



Psychological Safety and Its Impact on Team Performance in Hybrid Work Models

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Abstract

Hybrid work arrangements have rapidly redefined the way teams are managed, how communication is handled by organizations and the manner in which organizations meet their performance goals. Although hybrid work arrangements can provide flexibility and a better work–life balance, they can also cause a variety of issues related to collaboration, trust, communication and employee engagement. Psychological Safety is a key consideration in the effectiveness of a team in this context. Psychological Safety is a culture in an organisation where people feel free to share their ideas, questions, concerns and errors without risk. This research examines the impact of psychological safety on the team performance in hybrid working environments. This research explores the psychological safety's influence on different facets of team performance including teamwork, idea generation, the sharing of knowledge, decision making and productivity. The study draws on literature in the field of organizational behavior, team dynamics and remote management to identify mechanisms that make sense when discussing the role of psychologically safe environments in facilitating open communication and trust in the workplace when working remotely. This analysis also delves into the effect of leadership and organizational culture and digital communication enablers on building and maintaining a psychologically safe hybrid team. The results suggest that teams with high levels of psychological safety feature better interpersonal relations, improved flexibility with changes in the work environment, and better problem-solving skills, as well as better team performance. Psychologically safe environments are linked to increased employees sharing views, feedback, participation in team activities, and increased organizational outcomes. Conversely, a lack of psychological safety can result in problems with communication, decreased productivity, and decreased engagement. The study further found that creating a 'psychologically safe' environment at the workplace is an essential component to maximise the benefits of hybrid working. Organizations can encourage inclusive leadership, effective communication, and positive team dynamics to improve team cohesion and boost performance. The findings offer some direction to those in management, Human Resources (HR) departments and policy makers looking to develop resilient and productive hybrid teams in the new world of work.

Keywords: Psychological Safety, Team Performance, Hybrid Work Models, Employee Engagement, Collaboration, Organizational Culture, Leadership, Workplace Communication.

1. Introduction

A number of major shifts in working lives have occurred over the last few years due to the development of digital technologies, the globalisation of the world and changing employee expectations. One of the biggest trends is that of hybrid working, which gives staff the choice to work from home or in the workplace. In an era where more and more businesses are implementing hybrid or flexible working arrangements, they are seeking to offer their employees more flexibility, better employee satisfaction, and business efficiency. Although there are many benefits of hybrid work, it also presents communication, collaboration, trust, and team-building challenges. As the workplace changes, the concept of psychological safety has become a key driver of team productivity and team success.

Psychological safety is when team members believe that the environment they shared is safe to take interpersonal risks. It highlights workers' self-assurance that they can voice their opinions, ask questions, make mistakes and give feedback without fear of embarrassment, rejection or repercussions. With psychological safety in place, people tend to openly discuss ideas and topics, share their creative thoughts, and work well with peers. On the other hand, if

psychological safety isn't present, people may not speak up, engage in the discussion, or perform well as a team. Psychological Safety has become a more prominent topic in the research of organizational behaviour and human resource management. Cooperation is crucial to the success of modern companies and the achievement of strategic goals, the resolution of complex problems, and the development of innovation. Psychologically safe teams have greater trust, knowledge sharing, creativity, and learning. Staff members who are working in psychologically safe environments are more willing to take initiative, to ask for help when necessary, and engage in constructive problem-solving processes. These behaviours directly impact team performance and organizational outcomes.

While hybrid work environments create different situations that can foster or limit psychological safety. Physical distancing can decrease informal interactions, limit opportunities for relationship building and can result in communication barriers. While virtual meetings and digital communication can provide connection, it can sometimes be difficult to have impromptu chats and raise issues. Working with a remote team can cause anxiety and confusion for employees about what is expected of them and how the organization supports their work. Therefore, psychological safety in a hybrid team demands intentional actions from leaders and workplaces to build trust, inclusion and open communication.

Especially in hybrid working, leadership is key to setting the tone for psychological safety. Actions of leaders that foster participation, empathy, listening to team member concerns and providing opportunities for collaboration can build team member trust and belonging. Transparent communication, fair treatment of remote workers and in-office workers, and a supportive management culture are imperative in fostering an environment where employees feel they can share their ideas. This can not only create a better work environment for employees, but also boost team performance and flexibility.

