



INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP AND CULTURAL VALUE INTERNALIZATION IN SHAPING EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE IN A MULTICULTURAL ORGANIZATION; A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY OF WORK ENVIRONMENT DYNAMICS AT ARUNIKA JOGLO & EATERY

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the dynamics of inclusive leadership and the work environment in shaping employee performance through the internalization of Javanese and Sundanese cultural values at Arunika Joglo & Eatery, a culinary tourism enterprise in Kuningan, West Java. The organization implements the ISO 9001 Quality Management System, which makes the consistency of employee performance across a culturally diverse workforce a strategic concern for its quality objectives. A qualitative approach with a Grounded Theory design was employed. Data were collected from 14 informants, comprising 9 members of management and 5 non-managerial staff of Javanese and Sundanese backgrounds, through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. Data were analyzed through open, axial, and selective coding. The findings showed that inclusive leadership was manifested through open communication, employee participation, leadership accessibility, and appreciation of cultural diversity. Javanese and Sundanese cultural values were internalized through social interaction, cultural adaptation, and leadership modeling, forming a harmonious, tolerant, and collaborative work culture. Employee performance emerged from the interaction between inclusive leadership, cultural internalization, and a conducive work environment, which in turn reinforced the consistent implementation of ISO 9001 procedures. The substantive theory generated indicated that, in a multicultural organization, inclusive leadership capable of integrating cultural diversity fosters shared cultural values, creates a conducive work environment, strengthens collaborative work behavior, improves the consistency of employee performance, and supports the sustainability of ISO 9001 implementation.

1. INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly competitive business environment, organizations are required to optimize employee performance as a strategic asset that determines their sustainability (Arfah, 2021). Various factors influence performance, including motivation, leadership, skills, work environment, organizational culture, and work ethic (Ali, 2024). Beyond technical capability, organizations also depend on the quality of social relationships, the psychological condition of work, and the cultural values that live within them. In this context, the dynamics of inclusive leadership and the work environment play an important role.

Inclusive leadership emphasizes openness, appreciation of diversity, fairness in work processes, and the participation of every team member (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006; Cenkci, Bircan, & Zimmerman, 2021). Inclusive leaders are accessible, open, and available, and actively ensure that every individual feels their contribution is meaningful (Octavia & Ratnaningsih, 2017). Inclusion is understood as a two-way social process between leaders and followers built through interaction, consultation, and joint decision-making (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Such leadership becomes particularly consequential in a workplace where Javanese and Sundanese employees, who differ in communication style and social-hierarchy expectations, work side by side: without a leadership approach that actively bridges these differences, cultural distance can just as easily generate misunderstanding and disengagement as it can enrich collaboration. Meanwhile, the physical and non-physical work environment is also a key factor shaping employees' daily work

experience (Sedarmayanti, 2009; Ali, 2024). A conducive work environment, marked by adequate facilities, harmonious relationships among colleagues, open communication, and supervisor support, strengthens motivation and solidarity, whereas an unsupportive environment increases the risk of stress and declining performance.

The effectiveness of inclusive leadership and the work environment can operate more optimally when aligned with the cultural values held by the organization and its members. Diversity management theory suggests that a demographically or culturally diverse workforce carries an inherent dual potential: it can enrich decision-making and problem-solving through informational elaboration, yet it can also trigger social categorization processes that produce in-group/out-group tension if left unmanaged (van Knippenberg, De Dreu, & Homan, 2004). Whether cultural diversity becomes an organizational asset or a source of friction is therefore contingent on how leadership and organizational context manage the categorization-elaboration trade-off. Indonesia, as the world's largest archipelagic nation, is home to thousands of ethnic groups, each with distinctive cultural characteristics. The Javanese and Sundanese are among the largest ethnic groups in Indonesia, together comprising more than half of the national population (Suryadinata et al., 2003; Badan Pusat Statistik, 2024). Although culturally proximate, Javanese and Sundanese values differ in ways that shape worldview and work ethic: Javanese culture tends to emphasize rigid social hierarchy, harmony (*rukun*), and spiritualism (Efferin & Hopper, 2007; Musman, 2025), while Sundanese culture tends to be more flexible in social hierarchy and highly values hospitality (*someah hade ka semah*) and simplicity in social relations (Rustandi & Anggradinata, 2019).

In the hospitality and tourism sector specifically, a culturally diverse workforce has been shown to generate informational advantages, such as broader service repertoires and stronger guest rapport, alongside coordination challenges rooted in differing communication norms and in-group dynamics (Manoharan, Gross, & Sardeshmukh, 2021). Within the Indonesian hospitality context, cultural awareness among managers has likewise been identified as a determinant of effective cross-cultural communication and service consistency (Oktadiana & Djauhar, 2011). These findings collectively indicate that the outcomes of workforce diversity in service organizations are not automatic but depend on deliberate managerial practice, which reinforces the relevance of examining inclusive leadership as the mechanism through which diversity is converted into performance in the present study.

