

## Role of Psychological Safety in Organisational Behaviour – Literature Review

Václava Kloudová Jiříčková<sup>1</sup> - Zuzana Křečková Kroupová<sup>2</sup>

ORCID iD: 0009-0002-6373-9681<sup>1</sup>, 0000-0002-0448-7069<sup>2</sup>

xjirv07@vse.cz, zuzana.kreckova@vse.cz

Prague University of Economics and Business, Faculty of International Relations,  
Department of International Business,  
Prague, Czech Republic

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**Abstract:** A constructive and safe work environment is a fundamental predecessor for learning, development, and innovations in organisations. The Psychological safety appears as the predictor supporting the constructive organisational settings. Until the 1990s, the focus of academic research was on elucidating the fundamental principles of the psychological safety. Currently, however, scholars aim at explaining more nuanced questions. This expansion seeks to deepen our understanding of the intricate nature of Psychological Safety, including the identification of its antecedents and understanding of its outcomes, and the mediating and moderating effects that shape the dynamics of Psychological Safety within organisational contexts. Given the recent dynamic attention to this concept, a literature review is needed. Suggestions for future research are also provided.

**Keywords:** psychological safety, teamwork, team efficiency, learning, innovation development

**JEL Classification codes:** M14

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### INTRODUCTION

Today's world is interdependent on many levels. Organisations are not an exception; a collaboration of people is required to accomplish common, shared goals. The environment in which most people work can be characterised (to a smaller or larger extent) as complex and ambiguous. The less the environment carries the characteristics of simple and predictable, the more cross-expertise communication, team collaboration and learning are required on a daily basis to ensure safe operation, achieving goals and innovation. It applies not only to highly skilled, experienced experts but to any work, any position. The authors state case studies from various industries that describe the role of Psychological Safety (PS) in various workplaces - from PhD level experts in nuclear power plants and highly skilled teams in tertiary care hospitals to teams of unprivileged manual workers in mines in Africa where collaboration, speaking up with question and concerns was the critical factor that led to success or (if not present) to failure (Edmondson, 2018; Clark, 2020).

Not only business organizations see the importance of creating workplaces where people can express their best selves, grow, learn, and contribute to shared goals and innovations as a tool to flourishing – on personal, community, state, and humankind levels. National governments, represented by the United Nations, set an ambitious goal to promote inclusive, productive employment and decent work for all (United Nations a). In the Political Declaration adopted at

the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), under the auspices of the General Assembly in September 2023 in New York, one of the Shared Commitments states: "We reaffirm that the 2030 Agenda (of SDGs) is universal in nature and that its Goals and targets are comprehensive, far-reaching, people-centred, indivisible and interlinked, balancing the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental, in an integrated manner." (United Nations b, Political Declaration adopted at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), under the auspices of the General Assembly in September 2023, 78/1, p.2).

The research focused on the phenomenon of Psychological safety (PS) proved that it is a crucial factor in processes enabling collaboration (Chen et al. 2017), open communication (True et al. 2014), learning (Edmondson 1999), inclusion (Singh et al. 2013, Hora et al. 2021), goals attainment and effective performance (Edmondson, 1999; Huang et al., 2008), better experience of the work / meaningful work (Grant et al., 2014; Blustein et al., 2023) and innovation (Anderson et al., 2020).

Psychological safety (PS) can be utilised as a guiding principle to answer many challenges. Considering the above-mentioned characteristics of a workplace of interdependence and ambiguity, we experience new work contexts in which (1) employees are expected to integrate ideas that stem from their expertise into cohesive team outputs, collaborate and innovate to achieve shared goals, and (2) employers are expected to create inclusive, sustainable and decent workplaces. (United Nations c).

The purpose of this paper is to establish a grounding grid - overview of research, findings, and implications of Psychological Safety (PS) in general, i.e. integrating key findings of all levels of research – individual, group, and organisational. However, a detailed review will be aimed at the individual level of Psychological Safety (PS) as the least explored area. The potential for future research will be mentioned as well.

