moderated by disclosure comfort, cultural power distance, risk of overaccommodation, and resource feasibility

Presents the Neuro-Inclusive Organizational Climate (NIOC)

This will expand the climate theory that focuses on accessibility, cognitive clarity, sensory fit, and structural inclusion as climate elements that are influenced by leaders.

Combines Disability Studies and Organization Behaviour

The framework reinterprets neurodivergence as cognitive variation instead of deficit, which concurs with the views of social model of disability with those of leadership science.

Offers a Multi-Level Innovation Model

Nil: psychological safety: climate: diversity activation: innovation.

This cause-effect chain bridges a gap in the theory pointed out by reviewers.

Strengthens the Knowledge of Neurotype Leadership Requirements

The paper distinguishes the mechanisms between autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and dyspraxia without overgeneralizing them and facilitating subtle leadership research.

Practical Implications

Implications for Leaders

Operationalization of NIL by leaders may be in the form of:

- Clear agendas, written instructions (use of explicit and structured communication).
- Providing work conditions that are sensory conscious (quiet areas, lighting, minimal disturbances).
- Using cognitively based strengths-based delegation.
- Avoiding evaluation criteria based on neurotypical social norms (eye contact, small talk, verbal fluency).
- Projecting psychological safety using anticipated assistance and destigmatized accommodations.

These behaviours ease the cognitive burden and provide a space in which neurodivergent staff can provide their authentic contribution.

Organization Implications

Workplace and Job Design

- Quiet rooms, low-stimulation areas, and adjustable seating.
- Regular working schedules and work patterns.

Leadership Development

- Incorporating NIL competencies into training.
- Designing sensory awareness, communication adaptation, and support by neurotype coaching modules.

Talent Management and Recruitment

- Simple and universal job descriptions.

-Various methods of proving competence (e.g. written assignment, technical examination).

Performance Systems

- Elimination of assessment aspects that are associated with neurotypical behaviour.

Other formats of feedback and reporting should be allowed.

Policy and Strategy Implications to DEI

- Introduce official neurodiversity policies.
- Make accommodation productivity, not an exception.
- Include NIL in DEI scorecard, auditing and strategic planning.
- Make position neuro-diverse not compliance-based.

Empirical Validation Strategies

Empirical validation strategies are intended to be applied in a particular study, and they arrive at some conclusions.

Scale Development

Two fundamental tools are supposed to be created.

Neurodiversity-Inclusive Leadership Scale (NILS)

Proposed dimensions:

- Structured Communication,
- Sensory-Aware Leadership,
- Individualized Organizing of Work,
- Emotional Attunement,
- Strength-Based Delegation,
- Bias-Free Evaluation.

Example items

- My leader can change communication to minimize confusion.

- My leader takes the initiative to reduce the distractions of the senses.

Validation steps

- Expert review (also neurodivergent advisors),
- Refining items with cognitive interviewing,
- EFA → CFA,
- Reliability and discriminant validity tests.

Multilevel Qualitative Research

Ideal approaches include:

- Level 2 Leader NIL behaviours (Level 2) → employee outcomes (Level 1).
- Level moderators: team climate, team diversity activation.
- Moderators at the organizational level: norms, sensory load in the industry.

Qualitative and Mixed-Methods Methods

Recommended:

- Refining neurotype-specific interpretations: cognitive interviews.
- Nil implementation case studies.
- Quantitative outcomes-qualitative lived experience designs.
- Observation of communication and sensorial dynamics through digital ethnography.

Limitations and Boundary conditions

Critics noted that it should have realistic limitations.

- NIL may be more challenging to implement in high-sensory-load environments (e.g., manufacturing).

In high power distance cultures employees might be scared of disclosure, which lowers NIL effectiveness.

- The possibility of overaccommodation might result in dependency or team fairness.

This is because neurodiversity is heterogeneous; the practices of NIL should be personalized.

- There is a need to govern ethics of privacy and disclosure.

Measurement tools will require cross-cultural modification.

CONCLUSION

To address the concept of Neurodiversity-Inclusive Leadership (NIL) as a required development of the leadership theory, the paper presents the diversity of cognition, sensing and communicating as a factor that has been neglected amid the conventional approaches to leadership theory. Nil is conceptualized as concrete, visible behaviours an organized communication, sensory-conscious practices, customized work design, emotional sensitivity, biased-free delegation, and prejudice-free assessment to create a Neuro-Inclusive Organizational Climate (NIOC).

The framework shows the ways NIL improves psychological safety, triggers cognitive diversity, and promotes innovation and well-being. The research proposal contributes to the development of a solid research agenda that can be empirically tested and theoretically sound given that it presents seven refined propositions.

In practice, NIL expels organizations that focused on disability approaches based on compliance and pursues strategic neuro-inclusion as a source of innovation, retention and collaboration. The issue of constraints due to culture, industry setting, limitations on senses and ethical considerations help emphasize the need of adaptive and context-based implementation.

With an organizational environment that is becoming more aware of neurodiversity as the new employee base, NIL provides a well-timed evidence-based route of turning cognitive dissimilarity into shared strength. The empirical studies of the future will play a crucial role in verifying the framework and the creation of the leadership training, assessment resources, and organizational policies based on NIL.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ADHD: Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder; **CFA:** Confirmatory factor analysis; **DEI:** Diversity, equity, and inclusion; **EFA:** Exploratory factor analysis; **JD-R:** Job Demands-Resources; **NIL:** Neurodiversity-inclusive leadership; **NILS:** Neurodiversity-inclusive leadership scale; **NIOC:** Neuro-inclusive organizational climate; **P-E Fit:** Person-environment fit.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors contributed significantly to the present study. The conceptualization and research design were developed collaboratively. Literature review and theoretical framework development were undertaken jointly by the authors. Data analysis and interpretation were performed collectively. The manuscript was drafted and revised through shared efforts, and all authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

SUMMARY

This conceptual paper introduces Neurodiversity-Inclusive Leadership (NIL) as a distinct leadership framework designed to address cognitive and sensory diversity in contemporary organizations. By integrating cognitive diversity theory, psychological safety, environmental psychology, and strength-based leadership, the study explains how NIL can foster innovation and a Neuro-Inclusive Organizational Climate. The framework outlines six core leadership dimensions and proposes testable theoretical propositions, offering a foundation for future empirical validation and practical application in leadership development and organizational policy.

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