Arunika Joglo & Eatery, a culinary tourism destination in Kuningan, West Java, exemplifies this cultural dynamic: its managerial ranks are predominantly Javanese, while most operational employees are Sundanese. Despite this cultural diversity, the company has maintained service quality, implemented the ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management System, and received several notable accolades, including the Best New Sustainable Tourism Destination award from CNN Indonesia in 2024. This phenomenon raises the question of how the dynamics of inclusive leadership, work environment, and cultural values shape employee performance.

Prior studies have examined cultural acculturation and management control in Chinese-Javanese and Javanese-Sundanese business contexts (Efferin & Hopper, 2007; Anasthasia & Efferin, 2019), yet research that explores how inclusive leadership, work environment, and local cultural values interact to shape employee performance in a multicultural organization pursuing an international quality standard such as ISO 9001 remains limited. Furthermore, the inclusive leadership literature to date has been dominated by quantitative, variable-centered designs conducted mainly in Western, healthcare, or large-corporate settings that test inclusive leadership as a predictor of psychological safety, engagement, or performance through mediation and moderation models (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006; Ashikali, 2023; Fang, Chen, Wang, & Chen, 2019; Umrani, Bachkirov, Nawaz, Ahmed, & Pahi, 2024). Comparatively little is known about the process through which inclusive leadership operates, particularly in small and medium-sized, community-embedded hospitality enterprises in emerging economies where ethnic diversity is locally rooted rather than nationally abstract. This gap indicates the need for a process-oriented study capable of penetrating organizational structures to reveal employees' lived experience. This research therefore employs a Grounded Theory approach to examine the dynamic interaction between inclusive leadership, work environment, and local culture in shaping sustainable performance at Arunika Joglo & Eatery. Specifically, this study aims to (1) understand how inclusive leadership is practiced in managing employees

of Javanese and Sundanese backgrounds, (2) understand how Javanese and Sundanese cultural values are internalized in the work environment, (3) understand how the interaction of inclusive leadership, work environment, and cultural values shapes employee performance, and (4) understand how the organization manages cultural diversity to support performance sustainability and quality standards. The novelty of this study lies in its process-oriented, inductive account of how inclusive leadership converts ethnic cultural diversity into a performance-enhancing resource within a single multicultural service organization, an account that variable-centered designs are not positioned to produce.

2. METHODS

This study used a qualitative approach with a Grounded Theory design, developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), which aims to build theory inductively from empirical field data rather than testing pre-established hypotheses (Sudirman et al., 2020; Siregar, 2025; Sosa-Díaz & Valverde-Berrocso, 2022). Grounded Theory was selected because the phenomenon under study, the dynamics of inclusive leadership, work environment, and cultural values in a multicultural organization, required an in-depth, process-oriented understanding that could not be adequately explained by existing variable-centered theory. Data collection and analysis were conducted simultaneously and iteratively, with each finding informing subsequent theoretical sampling until data saturation was reached.

The research was conducted at Arunika Joglo & Eatery, Kuningan, West Java. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with key informants from management and operational staff of Javanese and Sundanese backgrounds, complemented by direct observation of work activities and interaction between leaders and employees. Secondary data included internal company documents (SOPs, HR policies, ISO 9001 documentation, internal audit results), organizational archives, and relevant literature. Informants were selected through theoretical sampling, requiring at least two years of tenure and direct managerial, non-managerial, or customer-facing involvement. A total of 14 informants were interviewed: 9 from management (general manager, corporate chef, department coordinators, and unit managers) and 5 non-managerial staff (service leaders and front-line staff), aged 19 to 50 years, drawn from Javanese, Sundanese, and, for one informant, other ethnic backgrounds. Consistent with the iterative logic of theoretical sampling, the number of informants was not fixed in advance; additional informants were recruited as long as new interviews continued to surface new codes or categories, and recruitment stopped once successive interviews and observations no longer yielded new conceptual content, indicating that data saturation had been reached.