## 1 LITERATURE REVIEW

Psychological safety (PS) has been studied for decades. The first attempts to describe the construct of PS can be tracked back up to the year 1965 when MIT professors Schein and Bennis (1965) studied organisational change. They identified that PS is a critical element making people feel safe and consequently willing to change their behaviour to align their efforts and actions with changing organisational and business environment. In his later work, Schein (1993) elaborated on ideas that linked PS to an environment where people do not have to focus on impression management and can rather be focused on contributing to the attainment of the group goals. Impression management as established by Goffman (1959) encompasses the strategies individuals employ to create and/or regulate what others think of them. Most often the main aim of impression management behaviours is to be more likeable for the audience, make the individual to be accepted by the group, comply with spoken or unspoken norms of the group. Striving for such compliance creates a barrier to open communication.

The turning point for the construct of Psychological Safety (PS) was the research of William Kahn (1990), in which he studied the influence of various factors (psychological meaningfulness, safety and availability) on engagement at work. He described: "Psychological safety was experienced as feeling able to show and employ oneself without fear of negative consequence to self-image, status, or career." (Kahn, 1990).

Most researchers use the definition crafted by Amy C Edmondson, in her influential paper, stating that: "Psychological safety is a shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking" (Edmondson, 1999). "Psychological safety is a belief that

one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes. "(TEDx Talks, 2014), PS is an environment in which people can fully express their abilities and skills without fear of being perceived as ignorant, incompetent, negative or intrusive (Edmondson, 2018). In a psychologically safe environment, people can learn from their own mistakes and the mistakes of their colleagues. People learn faster, without excessive stress and emotional strain, and can be focused on high performance and innovative solutions (Edmondson, 1999). The typical misconception about a psychologically safe environment is that it is close to the comfort zone where people are free from accountability, avoiding difficult topics and challenges. On the contrary, a psychologically safe environment enables people to overcome interpersonal insecurities and reduces the level of impression management. Those factors (1) remove barriers to sharing thoughts, concerns, questions, and feedback, (2) enable sharing mistakes and learning from them, and (3) promote asking for help for better performance and faster learning.

The last 25 years of research have built up a massive body of work exploring Psychological Safety (PS) from various perspectives, contributing to broadening knowledge and providing practical implications for leadership in various fields, i.e., business, military, state administration, education, and healthcare. Currently, we possess models that describe how PS mediates or moderates various aspects of the work process, which we can cluster into seven major categories: (1) collaboration, (2) open communication, (3) learning and (4) inclusion. PS also impacts how people experience the work process in terms of (5) personal fulfilment/meaning. Categories that play prominent roles are (6) effective performance/goal attainment and (7) innovation.

### **1.1. Collaboration**

Most current job tasks can only be performed through interaction with co-workers.

Most research papers focus on only one of the levels on which psychological safety (PS) is studied: either individual, group, or organizational perspective of PS. However, Remtulla et al. (2021) focused in their study on the identification of four key barriers to PS covering all three levels: individual, team, and organizational; and eight facilitators of PS covering individual and team levels. This research underscores the multifaceted nature of factors contributing to PS. It emphasizes the potential for all team members to contribute to psychologically safe environment. Even in the absence of desirable leadership behaviours, team members can proactively cultivate PS.

Malhotra et al. (2017) found that PS mitigates undesirable effects of functional dominance in cross-functional teams (i.e. it mitigates risk in situations that in a cross-functional team, specific expertise is over-represented which can skew team opinion towards perspective of the domineering expertise). Furthermore, their model (Malhotra et al. 2017) described the behaviours that the leader of the cross-functional team needs to employ to mitigate the risk of sub-optimal performance if, due to practical constraints, when the team cannot avoid functional dominance. Those behaviours are all linked to creating PS.

Empowerment and self-empowerment to collaborate not only on the job tasks but also contribute to creating the PS itself is an essence of the construct of PS. As opposed to many leadership theories, PS puts more focus on team members' active participation. A leader's responsibility is to follow 3 step process: „setting the stage, inviting participation, and responding productively" (Edmondson, 2018). A team member is responsible for joining the leader in the endeavour, contributing to, appreciating, and supporting others' contributions.

## 1.2. Open Communication

Reducing interpersonal risk (risk resulting from interpersonal interactions that can impact a person's acceptance and social status in a group (St. Amour, 2004)) enables people to contribute with their ideas and raise concerns. However, psychologically safe communication is not voicing all ideas at all times. Reducing self-censorship needs to go hand in hand with creating rules, embracing non-judgemental communication, and creating platforms where people can use their voice to enrich others and contribute to shared efforts.