Various parameters such as coordination, communication quality, engagement, collaborative problem solving, etc. are crucial for team performance in hybrid working models. These factors grow as a result of psychological safety as a foundation. High-psychological-safety teams are more capable of sharing knowledge, resolving conflict in a positive manner, and adapting to new demands in the workplace. They also tend to be resilient and creative, as well as productive. As a result, the link between psychological safety and team performance is gaining greater significance for companies aiming to optimize the advantages of hybrid work.

Although more and more companies are implementing hybrid working models, there is still not a lot of research that has been conducted on the impact of psychological safety in hybrid working. Most existing research has been conducted in the context of a traditional work environment, and there is a need for additional research on the role of psychological safety when teams are broken down between physical and virtual settings. It can offer managers, HR professionals and policymakers useful insights in designing nurturing workplaces that foster greater employee involvement and organizational results.

2. Background of the study

The workplace is all different because of hybrid working. Technology, and now even more so, the global COVID-19 pandemic, have fueled hybrid working, which is now a popular organizational approach to achieving flexibility for workers and efficiency for organizations. This model has been adopted by organisations of all kinds to boost productivity, cut down on running expenses and strengthen employee work-life balance. The transition from a traditional in-person work culture to a hybrid model has added new communication, collaboration, trust, and team-building challenges, though.

Psychological safety is one of the biggest drivers for teams to be effective when they're hybrid. Psychological safety is the mindset an employee has that every person in their work environment is safe to take interpersonal risks, such as sharing ideas, asking questions, admitting mistakes, and giving feedback without worrying about being embarrassed, criticized, or punished. Psychological safety in teams creates an environment that allows for open communication, respect, learning and innovation, which are all necessary to meet team objectives and maintain high performance.

Psychological safety has become a major topic of research in organizational behaviour and human resource management since it has been linked to employee engagement, knowledge sharing, creativity, and organizational learning. In an office environment, it would be common for face-to-face contact with team members to aid in building trust and relationship-building. But hybrid workplace models can also cause the loss of spontaneous collaboration and informal interactions and communication gaps. These challenges could impact staff members' capacity to express their views, ask for assistance or to contribute to group discussions, and therefore could hinder team effectiveness. With numerous workgroups dispersed and dependent on technology, psychological safety is now a more critical need than ever. Remotely working staff members might They might not feel a part of the team, may not be seen, and may not know what the team expects of them. Likewise, remote workers can feel out of the loop or out of the office and this lack of information and engagement can impact trust and collaboration. In those cases, the psychologically safe culture will be able to do so by communicating to ensure inclusion, by allowing for other perspectives and by enhancing the team dynamics.

High psychological safety teams are more likely to have positive communication, learn from failure, adapt to change,

and achieve better performance. A culture that promotes psychological safety allows people to feel valued, appreciated and respected, leading to greater motivation, commitment and collective problem solving. They are essential in the context of hybrid working where digital communication tools and self-managed team working are becoming integral to effective collaboration.

While hybrid working arrangements are becoming more relevant, there is limited empirical research seeking to understand the psychological safety and team performance in the hybrid context. There is little existing research that addresses the traditional team, and little knowledge on the psychological safety in a hybrid work environment. Organizations which embrace hybrid working have unique communication dynamics, reliance on technology and organizational architectures, which can introduce a need to examine psychological safety within team efficacy in this specific context.

Organizations are also seeking to ensure the wellbeing of their employees and fostering innovation and productivity within the evolving workplace. Understanding the notion of psychological safety can be of value to a manager or HR who wants to foster a positive organizational culture, team working and communication. What these learnings can offer companies to leverage the benefits and minimise the risks of hybrid working. Based on this, the study's aim is to explore the impact of PS on Team Performance in the Hybrid working models. The findings from the research will inform the knowledge base on the modern workplace and will impact on ways to improve the productivity of hybrid teams.