Data collection combined semi-structured, in-depth interviews guided by an interview matrix derived from the indicators of inclusive leadership, cultural values, work environment, and performance, together with direct observation of daily operations and documentation review. Each interview was audio-recorded with informant consent and transcribed verbatim prior to coding. Data trustworthiness was established through source, technique, and time triangulation (cross-checking accounts from management and staff, and comparing interview data against observation and documentation), as well as member checking, in which preliminary interpretations were returned to key informants for confirmation, alongside prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and referential adequacy checks, in line with the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability criteria for qualitative research (Fateqah, 2024; Arianto, 2024). Data analysis followed the constant comparative principle through three coding stages developed by Strauss and Corbin: open coding, in which transcripts were analyzed line by line to label first-order concepts directly grounded in informants' own words; axial coding, in which open codes with related meanings were grouped into subcategories and then into main categories, and the relationships among causal conditions, context, action/interaction strategies, and consequences were identified; and selective coding, in which the main categories were integrated around a core category to form the substantive theory (Siregar, 2025).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results

Analysis through open, axial, and selective coding identified "Inclusive Leadership as a Mechanism for Integrating Cultural Diversity" as the core category linking all categories found in the field, as summarized in Table 1.

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Table 1. Selective Coding Summary

Element	Result
Core Category	Inclusive leadership as a mechanism for integrating cultural diversity
Causal Conditions	Javanese and Sundanese cultural diversity
Phenomenon	Internalization of cultural values within the organization
Contextual Conditions	Physical and non-physical work environment; ISO 9001 implementation
Action/Interaction Strategies	Communication, cooperation, coaching, cultural adaptation
Consequences	Employee performance and organizational quality sustainability

Sumber: Peneliti (2026).

Four interrelated findings emerged. First, inclusive leadership at Arunika Joglo & Eatery was practiced through open communication, adaptation to employees' cultural and personal characteristics, employee participation in problem-solving, and leader role-modeling through direct involvement in daily operations. Informants consistently described a discussion-based rather than directive approach to problem-solving; as one manager put it, "if there is a problem, I call them in and discuss it first" (informant M-01), while a staff member noted that "superiors always listen to input" (informant S-01). Leaders also reported deliberately adjusting their communication style to individual staff characteristics rather than applying a single approach uniformly, consistent with the code "communication adaptation" identified during open coding, without diminishing the clarity of instructions.

Second, Javanese and Sundanese cultural values, such as harmony, tolerance, mutual respect, and togetherness, were internalized through daily interaction, teamwork, and leader modeling rather than through formal programs. Informants explicitly linked cross-cultural harmony to tolerance and the use of a common language, reflected in statements such as "what matters most is tolerance" (informant M-03) and "Indonesian becomes the main [unifying] language" (informant S-03), while a sense of shared purpose was captured in the observation that "we work as one team" (informant M-09). These values gradually acculturated into a distinctive shared organizational work culture rather than remaining as two separate ethnic value systems.

Third, employee performance emerged from the interaction of inclusive leadership, a conducive work environment, and internalized cultural values, rather than from individual ability alone. This interaction was reflected in increased cooperation, discipline, effective communication, and responsibility in carrying out tasks, and was reinforced by routine mechanisms such as daily briefings, described by one informant as occurring "every day" (informant M-04), alongside regular evaluation practices that informants associated with maintaining work consistency.

Fourth, the organization managed cultural diversity through open communication, a collaborative work culture, and standardized work systems (SOPs, routine evaluation, and continuous improvement), enabling cultural diversity to be integrated as a resource that supported, rather than hindered, consistent implementation of the ISO 9001 Quality Management System. As one informant summarized the perceived benefit of the standard, "ISO makes the work more organized" (informant M-06), a view consistent with the axial-coding category of "quality system" that combined the benefits of ISO 9001 with broader system-strengthening practices.

Discussion

The core category found in this study, inclusive leadership as a mechanism for integrating cultural diversity, is consistent with the concept of inclusive leadership advanced by Northouse (2022), which emphasizes openness, appreciation of diversity, equal opportunity, and member involvement. However, the findings extend this concept: at Arunika Joglo & Eatery, inclusive leadership functions not merely as a participatory leadership style but as an active integration mechanism that bridges Javanese and Sundanese cultural differences, strengthening inter-employee interaction and building harmonious working relationships.

The findings also align with Sedarmayanti's (2009) view of the work environment, while extending it further. In this study, the work environment was not only a determinant of comfort but also a social space enabling adaptation, mutual respect, and the natural internalization of cultural values, thereby reinforcing the effectiveness of inclusive leadership in managing diversity.

Regarding performance, the findings support the view that performance results from a continuous process of communication, coaching, evaluation, and alignment between individual and organizational goals. The study shows that this process, realized through routine briefings, evaluations, and open communication, becomes more effective when supported by harmonious working relationships and inclusive cultural management, rather than through individual competence in isolation.