The massive body of research on speaking up with concerns and communicating across professional boundaries was done in healthcare, a sector that attracted the most attention during the initial phases of exploring Psychological Safety (PS). The latest work of True (2014) on communication across different expertise in medical homes among primary care staff adds a deeper perspective of open communication outside the stable team. Research from different industries shows how PS can prevent the detrimental effects of office politics on relationships (Li et al., 2014) and the role of positive mood in promoting employees (Liu W. et al., 2015).

The pioneering work of Detert & Edmondson (2011) on the implicit voice theories shows that the popular notion of a leader being able to motivate or stop open communication is not the complete picture. People have certain expectations of harsh consequences of their voice (that are not supported by any actual events or interaction) that stop them from engaging in communication fully or at all. In addition, reluctance to speak up is not always caused by fear of consequences but inappropriateness of the message, messenger, or place. As everyone carries his/her life experience (gained prior to entering the current team with the current leader), building PS is a prerequisite necessary but not sufficient to combat the implicit voice theories (unstated and unconfirmed expectation from engaging in difficult topics discussion). It does not mean we can resign to build the PS – it only means that the benefit from open communication can come to fruition with delay.

## 1.3. Learning

Long-life learning is not only the personal strategy to keep up with the increasing speed of change and continuously prolonging engagement in the work process due to prolonging life. From an organisational perspective, continuous learning needs to be seen as a series of daily mini interactions that contribute to increasing the organisation's competitiveness or strengthening the purpose (service) of the state institution. The interaction between people, sharing best practices, mistakes and learnings from them - if facilitated and fully exploited - is a key element supporting the flourishing of people, organisations, and communities.

Edmondson (1999), in her paper, tested various hypotheses to understand how Psychological Safety (PS) influences the learning process and performance. She proved that the team PS predicts team learning behaviour, i.e. "Seeking feedback, discussing errors, seeking information and feedback from customers and others" (Edmondson, 1999). In her model, she explores even further and proves that team learning behaviour is a mediator between team PS and team performance (Edmondson, 1999). It shows that PS is not a goal per se. It is an enabler and accelerator of the learning process in everyday interaction in the workplace.

During the last decade, a plentiful body of research focused on understanding the moderating and mediating effects of PS on learning behaviour was published, providing more details on how the learning process happens. Bresman & Zellmer-Bruhn (2013) argue that a solid team structure promotes interactions, discussions and learning among team members, while in a team where strict organisational structure hinders team task autonomy, learning happens

externally (team independent). PS mediates the relationship between team structure and internal team learning.

Particularly enriching are two pieces of research by Wilhelm et al. (2019) and Hood et al. (2016). Their research attempts to shed light on the linkage between PS and group transactive memory system. Wilhelm (2019) argues that if PS on the group level is present and the transactive memory system is present as well (transactive memory system is "... memory that is influenced by knowledge of the memory system of another person" (Lewis, 2003), then it employees can fully exploit the learning opportunity, mitigating the inherent barrier to learning caused by the defensive reaction on an intra-personal level and by impression management on an inter-personal level. Hood (2016) undertook research examining the role of PS in discussing mistakes, focusing on positive and negative affect and its relationship to updating, enriching, and developing transactive memory system. He found that negative affectivity diminishes the development of the group's transactive memory system. Moreover, negative affectivity indirectly lowers PS, which could mitigate the risk of silence and blame as opposed to asking and providing help and learning from mistakes on the team level.

#### **1.4. Inclusion and Diversity**

To explore the full potential of diverse teams (particularly if partly or fully working online), the inclusion of the team members is of paramount importance. The inclusion of a person as a human being to the team is a basic human right; however, the inclusion of a person as an executor of a work role is linked to the ability of the person to fulfil the role expectation and contribute back to the team's common goal fulfilment. A high level of Psychological Safety (PS) lowers barriers to asking questions, calling for and offering help, sharing suggestions, and learning from mistakes. Therefore, PS provides benefits to all parties. (1) A person who experiences a PS behaviour can learn faster, contribute back to the team and experience respect and dignity; (2) the team benefits from being enriched by additional skills, strengths, talents and ideas; (3) the company experiences benefit in terms of effective goal delivery and innovation.