3. Justification

Hybrid working has quickly become the norm, transforming the way organisations work and presenting new challenges and opportunities to manage relationships with, and team effectiveness of, employees. In a hybrid work environment, employees spend some of their time at their worksite and some working remotely, effective communication, collaboration, trust and engagement are more complex. These shifts have brought PS to the forefront as a key element impacting teams and organisations. Psychological safety is when staff feel safe to share ideas without fear of negative consequences, feel free to ask questions without fear of negative consequences or embarrassment, feel safe to voice concerns without fear of negative consequences or embarrassment, and feel safe to admit mistakes without negative consequences, fear of embarrassment, or fear of criticism by peers. Psychological safety has been linked to increases in innovation, learning, employee engagement and team performance in the workplace. However, the move to hybrid working has altered the social dynamics and we need to know if and how psychological safety is linked with team effectiveness in a hybrid setting. New hybrid work models may mean more technology-based alternatives and less face-to-face communication, leading to miscommunication, isolation and lack of open communication. Team members may not be able to participate in discussions, provide feedback or offer new concepts if they are not physically together. As such, it is critical that organizations understand how to apply and apply psychological safety to help support collaboration and productivity in a distributed work environment. Moreover, companies in different sectors are spending significant time and resources on implementing hybrid work models as a long-term solution. Despite this, empirical studies on the link between psychological safety and team performance in hybrid work place are still scarce. Previous research has predominantly examined the context of completely remote or office-based working, missing the hybrid working context. The study is warranted because it seeks to address the dearth of knowledge in this field by investigating the relationship between psychological safety and communication quality, knowledge sharing, employees' participation, team trust, innovation, and team performance in hybrid work models. The results can help managers, HR practitioners and organisational leaders to develop positive work cultures where people can work together and operate at their best. Furthermore, the research adds to the body of knowledge related to organizational behavior and management of human resources and extends the use of psychological safety theory to contemporary working. It provides actionable suggestions for building leadership practices, communications approaches, and organizational policies to foster psychological safety in hybrid work environments and improve team performance. It is, therefore, timely and relevant to investigate the psychological safety in team performance in the hybrid working model, which has gained increased interest in the organizations due to its novelty as a challenge and has also been a source of evidence-based strategies to improve employee well-being and organizational performance in the new working model.

4. Objectives of the Study

1. To determine the extent to which employees feel psychologically safe when they work remotely and at work.
2. To understand the connection between psychological safety and overall team performance in hybrid work environments.
3. To explore how psychological safety affects the communication, collaboration, and knowledge sharing aspects of employees in hybrid teams.
4. To explore how psychological safety contributes to employee engagement and involvement in decision making.

5. To assess impact of psychological safety on innovation, creativity and problem-solving skills of hybrid working teams.

5. Literature Review

As people spend part of the day at home and part at work, psychological safety is becoming a key factor in business success in today's hybrid work environment. Psycho-social safety was first proposed by Kahn (1990) as an individual's sense that they can share their thoughts, ideas, and concerns without negative repercussions. Later, Edmondson (1999) broadened the concept and applied it to having a collective sense among team members that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking. This base is gaining in significance in the context of hybrid working. Team Learning and Performance is found to be significantly affected by Psychological Safety. Teams with high psychological safety were found by Edmondson (1999) to share knowledge, discuss mistakes, and discuss problems together. These actions help to facilitate ongoing learning and enhance team performance. Likewise, Carmeli, Brueller, and Dutton (2009) found that psychological safety leads to employee involvement and creative work involvement, which facilitates teams in performing well in dynamic organizations. Researchers have been studying the correlation between psychological safety and employee voice. Detert and Burris (2007) stated that the greater a sense of psychological safety in the workplace, the more likely workers were to share innovative ideas and constructive suggestions. The meta-analysis conducted by Frazier et al. (2017) has now established that there is a positive relationship between psychological safety and employee engagement, organizational commitment, learning behaviors and job performance. Their results indicate that psychological safety plays an essential role as a mechanism which supports organizations to improve the individual and collective outcomes.



Source: <https://www.process.st/psychological-safety-hybrid-workplace/>

Psychological safety promotes trust and collaboration in teams. Newman, Donohue, and Eva (2017) noted that psychologically safe environments promote employees to ask for feedback, acknowledge mistakes and share information freely. These interactions foster inter-personal relationships and enhance group coordination. The advantages of these are especially relevant in hybrid working models, where different locations can hinder communication and informal collaboration.