The findings further correspond to the ISO 9001:2015 principles of engagement of people, relationship management, and continual improvement. Implementation of the quality standard at Arunika Joglo & Eatery was not solely a matter of formal procedure but was reinforced by employee involvement, harmonious working relationships, and ongoing evaluation, indicating that quality management systems operate more effectively when embedded within an inclusive and collaborative work culture. Analytically, this suggests a specific causal ordering within the substantive theory: inclusive leadership and cultural internalization do not merely coexist alongside ISO 9001 implementation but function as its enabling condition, since standardized procedures such as SOP habituation and routine monitoring depend on the cooperative, low-conflict working relationships that inclusive leadership and shared cultural values generate. Where cultural diversity is left unmanaged, the same procedural apparatus would have far less to work with, as compliance with SOPs and monitoring routines ultimately relies on the willingness of a culturally diverse workforce to cooperate.

Compared with prior studies on Javanese-Chinese and Javanese-Sundanese acculturation (Efferin & Hopper, 2007; Anasthasia & Efferin, 2019), this study extends the discussion by showing that cultural diversity influences not only day-to-day working relationships but also the long-term sustainability of organizational quality, through the interaction of inclusive leadership, work environment, cultural value internalization, and quality management system implementation.

The centrality of leadership to performance outcomes found in this study is also consistent with broader evidence in the leadership literature. A systematic review of leadership style and employee performance across manufacturing organizations similarly concludes that leadership style is a consistent and significant predictor of employee performance across organizational settings (Ramdani et al., 2023), reinforcing the finding that inclusive leadership functions as the central mechanism shaping performance outcomes at Arunika Joglo & Eatery, even though the two studies differ in sector and methodological approach.

This process-level account also resonates with, and extends, variable-centered evidence from the inclusive leadership literature. Determinant studies of inclusive leadership in public and healthcare organizations identify openness, accessibility, and availability as core leader behaviors that generate psychological safety, a construct originally established in team-learning research (Edmondson, 1999) and later extended to leader inclusiveness specifically (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006; Ashikali, 2023), while quantitative studies link inclusive leadership to employee performance and well-being through psychological capital as a mediating mechanism (Fang et al., 2019; Umrani et al., 2024). The present findings are broadly consistent with these mechanisms, in the sense that Arunika Joglo & Eatery's leaders' openness and accessibility appeared to create the felt safety that allowed employees to voice concerns and adapt across cultural lines. However, where prior quantitative studies model psychological capital or engagement as the mediating variable between inclusive leadership and performance, the present Grounded Theory analysis surfaces a different, culturally specific mediating pathway: the internalization of shared Javanese-Sundanese cultural values as the mechanism connecting inclusive leadership to collaborative work behavior and performance. This suggests that the mediating mechanism linking inclusive leadership to performance may not be uniform across contexts, but shaped by the cultural resources available within a given organizational setting, an insight that variable-centered designs using predetermined mediators are not well positioned to detect.

The finding that cultural diversity, when managed through inclusive leadership, functioned as an organizational resource rather than a source of conflict is also consistent with diversity management theory, which holds that culturally diverse groups can realize informational and elaboration benefits when categorization-based tension is actively managed (van Knippenberg et al., 2004), and with hospitality-sector evidence that a culturally diverse workforce yields more benefits than challenges when supported by appropriate managerial practice (Manoharan et al., 2021; Oktadiana & Djauhar, 2011). The present study extends this literature by identifying inclusive leadership, rather than diversity management policy in the abstract, as the specific mechanism that tips this balance toward benefit in a Javanese-Sundanese hospitality setting.

Regarding the sustainability of the ISO 9001 Quality Management System, the present findings are consistent with survey evidence indicating that organizational commitment and consistent procedural implementation, both cultural and behavioral rather than purely documentary in nature, are what allow ISO 9001 implementation to translate into improved employee performance (Anuar Syahdan, Mujannah, & Artinah, 2021). The present study extends this evidence by showing the leadership and cultural mechanism, inclusive leadership integrating cultural diversity into a shared collaborative culture, through which such commitment is generated and sustained in a multicultural organization.

Based on this constant comparative analysis and the paradigm model presented in Figure 1, the study proposes the following substantive theory: "In a multicultural organization, inclusive leadership capable of integrating cultural diversity fosters the internalization of shared cultural values, creates a conducive work environment, strengthens collaborative work behavior, improves the consistency of employee performance, and supports the sustainability of ISO 9001 Quality Management System implementation." This theory indicates that the relationship between cultural diversity and organizational quality sustainability is not direct, but is mediated by an integration process led by inclusive leadership.