Kirkman et al. (2013) have examined specific teams – teams of „communities of practice“ (“Groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger et al., 2000). The research proved that critical drivers of performance of the „community of practice“ are a high level of diversity and frequency and extent of communication – when moderated by a high level of PS.

In the last few years, the number of research papers from countries with various cultures has increased significantly. Chinese researchers play an exceptional role in the volume of peer-reviewed papers from non-US environment. Chen et al. (2017) worked with a sample of 61 workgroups to confirm their hypothesis that a curvilinear relationship exists between faultlines and team performance. (Faultlines are imaginary yet noticeable dividing lines breaking a group or team into subgroups.) Each subgroup is formed based on specific attributes, i.e. race, sex, age, nationality, hometown, and alma mater. PS reduces the negative impact of faultlines on team performance.

#### **1.5. Performance and Goal Attainment**

The first piece of research that presented a model linking Psychological Safety (PS) with performance was the one developed by Edmondson (1999) in her pioneering study surveying teams of furniture producer. She proved that all teams - regardless if they were cross or single-

functional, temporarily formed or permanent, manager-led or self-led – achieved better performance once PS was present, with learning behaviour as a mediator translating PS to performance. Her findings were confirmed by Huang et al. (2008) in Taiwan research. Currently, teams are not stable entities. People join and leave the teams based on the need for their expertise. Research on boundary spanners (people who are linking the team's internal networks with external sources of information or other teams" (Tushman & O'Reilly, 2002) and boundary work (spanning, buffering, and reinforcing) proved that PS is positively linked to team performance (Faraj & Yan, 2009). Bieneffled & Grote (2014) proved that "within the home-team" PS of boundary spanners played a key role in mitigating the negative effects of status differences and promoted the habit of speaking up across boundaries. Boundary spanners play a critical role in voicing concerns and contributing with expertise, knowledge, and experience to problem-solving. Therefore, the models that help understand how to remove barriers to cooperation across teams can provide guidance to better performance in complex organizations.

The most significant research executed in a business setting by Google (code-name project Aristotle) proved that PS was the critical factor explaining why some teams outperformed others (Duhigg, 2016). Research started in 2012 and used data from more than 180 work teams, proving that there are five key factors that ensure better performance when present in teams. Interestingly, those factors were not characteristics attributed to individual team members (i.e. personality traits or time spent together as a team); all individual linked characteristics proved insignificant. What surprised the researchers in a 2+ years-long multilevel research project was that all factors were linked to "how" the team members interact. PS was proved to be the most important out of those five factors; moreover, if PS was not present, then none of the remaining 4 factors enhanced the performance.

### **1.6. Better Work Experience and Meaningful Work**

With stress levels record-high as an after-math of COVID and other societal challenges, PS was studied as a mitigating factor of stress, undesirable work experiences i.e. bullying, incivility, and burnout.

PS was proven to work as an antidote to exhaustion from high-performance expectations (Grant et al., 2014). Referring to research presented in the section on Performance/Goal attainment, it is clear that PS not only creates an environment where it is easier to meet high-performance standards. It also ensures that the personal experience of people working in psychologically safe teams will be better. Empowering pieces of research describe PS as a significant factor in mitigating behaviours of bullying and incivility (Klingbert et al. 2018). Moreover, the existence of PS is able to help to manage the consequences of undesirable behaviour in the workplace. The existence of PS also predicts an increased likelihood that bullying behaviour will be addressed and discussed within the team and that the bullied person will experience support from the team members (Shea et al., 2018; MacCurtain et al., 2018).

### **1.7. Innovation**

The challenges of today's world require employing innovative thinking to progress on solutions to acute global objectives, social problems, business goals and issues of individual people, teams, and communities. The barriers standing in the way of employing innovative thinking can be overcome by strengthening PS.