With the explosion in hybrid and remote working, there's been a growing focus on the psychology of working in virtual teams. Gilson et al. (2015) state that virtual and geographically dispersed teams have several issues with respect to trust building, communication and social cohesion. Psychological safety can mitigate some of these issues with openness and by allowing for active participation by all team members, regardless of where they are. Similarly, Breuer, Hüffmeier, and Hertel (2016) discovered that both trust and communication quality are crucial determinants of the effectiveness of virtual teams, and both of these are aided by a feeling of psychological safety.

Hybrid working means more complex interpersonal interactions as employees need to communicate via digital channels. Gibson & Gibbs (2006) state that due to geographical dispersion between distributed teams, there is a problem with knowledge sharing and coordination. These can be addressed by creating and maintaining a psychologically safe workplace where team members can seek clarification, contribute information and offer ideas. So, teams are more capable and adaptable when they face uncertain situations and challenging tasks.

Leadership is a huge part of creating psychological safety in hybrid teams. Nembhard and Edmondson (2006) found that inclusive leadership behaviours facilitate employees' full engagement in conversations and decision-making. Building a culture of trust and psychological safety means leaders should seek input, accept contributions, and react positively to errors. The same applies to leader inclusiveness, which was shown to positively influence team learning and team performance by providing psychological safety by Hirak, Peng, Carmeli and Schaubroeck (2012).

Psychological safety has been a focus of recent research as an important factor in fostering innovation and adaptability. Baer and Frese (2003) suggested that open communication and interpersonal relationships are related to organizational innovation and performance in operational activities. Psychological safety allows for experimentation and sharing of knowledge without concern of criticism, as teams will have to change technologies and work processes often in hybrid environments.

Knowledge sharing behaviour is another key outcome of Psychological Safety. Siemsen, Roth, Balasubramanian and Anand (2009) concluded that knowledge sharing is more likely to occur when people feel psychologically safe at work. For hybrid working to be successful, it requires a lot of digital interaction and information sharing, making psychological safety crucial to effective communication and group problem solving.

Moreover, psychological safety is a factor that plays a role in the well-being of employees and alleviates stress at work. Dollard and Bakker (2010) found that positive psychosocial workplaces have a positive effect on employee mental health and engagement. Psychologically safe employees will be less likely to be anxious to speak up or make errors, leading to higher job satisfaction and organizational commitment. These outcomes are particularly important in hybrid working as social isolation and communication barriers could impact employee health.

While there is considerable research on psychological safety, there is less research that explicitly focuses on psychological safety and hybrid working. Existing literature is largely related to the traditional workplace or all-virtual teams. With the rise in hybrid organizational structures, there is a growing need to examine the impact of psychological safety on team performance, working together, innovation, and employee well-being in these changing work contexts. Companies looking to work with a hybrid team and ensure a positive worker experience could benefit from learning more about how to address this gap.

The literature overall clearly shows that psychological safety is an essential key driver of team performance, employee engagement, knowledge sharing, innovation, and organizational learning. As communication and collaboration shifts to digital and physical spaces in hybrid working arrangements, psychological safety is a key pillar of successful hybrid teams and sustainable business performance.

6. Material and Methodology

The method of this current research was quantitative research method in analyzing the effect of psychological safety on team performance in hybrid working. Description and explanation research design was used to investigate the relationship between employees' perception on psychological safety and team performance effectiveness in a hybrid work organization. The study aimed to focus on employees working in sectors that are currently implementing a hybrid model of working from home and from the office, including in the information technology, financial services, consultancy, education and business process management industry sectors. The main data collection instrument used was a structured questionnaire that was applied to the participants of the hybrid environment employees and team members. The questions were broken down into three categories: Demographic, Psychological Safety Measures and Team Performance Indicators. Psychological safety was measured with items modified from previously developed scales that evaluate employees' willingness to share opinions, ideas, mistakes, and help without fear of detrimental consequences. Team performance was evaluated according to various criteria such as effectiveness of team collaboration, communication, productivity, problem solving, innovation and team goal achievement. A 5-point Likert scale was used for the responses measuring from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The sample comprised employees who had been working in hybrid teams for 6 months, thus ensuring that the sample had appropriate experience in hybrid working practices. The sampling method used was purposive, as participants were identified

