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The Impact of Psychological Safety on Creative Performance: Mediating Role of Job Involvement

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Abstract: *The study was conducted with the aim of identifying the impact of psychological safety on creative performance, not in isolation, but by taking job involvement as a mediator. A plethora of research is available that is considered psychological safety and creativity. However, psychological safety has the potential to evoke and motivate employees to involve themselves in work-related activities. Positivism research philosophy was adopted, followed by a deductive approach. 132 sample size was finalized from the employees working in public sector related organizations. The results suggested that psychological safety significantly contributes to the creative performance of employees and job involvement is partially mediating the said relationship.*

Key Words: Psychological Safety, Job Involvement, Creative Performance

Introduction

In the current settings, where organizations are searching for most effective talent and trying to motivate them in such a way to gain maximum output (Malik & Khan, 2020). In this context, organizations are not only asking for routine performance but requiring creative performance from employees (Hora et al., 2021). Moreover, organizations are also asking for active employee involvement in work related activities. Similarly, employees are also keen to identify a safe environment in the organization where they can

feel free to put in their efforts. In this regard, psychological safety is one of the important factors that drive individuals to involve themselves in work related activities (Vella et al., 2022). The concept of a safety climate provided by an organization is referred to the extent to which the employees feel confident and secure to take any initiatives by using of best of their abilities and suggest any changes in the organization (Schein & Bennis, 1965). Further work on the construct led to an addition to the concept as the extent of an individual's perception of feeling safe when engaging in risk-taking activities (including voice behaviors) without fear of

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its negative impact on status, self-image and career when he/she has a supportive and trusting relationship his/her colleagues (Kahn, 2010). Moreover, Edmondson (1999) defined psychological safety as a shared belief among individuals as the extent to which it is safe to engage in interpersonal risk taking behavior at the workplace. On the other hand, employee involvement is defining the concept as the direct participation of an individual aiming to achieve organizational objectives by providing assistance in voluntary decision making, exerting the efforts to solve problems and applying their own expertise and ideas (Comer et al., 1995). It is also referring to the attachment of an individual towards his/ her job as well as towards the organization. It is an understanding that people at all levels of an organization possess unique talents, skills and creativity that can be significant value fallowed to be expressed" (Carmeli et al., 2017). The current study aims to identify the impact of psychological safety on employee creative performance with mediating role of employee involvement. It is trying to investigate the relationship in the public sector organizations where employees are not giving their best because they tend to procrastinate and non-work-related presenteeism (Akhtar & Malik, 2016; Akhtar et al., 2022). Moreover, organizations are discouraging the employees from introducing new ways of working (creativity) rather than emphasizing on completion of tasks in defined manners. Such organizations are also focusing on the completion of tasks with old methods. Due to these working conditions, employees are also trying to fulfil their tasks with low motivation because they feel that the environment is not safe for taking any creative initiatives.

Literature Review

Psychological Safety

Psychological safety refers to the extent to which the employees feel secure and confident in their abilities to deal with organizational change (Schein & Bennis, 1965). Further work on the construct led to an addition to the concept as the extent of an individual's perception of feeling safe when

engaging in risk taking activities (including voice behaviors) without fear of its negative impact on status, self-image and career when he/she has a supportive and trusting relationship his/her colleagues (Kahn, 1990). Moreover, Edmondson (1999) defined psychological safety as a shared belief among individuals as the extent to which it is safe to engage in interpersonal risk taking behavior at the workplace. If employees feel psychological safety, this entails the feeling that they would not be rejected by colleagues for being themselves or expressing themselves; they would be respected for their competence; they would promote positivity and exhibit positive intentions towards one another; they would be able to engage in constructive conflict; they would feel safe to take risks and experimentation (Edmondson, 1999). Thus, psychological safety lead towards interpersonally risk taking behaviors like voicing concerns, engaging in open communication, and seeking greater feedback (Pearsall & Ellis, 2011), which influences a number of workplace outcomes like learning and performance (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). It appears that trust and psychological safety constructs overlap as both the individuals engage in risk taking behaviors, but Newman, Donohue, and Eva (2017) pointed out the conceptual difference that trust focuses on how one person views another; whereas psychological safety focuses on how group members perceive a group norm as it is a "shared" belief.

Employee Involvement

Employee involvement is defining the concept as the direct participation of an individual aiming to achieve organizational objectives by providing assistance in voluntary decision making, exerting the efforts to solve problems and applying their own expertise and ideas. It is also referring to the attachment of an individual towards his/ her job as well as towards organization.

Creative Performance

Transform novel ideas into a successful process can define as the individual ability as an outcome of creative performance. It can also be defined as the ability of an individual to present novel thoughts/

ideas and implement them in such a way to meet the desired objectives. Creative performance is directly linked to the capabilities/ abilities of an individual to solve a problem in a more imaginative way.

Psychological Safety and Creative Performance

A psychologically safe environment is having a more inclined relationship with employee creativity. A recent systematic review suggested that psychological safety has a strong link with employee creativity through voicing behavior (cf, [Newman et al., 2017](#)). When an employee has the perception that the environment is safe for taking the personal initiatives for simplification of procedures and organization will support their ideas, then they involve themselves in creative initiatives. Most of the psychological safety related studies included psychological safety as an important factor for creativity (e.g. Edmondson, 1999; 2002). Evidences such as Carmeli et al., (2010) and Kark and Carmeli (2009) provide strong empirical support for psychological safety and creative performance. Employees' perception of psychological safety can also be linked with creative thinking and risk taking behavior ([Palanski & Vogelgesang, 2011](#)). [Lee, Swink and Pandejpong \(2011\)](#) conducted research on R & D teams and concluded that psychological safety is a strong predictor of the creative and innovative performance of employees. In line with the social exchange theory, researchers argued that psychological safety could influence the creative performance of an individual through nurturing social exchange between individual employees and organizations ([Singh & Winkel, 2012](#)). Psychological safety can be defined as the individual perception of an organization that it can support their creative thinking and ideas and will provide adequate resources for the implementation of creative thinking. Prior studies provide a strong justification for psychological safety and employee creative performance and employees with the perception of psychological safety have the tendency to involve in creative procedures.

