

EDITORIAL

Psychological safety at workplace during changing times. Trends and research implications

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The Importance of Psychological Safety at the Workplace

The unprecedented uncertainty and complexity of today's workplace environment mark a period of deep change that imposes a need for innovation and experimentation within organizations. Consequently, recent research focuses on highlighting the correlation between leadership, psychological safety, and learning behaviors. A recent meta-analysis (Edmondson & Bransby, 2023) showed that psychological safety has increasingly captured the interest of academic researchers. Notably, most of the studies on this topic were published in the recent three-year span of 2019 to 2021, the predominant approach being quantitative, with significant theoretical contributions. The concept of psychological safety is pivotal in fostering an environment where open communication, innovation, and constructive risk-taking are encouraged, leading to improved learning and performance outcomes.

Psychological safety emerged in early research on organizational transformation its focus being on ensuring that individuals experience a high sense of security and being able to adapt to change (Schein & Bennis, 1965). Later on, Kahn (1990) linked psychological safety to employee engagement,

suggesting that it enables individuals to fully engage physically, cognitively, and emotionally in their roles. While Schein & Bennis (1965) focused on individual perceptions of psychological safety, (Edmondson, 1999) defined psychological safety as a belief shared by team members about taking interpersonal risks. The central theme emerging from these perspectives is the significance of fostering a work environment where interpersonal risk perceptions are minimized, and where employees are encouraged to freely contribute ideas and actions to collective goals (Frazier et al., 2017).

Psychological Safety and Performance

Previous studies have extensively explored how psychological safety impacts a range of organizational outcomes. This includes areas like innovation, employee attitudes, creativity, knowledge sharing, voice behaviors, and communication (Newman et al., 2017). Research studies confirmed that psychological safety directly influences task performance, playing a crucial role in mitigating the adverse effects associated with making mistakes or initiating new actions, as identified by Edmondson (1999). This reduction in perceived risk enables employees and teams to

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concentrate more effectively on their tasks, subsequently enhancing performance (Faraj & Yan, 2009; Frazier et al., 2017; Mayer & Gavin, 2005). In their meta-analysis study, Newman and his colleagues (2017) revealed the impact of psychological safety on performance at multiple levels within organizations. Both at the individual and team level, there is a direct and strong influence of psychological safety on performance. Additionally, psychological safety's role extends to indirectly facilitating learning behavior, which in turn affects performance (Li & Tan, 2013; Ortega et al., 2014). Further, alternative mechanisms, such as team turnover, have been identified as factors through which psychological safety can impact performance (Chandrasekaran & Mishra, 2012). At an organizational level, the overall sense of psychological safety felt by employees within a company is closely and positively linked to the company's performance, as indicated by its return on assets and the achievement of its objectives (Baer & Frese, 2003).

Besides the effects of psychological safety on work performance, more specific results synthesised by Newman and his colleagues (2017) showed positive correlations between employees' perceptions of psychological safety and their creativity and risk-taking abilities (Carmeli et al., 2010; Palanski & Vogelgesang, 2011). Other studies revealed that psychological safety positively affects team performance, mediated by the sharing of information and "know-how" (Kessel et al., 2012). Some researchers suggest that psychological safety could improve performance by fostering better social exchanges between employees and the organization and sustaining employee identification with the organization (Singh et al., 2013). Correlated with other personality traits, psychological safety could also have an impact on performance, a recent study showed that self-efficacy and psychological safety explained the role of error tolerance on learning behavior which in turn, improved the overall work performance (Wang et al., 2020). These findings highlight the multifaceted role of psychological safety in enhancing

performance across individual, team, and organizational levels.

Psychological safety during changing times; relationship with organisational change

Psychological safety plays a crucial role during periods of change, as it helps individuals and organizations manage the stress and uncertainty inherent in such transitions. By fostering an environment where people feel safe to express concerns and take risks, psychological safety enhances creativity, innovation, and decision-making, crucial for rapid adaptation. Given the high uncertainty and the rapid changes both at organisational and societal levels, current studies could focus on the impact psychological safety could have on organizational change and its effects on employees' well-being. Researchers considered psychological safety as a component of efficient organizational change, however, there are not many studies on this topic. Employees who experience a high level of fear are often less receptive to organizational change, which can lead to a decline in their job performance (Weeks et al., 2004). Recent research has indicated that when employees with a greater sense of psychological safety are more open to engage in future transformations within the organization. Furthermore, implementing practices that enhance psychological safety can foster a stronger bond between the leadership and employees (Page et al., 2019).

Research studies also focused on the mediating role of psychological safety on the association between authentic leadership and employees' behavior, as psychological safety leads to important behavioral outcomes, such as organizational learning, information sharing, citizenship behaviors, and creativity (Steger et al., 2006), which are important antecedents of change and learning in organisations (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). More recent studies showed that employee psychological safety is positively associated with performance and innovation (Frazier et al., 2017). Concerning change engagement, it seems that psychological safety and self-

efficacy have positive effects on change engagement (Albrecht et al., 2023). Therefore, research supports the idea that psychological safety could be an important antecedent for change engagement and proactive work behavior. If employees perceive organizational change as purposeful and feel competent and safe, organizations can significantly boost employee motivation to embrace change and drive innovation.

Conclusions

Factors such as organizational support and a positive safety climate are intrinsically linked to work performance. This perspective suggests that the benefits of psychological safety could extend beyond its immediate impact on work engagement; when organizations cultivate a supportive environment and a climate that prioritizes safety, the sense of security among employees is enhanced and their engagement and productivity are also stimulated (Kim et al., 2020). The perspectives outlined above underscore the crucial role of psychological safety in the workplace, particularly in the context of the evolving work environments we see today, such as distributed and hybrid models. Thus, in the modern workplace, where traditional office dynamics are rapidly evolving, prioritizing psychological safety is not just a matter of employee well-being, but a strategic imperative for organizational success. Understanding what factors contribute to the development of psychological safety, and how and when it influences work outcomes, is crucial for the success and well-being of individuals, teams, and organizations.

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