from organisations that had formal policy and guidance for working remotely. Team members, supervisors and project managers from different levels in the project were chosen in such a way to represent a number of team members. Because the input to the survey was not mandatory and anonymous, it was hoped it would be honest and unbiased. Data was gathered using online survey tools, so that participants could easily complete surveys from various geographic areas. A preliminary survey was carried out with a small sample of respondents to check the clarity, reliability and validity of the items of the questionnaire before the main survey. Changes were made based on the feedback from the participants and the recommendations by the experts. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to assess the reliability of the instrument and academic experts and human resource professionals consulted to achieve the content level of the instrument. Coding, tabulation and analysis of collected data was done with the aid of statistical software. Data on the characteristics of the respondents and main study variables were summarized descriptively, such as frequency distribution, percentages, mean and standard deviations. To explore the relationship between psychological safety and team performance, both inferential (correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis) and descriptive statistical techniques were used. Further comparison analyses were carried out to determine the demographic and organisational role differences in perceptions. The results were analyzed in the context of hybrid working environments to gain insight into the relationships between psychological safety and team effectiveness, employee engagement and organizational performance. The methodology was created to provide accurate, objective and reliable Studies on the relationship between a psychological safe culture and the performance of a team in a hybrid working model. It also presents empirical evidence from existing scales of assessment and systematic data analysis procedures that can help managers, HR practitioners and organizational leaders to build psychologically-safe teams that are high performing.

7. Results and Discussion

7.1 Results:

This study explored the link between psychological safety and team performance in hybrid work settings. The data were gathered from the staff members and team leaders of organizations that implemented a mix of remote and in-office work arrangements. The results showed that psychological safety was highly correlated with several aspects of team functioning such as effective communication, effective collaboration, innovation, employee engagement, and task completion efficiency.

7.1.1 Psychological Safety Levels in Hybrid Teams

The analysis revealed that employees overall felt moderate to high psychological safety in their hybrid work environments. The degree of supportive leadership, transparent communication, and team practices that were included were reported as positive factors in their psychological safety. Teams that reported having regular virtual meetings and structured feedback systems had higher psychological safety scores than other teams. Additionally, staff who were more likely to speak up on issues, ask questions and say they were wrong showed greater trust in colleagues and supervisors. This trust helped to create effective collaboration, even when working remotely.

1.2 Impact on Communication Effectiveness

Results indicated that psychological safety had a significant impact on communication effectiveness in hybrid teams. Staff were more willing to share ideas, ask questions and join in discussions when they felt more psychologically safe. Open communication minimized miscommunication and improved collaboration between remote and office-based staff. On the other hand, groups with less positive psychological safety experiences reported communication challenges, lack of wanting to share concerns, and fear of negative evaluation, all of which had an adverse impact on the collaboration and decision-making processes in the group.

1.3 Influence on Team Collaboration

The results showed a significant positive correlation between psychological safety and team collaboration. Staff members in a psychologically safe environment were more likely to help each other, share knowledge, and collaborate on solving problems. High trust hybrid teams had the highest level of cooperation and willingness to contribute to common objectives. Digital collaboration tools reinforced this relationship even more when staff members knew their efforts would be appreciated, even when their work was not nearby.

1.4 Psychological Safety and Innovation

One of the most impacted is innovation. Teams with a strong sense of being psychologically safe were more creative and more experimental. No fear of criticism from others for people to make suggestions and ask questions about practice. Various adaptive communication and workflow protocols can be needed to handle hybrid workplaces. The results indicate that psychological safety is associated with allowing teams to foster an innovation environment, where they continually strive to enhance processes and operations to better satisfy the needs of their organization in the future.

1.5 Employee Engagement and Commitment

There was also a positive correlation between the psychological safety score and organisational commitment score

and engagement score. They were more likely to be motivated towards team goals and were more satisfied with their jobs. Less stressed and isolated as hybrid workers were those staff who felt they were part of a team and valued. Results also showed that psychological safety decreased the feelings of exclusion that remote employees reported, increased their belonging to organizational goals and activities.