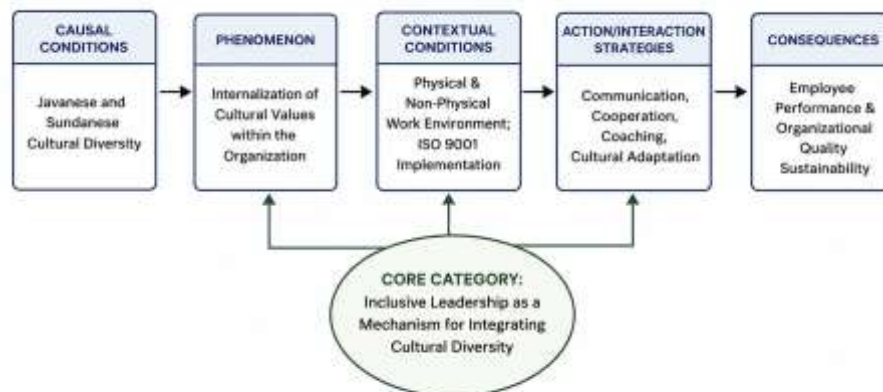


Figure 1. Substantive Theory Model

Source: Processed by the researcher (2026), based on open coding, axial coding, and selective coding analysis.

4. CONCLUSION

The central finding of this Grounded Theory analysis is the substantive theory that, in a multicultural organization, inclusive leadership capable of integrating cultural diversity fosters the internalization of shared cultural values, creates a conducive work environment, strengthens collaborative work behavior, improves the consistency of employee performance, and supports the sustainability of ISO 9001 Quality Management System implementation. At Arunika Joglo & Eatery, this theory is realized through open communication, leader accessibility, employee involvement in operational decision-making, and appreciation of cultural diversity, which together form the foundation for the harmonious management of Javanese and Sundanese employees. Cultural values such as harmony, tolerance, mutual respect, and togetherness have been internalized through daily interaction and leader modeling, gradually forming a shared organizational work culture rather than remaining as separate ethnic identities. Employee

performance is shown to result from the interaction of inclusive leadership, a conducive work environment, and internalized cultural values, rather than from individual capability alone: leadership opens the space for cultural integration, internalized cultural values sustain collaborative behavior, and the resulting work environment allows this behavior to translate into consistent performance and sustained ISO 9001 implementation.

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the inclusive leadership literature by extending it beyond its predominantly variable-centered orientation (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006; Ashikali, 2023; Fang et al., 2019; Umrani et al., 2024) toward a process-based, substantive theory that specifies how inclusive leadership functions as an integration mechanism in a culturally diverse, community-embedded organization. It further contributes to diversity management theory (van Knippenberg et al., 2004) by identifying inclusive leadership, rather than diversity policy in the abstract, as the specific mechanism that converts the categorization-elaboration trade-off toward elaboration-based benefit in a Javanese-Sundanese hospitality setting, complementing hospitality-sector diversity evidence from other cultural contexts (Manoharan et al., 2021; Oktadiana & Djauhar, 2011). Finally, the study contributes to the quality management literature by showing that the sustainability of ISO 9001 implementation (Anuar Syahdan et al., 2021) is not solely procedural but is enabled by the same leadership and cultural mechanism that shapes employee performance more broadly.

Practical Implications

Arunika Joglo & Eatery is advised to sustain and strengthen its inclusive leadership practices by broadening communication channels and employee participation in operational decisions, and to formally document the shared values of harmony, tolerance, mutual respect, and cooperation as organizational core values so that they can be consistently transmitted to new employees through onboarding, training, performance appraisal, and career coaching. Organizations with similarly diverse workforces, particularly in the hospitality and tourism sector, are encouraged to adopt inclusive leadership as a primary strategy for managing cultural diversity as a source of organizational strength rather than a source of conflict, and to embed this practice within, rather than alongside, their quality management systems.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations that should be considered in interpreting its findings. First, as a single-site Grounded Theory study of one hospitality organization involving two ethnic groups, the substantive theory generated is context-bound and its transferability to other organizational or cultural settings should be assessed by the reader against the contextual detail provided, rather than assumed (Fateqah, 2024). Second, although triangulation and member checking were applied, the interpretive nature of qualitative coding cannot fully eliminate researcher subjectivity. Third, the cross-sectional character of the fieldwork does not capture how the internalization of cultural values and inclusive leadership practices may evolve over a longer organizational life cycle. Future research is recommended to examine the dynamics of inclusive leadership, cultural diversity, and organizational performance in other hospitality or service-sector organizations with broader cultural diversity, and to complement this process-oriented account with longitudinal or mixed-methods designs that test the substantive theory's propositions, particularly the mediating role of cultural value internalization, across a larger number of organizations.

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