Interesting research from China by Gu (2013) showed that "psychological safety and learning from mistakes (LFM) partially mediated the relationship between the structural and cognitive

capital and innovation in R&D teams, and fully mediated the relationship between the relational capital and innovation in R&D teams” (Gu et al., 2013). How PS supports innovative processes was also tested in a European context, analysing data from Norwegian SMEs (small and medium enterprises). It suggests that when a workplace fosters an atmosphere where employees feel safe to take interpersonal risks and share ideas, organisations as a whole tend to perform better in terms of innovation. The findings show that when employees feel psychologically safe, there is a higher organisational level of innovation in various areas like products, processes, services, and even their business models. (Anderson et al., 2020).

### **1.8. Summary**

Establishing PS should not serve as a goal per se; it is a means to achieve the goal of a productive and decent workplace. PS is often described as soil into which the seed of work needs to be planted. PS is a construct that describes parameters of the environment in which collaboration, open communication, and learning occur without barriers, where goals are attained, innovations are developed with minimum interpersonal barriers, and where people experience an inclusive and positive atmosphere in the work teams.

By definition, a psychologically safe environment can be created only if there is (1) a group of people, (2) closely and frequently interacting with each other, and (3) collaboratively working on a common goal. PS is, therefore, a concept inherently linked to a team's existence. However, team PS can be measured only because of individual perceptions of the PS of each team member. Those individual perceptions of PS necessarily and logically differ from person to person. Most of the research on PS is focused on the team level. However, the authors believe the individual level of PS is an area to be studied as there is an increasing trend of remote work, fluid teaming, and multi-team membership. Organisations will not be formed from long-term teams where one leader will influence the members who spend a substantial amount of time working on a single goal, enjoying the benefits of long-term relationships.

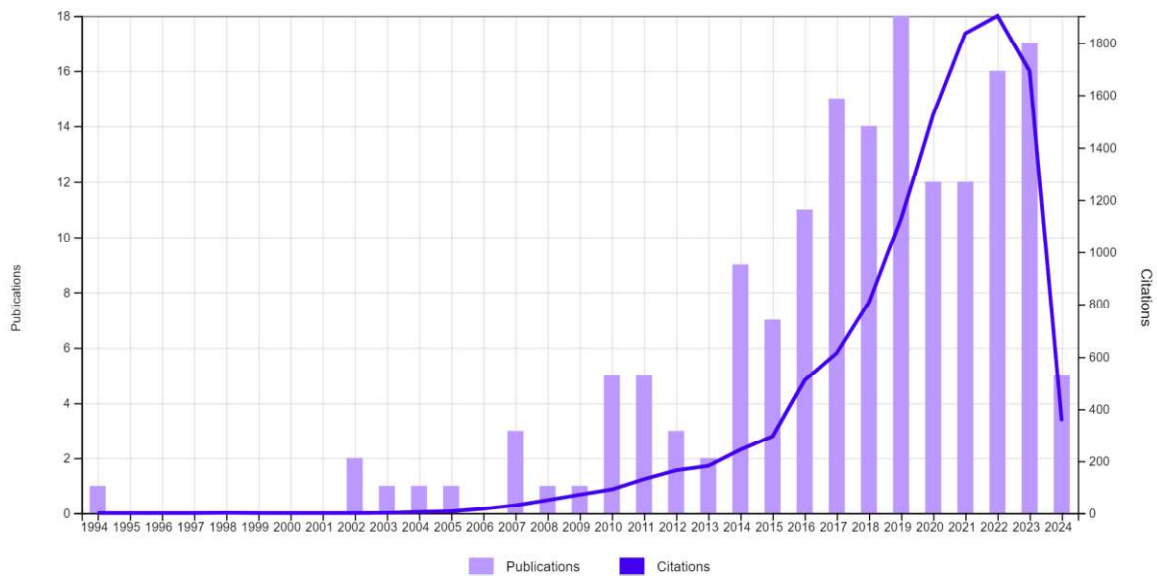
## **2 METHODOLOGY**

Uncovering the current knowledge of Psychological Safety (PS) in general with a specific focus on individual level of PS there was stated the following research question:

RQ1: How can be the key determinants of Individual level of PS categorised?