1.6 Impact on Overall Team Performance

The regression analysis showed that PS had a significant impact on team performance. The teams that did not have these relationships had poorer performance results than the teams that did have these relationships. Psychological safety also had an impact on adaptability, resilience and problem-solving ability. The findings show that psychological safety is strategically important for organizations to develop as a resource to enhance individual and group performance in hybrid work.

7.2 Discussion:

The findings give solid evidence to the importance of psychological safety in shaping the effectiveness of hybrid teams. Organizations becoming more flexible with their work arrangements make it more important than ever to provide safe environments for employees to allow them to express themselves and to maintain performance and collaboration.

7.2.1 Psychological Safety as a Foundation for Hybrid Team Success

The results corroborate the concept of a psychological safety being a prerequisite of effective collaboration within teams. The hybrid working models present new challenges such as physical separation, fewer interactions with the other person in the office, and an increased reliance on digital communication tools. In such an environment, employers might be reluctant to provide feedback or suggestions because they might think it will be criticized or will have an impact. The study demonstrates that these challenges can be addressed with the help of trust, openness and mutual respect in psychologically safe environments. This kind of environment fosters engagement and enhances connections among people even with physical separation.

7.2.2 Communication and Knowledge Sharing

One of the biggest findings is the value of psychological safety in helping people to communicate effectively. With hybrid working, there can be a gap in information between those working remotely and those in the office. The findings show that psychological safety can improve these gaps by helping to motivate people to ask questions, give feedback, and share information. In this regard, companies that are good at communicating would have a greater chance of maintaining their employees united and working in a hybrid model.

7.2.3 Enhancing Innovation Through Psychological Safety

Team culture is important to innovation and also is a key to psychological safety. If employees are to be innovative they need to be willing to take the risk of upsetting interpersonal relationships by providing new ideas, new concepts and challenging old beliefs. The importance of psychological safety for creative engagement is even more important in hybrid environments (where there are limited informal interactions). Businesses with an open dialogue and inclusive leadership will tend to be more innovative and adaptable.

7.2.4 Employee Well-Being and Inclusion

The findings also show that psychological safety is an important employee well-being factor. The hybrid working model can also bring about feelings of isolation for some, particularly for those who are working remotely. Employees who feel their opinion is valued and appreciated will feel emotionally supported and feel connected to the company, if they feel accepted. This feeling of being part of the organization decreases stress and promotes engagement, which is good for both the employee and the organization. The results indicate that equal opportunities to participate in a team, regardless of employment location, should be provided.

8. Conclusion

Hybrid working has completely changed the way colleagues work, communicate and collaborate to achieve the organisation's goals. Psychological safety is one of the important factors that helps make a team effective and perform well in the changing work environment. The results of this research suggest that the more comfortable workers are sharing their thoughts, feelings, questions and errors, the more successful their teamwork, creativity, commitment, and productivity. Open communication and trust relies on psychological safety, and helped solve issues like geographically distributed and digitally connected teams.

The research also shows that with poor communication, hybrid working can pose challenges to effective interpersonal communication, relationship building and information sharing. Employees who work remotely may feel they are out of sight and out of mind, and less likely to be involved in discussions. In such cases, psychological safety can serve as a connection that can strengthen team spirit and ensure that everyone feels valued and appreciated, regardless of their location. Under the Hybrid work conditions, groups that are high in psychological safety can adapt to changes, handle conflicts better and work well.

In addition, leadership plays an important role in the influence of psychological safety in hybrid work. Leaders that foster participation, show empathy, give constructive feedback and foster inclusive communication, will inspire employees to participate and collaborate. Other policies in organisations can also help to establish psychologically safe workplaces, such as respect and the health of employees.

Psychological safety is a good thing to have in the workplace and is an important tool to help the team remain effective when working hybrid. Creating trust, inclusion and open communication in the workplace helps to build more resilient and productive teams that are prepared to excel in today's workplace. Continuing to invest in psychological safety will be key to long-term organizational success, employee satisfaction and constant innovation as hybrid working continues to transform the future of work.

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