The bibliometric analysis of the term “psychological safety” resulted in 1167 articles in the Web of Science database, category Management, within the period 1994 to 2024. Given the focus on the assessment of the individual level of the phenomenon, the bibliometric analysis was narrowed to the terms “psychological safety” and “individual level”. Based on the analysis of articles indexed in the Web of Science database, there were published only 162 articles on topic since 1994, while the majority of them were published since 2016. The relatively new and unexplored territory resulted in specific literature review approach.

**Table: Bibliometric analysis of terms “psychological safety” and “individual level”**



Source: Web of Science, own research

The literature review was based on snowballing strategy. The procedure started from the Psychological Safety renowned author Amy Edmondson and her newest books *Right Kind of Wrong: The Science of Failing Well* (2023) and *Fearless Organisation: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation, and Growth* (2018). Both forward and backward snowballing was used (Wohlin, 2014). The academic databases Web of Science and Google Scholar were used. Web of Science served for both forward and backward directions, and Google Scholar for forward direction only.

Snowballing was chosen over the more common database search for the following reasons: there was clearly an appropriate seed (start) set of relevant sources (Wohlin, 2014), and snowballing is expected to be more efficient by reducing the amount of noise if the database search keywords include general terms (Wohlin, 2014). The potential threat of judgments based on the title of the paper only, when applying backward and forward snowballing, which might result in missing papers with no relevant keyword in the title (Jalali and Wohlin, 2012) was eliminated as authors analysed whole papers.

### 3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We need to understand how team Psychological Safety (PS) influences an individual and how an individual can contribute to creating a psychologically safe environment.

Although PS at the individual level is a relatively new perspective, there are research papers that bring new insights from various points of view.

Reviewing the research on the individual level of Psychological Safety (PS), the authors identified building on work of Clark (2020) the following areas that demonstrate the four bases of individual Psychological Safety (PS): (1) inclusion, (2) learning & experimenting, (3) collaboration, (4) open communication & challenging the status quo. Those four bases are inevitably interconnected and lead to outcomes in the form of better performance, innovation, and better work experience.



### 3.1 Inclusion

Singh et al. (2013) elaborate on diversity, resp. diversity-supporting behaviours as a driver of performance and examine role of Psychological Safety (PS) in the process. The research showed that relationships between racial diversity and (1) in-role performance (performance of the tasks related to a job description), (2) extra-role performance (displaying helping behaviours towards organization as a whole and also directed towards individuals) are mediated by PS. It proves that PS can serve as a true inclusion factor turning diverse workplaces into inclusive environment where people can show their authentic strengths and through it contribute to job tasks fulfilment and also go above and beyond and self-actualise themselves through helping other people and organization.

Hora et al. (2021) describes how PS helps to overcome difference in self-perception among men and women that if not addressed leads to faulting which then leads to suboptimal performance. Researchers investigated the creative self-efficacy of men and women in departments of US food producer where it was desirable to employ creativity to fulfil job requirements. The research confirmed differences in perceived self-efficacy between men and women. It also created a model that describes how the difference in creative self-efficacy between men and women can be bridged through PS. PS creates a space for open communication, idea sharing, mutual learning among team members, motivates search for new solutions, and peer mentoring. All this leads to the fact that PS has a positive effect on creative self-efficacy, for both men and women. Moreover, women benefit from PS disproportionately more in comparison with men (Hora et al., 2021). Thus, PS helps to improve inclusion ensuring that none of the voices of different team members is neglected. The inclusion of all team members in the discussion not only serves to improve work experience of each individual but also helps to increase number of ideas and inputs to team effort.

### 3.2 Learning & experimenting

Interesting insight on a role of PS in hospitality business demonstrated how an industry prone to errors and at the same time with very high expectations for flawless work can benefit from employing psychologically safe behaviours. More the non-blame approach to mistakes is adopted, stronger the self-efficacy (a person's belief in their ability to succeed in a particular situation, job, task) as well as PS. Self-efficacy and PS influence directly as well as cross-influence willingness to admit mistake and learn from the mistake (Wang et al. 2020). Creating environment where it is acceptable to share mistake and learn from it leads to better service recovery performance. Welcoming the mistake sharing should not be mistaken for environment that promotes low quality standards. Shame-free environment promotes sharing mistakes that leads to accelerated learning process. Employees can learn not only from their own mistakes but also from others' failures which amplifies performance and customer experience.

Espedido & Searle (2020) examined what is the role of PS in behaviours leading to innovation. They proved that when people (on intra-personal level) feel psychologically safe, it influences their perception of problem-solving demands as positive challenge (challenge appraisal), it then subsequently encourages them to come up with new ideas and solutions (engage in innovation). "The only significant mediation effect at the within-person level was problem-solving demands on individual innovation, via challenge appraisal." (Espedido & Searle 2020, page 12). "Results showed that psychological safety climate moderated the within-person effect of problem-solving demands on challenge appraisal." (Espedido & Searle 2020, page 13).

Wilhelm and Semrau (2019) help to clarify questions related to how desirable behaviour of learning from mistakes prevail over inhibiting behaviour of defensiveness and avoidance. When

employees work in teams where there is at least medium level of PS, they are more inclined to learn from their mistakes. Additionally, when these teams have a transactive memory system, it supports individual learning from failure further.

### **3.3 Collaboration**

In the current state of rapidly assembling, disassembling, changing, and evolving teams, the need to understand how helping and collaborating behaviors can be nurtured is critical, as only through collaborative processes can shared goals be achieved.

May et al. (2004) directly built on Kahn's (1990) research examining the role of psychological availability, safety, and meaningfulness on engagement. In their work, they proved that PS plays a mediating role both between supervisor-employee relations and employee engagement, as well as between co-worker-employee relations, and employee engagement. 'Rewarding co-worker and supportive supervisor relations were positively associated with psychological safety' (May et al., 2004, page 11). Based on the meta-analysis of Neuber et al. (2022) describing the link between engagement and performance, we can conclude that engagement is linked to increased task performance, therefore, work confirming the mediating effects of PS on engagement contributes to better performance.

Frazier & Tupper's (2018) research is revolutionary as it elaborates on work of Nembhard & Edmondson (2006) who argue that leader's individual's level of PS tends to be higher than the team members' individual level of PS. Nembhard & Edmondson (2006) explain that the dynamics is relevant for any relationship where the status is present, i.e. senior vs junior team member, length of belonging to the team, level of professional education or experience. The higher the status position, the higher the individual PS. Frazier & Tupper (2018) research quantifies effects of leader role-modelling and positive/desirable trickledown effect on employee PS (positive relationship between level of leader self-perceived PS and level of employee PS). The second part of the model elaborates on effects of employee PS on (1) if and how employees are willing to help each other and (2) how employees tackle job duties. PS influences two above mentioned elements through employee thriving (employee thriving is defined "a psychological state in which individuals experience both a sense of vitality and a sense of learning at work" (Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005, p. 538)).

Li & Tan (2013) focused on exploring the role of trust in a leader on employee performance. Results of their research show that trust is not only a social phenomenon but also plays the role of a business value generator. PS mediates the relationship between trust in a supervisor and job performance. Employee trust in a supervisor generates better job performance with PS being one of the mediating factors (the second one is psychological availability) (Li & Tan, 2013). The mediating role of PS was also proven by the research mentioned earlier by Singh (2013), where PS positively influences performance.

### **3.4 Open communication & challenging status quo**

Detert and Burris (2007) undertook two-phase study to investigate influence of (1) transformational leadership and (2) managerial openness on subordinate improvement-oriented voice. They discovered a positive relationship between how freely the subordinate expresses opinions and both the leader's openness and transformational leadership style. "We also found psychological safety to play a mediating role in the leader behavior-voice

relationship and found the influence of leader behaviors on voice to be more pronounced for subordinates with high performance." (Detert & Burris 2007).

Liang et al. (2012) examined PS, felt obligation for constructive change, and organization-based self-esteem to find dynamics behind forming promotive voice (expressing improvement ideas and future-oriented solutions) and prohibitive voice (i.e. pointing out harmful factors or expressing concerns). Research data were collected on the Chinese market, and the research showed that felt obligation for constructive change (perceived obligation to organization to put effort to help an organization in improvements) was related to promotive voice; while PS is strongly related to prohibitive voice mitigating inhibiting effects of inappropriateness of the individual voice and promoting speaking up. It draws an interesting base for ideas on how to encourage employees to share ideas and concerns in a non-US (high power distance) culture. It was also proven in a study conducted in China where Liu et al. (2015) explored how PS contributes to an environment that enables whistleblowing. On top of widely researched barriers to whistleblowing, i.e. fear of retaliation and perceived futility, Liu et al. (2015) also examined elements highly relevant to the local culture, i.e. the potential endangerment of "guanxi"—network/connections and a strong need for harmony). The research proved that PS mediates the relationship between authentic leadership and whistleblowing.

## CONCLUSION

### Conclusion

Today's world, characterized by interdependencies and ambiguity, demands collaborative efforts within organizations to attain shared objectives. Effective communication, team synergy, and continuous learning are paramount for operational safety, goal achievement, and innovation. Psychological Safety (PS) emerges as a pivotal factor in facilitating these dynamics, fostering an environment where individuals feel secure to express themselves, raise concerns, and contribute ideas without fear of reprisal.

Moreover, the significance of Psychological Safety (PS) extends beyond the confines of business organizations. National governments, represented by the United Nations, have embraced promoting inclusive and decent work as a fundamental goal. This commitment is enshrined in 17 SDGs – Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth.

Research examining PS underscores its multifaceted benefits, including enhanced collaboration, communication, learning, inclusion, goal attainment, performance, meaningful and fulfilling work, and innovation. These benefits are evident at the individual, group, and organizational levels.

The paper presents elaboration of four key areas of psychological safety at the individual level, namely inclusion, learning and experimenting, collaboration, and open communication and challenging the status quo.

As such, the paper seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of research findings on PS, with a particular emphasis on its implications at the individual level, which remains relatively underexplored and very much needed to help prepare workplaces that reflect current challenges, i.e. the rising prevalence of remote/hybrid work, flexible team structures, and participation in multiple teams simultaneously. Fast team formation on an interpersonal level is necessary to enable people to solve work problems, learn from each other and innovate. Quality of interpersonal relationships impacts the workplace experience of each individual

employee and trickles down to imminent families and broader communities. Building PS can support personal, organizational, business, and even large communities' thriving.

### **Future Research Recommendations**

Further research could focus on understanding how cultural differences influence the mechanism by which Psychological Safety (PS) is created. We hypothesise that different behaviours or different degrees to which a particular behaviour is manifested in a specific culture can contribute to or undermine the creation of PS. Based on Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions theory, elements, i.e. power distance and uncertainty avoidance, should be examined more closely. Current work done on the felt obligation to voice concerns in Chinese companies (Liang et al., 2012) and prerequisites on implicit voice theories (Detert & Edmondson, 2011) shows that there might be culturally and socially driven motivators that shape the mechanism of voice differently. The finding might have a tremendous impact on the efficiency of multi-national corporations as humankind can benefit from models suggesting how to modify the best practices when planning for implementation in different markets. Such a work would contribute to supporting the inclusion of different perspectives.

Further research could focus on understanding if there are differences in expectations (related to the level of PS) among generations. In the current workplace, there are four distinct generations: Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z. With the expected prolongation of participation in the work process, the diversity of the workforce needs to be addressed in a way that will lead to inclusion and collaboration. Research discovering similarities and differences in the role of particular behaviours in increasing PS will benefit leaders and organisations and could contribute to the meaningful implementation of the 2030 Agenda (SDGs).

PS within teams and organisations is promoted not only by the behaviours of the leaders but also by the interactions of all team members. While leaders play a crucial role in setting the principles and intents, team members also significantly affect the PS experienced by individuals. Understanding the dynamics will help today and, in the future, when we will see an increasing number of self-managed teams and the floating roles of the leaders. Understanding the impact of human interactions experienced from hierarchical vs peer positions will help create effective teams in future.

The levels of PS of a specific person established within teams can cross-influence the level of PS of other teams in which the specific person participates. The pivotal work of Bienefeld & Grote (2014) showed how enlightening it is to examine the individual levels of PS in the context of multi-team membership. Further work on this topic would be highly valuable.

The building blocks of PS are rooted in communication. Mini-interactions of everyday work life have an impact if a psychologically safe environment flourishes or deteriorates. It would be beneficial to observe how the most common interaction, particularly feedback, needs to be approached to support the personal and professional growth of the person while also supporting the individual level of PS.

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