H1: Psychological Safety has a Significant Impact on Creative Performance.

Employee Involvement and Creative Performance

In line with the study of [Eldor and Harpaz \(2016\)](#), it can determine that employee involvement and creativity have a strong link. Most of the Empirical research work suggests and relates the employee involvement not only involvement rather they relate it to creative work involvement. The involved employee with work continuously adopting the practices can foster creativity (Cohen et al., 2006). Social exchange theory ([Blau, 1968](#)) presented the link between employee attitudes and extra role behaviors (creative performance). Creative performance can be defined as a high level of capability of an individual employee at the workplace to apply the imaginative and novel solutions to a particular problem which can result in environmental factors an individual is taking from the organization i.e. autonomy, support and trust. These environmental factors can motivate the employee for involvement in work/ tasks ([Malik, Butt, & Choi, 2015](#)). Researchers (e.g. [Chandrasekarr, 2011](#)) identified that the working conditions, employee attitudes and employee performance as the behavioral outcome have significant relationships. The derived hypothesis for the relationship is:

H2: Job Involvement has a Significant Impact on Creative Performance.

Psychological Safety, Employee Involvement and Creative Performance

We can find the roots of the proposed relationship between psychological safety and employee job involvement in the study of Brown and Leigh (1996). The said study rigorously reviews the literature and empirically tests the relationship with a sample size of 85 and concluded that the psychological safety climate has a significant relationship with employee job involvement. Since then, there have been several studies available which are validating the statement of psychological safety and employee job involvement (e.g. Kark & Carmeli, 2009). Researchers identified that if the individual has the feeling of freedom of self expression, then they tend to involve themselves in

job related activities. [Barsade and Gibson \(2007\)](#) relate psychological safety with creative job involvement. The proposed relationship of psychological safety can be related to social exchange theory which defines that the provision of psychological safety climate by the organization to employees leads to job involvement ([Chen et al. 2014](#)). Such individuals who are getting the said climate and feelings tend to involve in their assigned task rather than procrastination or non work related activities. Moreover, such individuals have the tendency to perform the tasks in a more creative way because of their experimental tendencies to do their tasks rather than performing routine tasks. Psychological safety climate in the organization can take place through the supervisors' and leaders' positive attitude and supportive organizational activities which can turn the employee attitude into a more effective manner. It is imperative for the organization to have a keen observation of which strategies can help to com-up with a psychological safety climate. The study of [Holland, Pyman, Cooper and Teicher \(2011\)](#) provided support for the statement that psychological safety can significantly impact employee job attitudes (employee involvement).

H3: Job Involvement Mediates the Relationship of Psychological Safety and Creative Performance.



Research Methodology

Research Design

The current study intends to identify the impact of safety climate on creative performance with mediating role of employee involvement. For this purpose, the study adopts a positivist research philosophy followed by a deductive approach.

Sample Selection and Sampling Techniques

The research used purposive sampling techniques to investigate the relationship between psychological safety on employee creative performance. The sample was collected from the employees working

in public sector organizations. Psychological safety and job involvement related items were rated by employees and creative performance related items were rated by supervisors.

Sample Size

The sample size determined as 132 employees and 30 supervisors were also took part in the study. Initially, 150 self-administrated questionnaires were floated among employees of public sector organizations. Where 135 were collected back. Three questionnaires were not selected for formal data analysis because these questionnaires contained some unattended items.

Instrumentation

Psychological Safety was measured through the adopted questionnaire of Edmondson et al. (2014). This scale consists of 6-items, including three reverse questions. It is a self-reported questionnaire that will be assessed on a 5-point Likert scale. Creative performance was rated by immediate supervisors by using a 6-items scale by [Zhou and George \(2003\)](#), ranging from strongly disagree and strongly agree. The sample item chosen from the scale is this employee "comes with creative solutions to the problems ."Employee involvement was measured by using Kanungo's (1982) six (6) items scale. The said scale is self-reported and will be filled by individual employees.

Results

Respondent's Profile

Overall, 132 respondents were shortlisted and finalized for data analysis. Among 132 respondents, 101 were male and 31 were females. The work experience of 98 respondents is more than 10 years. The rest of the respondents have work experience of less than 10 years. 108 respondents have a master's degree and the rest have maximum graduation degree.

Reliability

The reliability analysis revealed that all the items of selected variables are according to the defined range

i.e. $>.60$. Psychological safety related item's reliability is $.87$, job involvement is 0.91 , and creative performance is 0.78 .

Correlation Analysis

The below-mentioned table is about the correlation

of the variables selected for the study. It can be interpreted as there is a strong association between psychological safety and employee involvement ($r = .437$, $p < 0.01$). Similarly, psychological safety has a significant association with creative performance i.e. $.285$, $p < 0.01$.

Table 1. Correlations

Variables	1	2	3
Psychological Safety	1		
Job Involvement	.437**	1	
Creative Performance	.285**	.310**	1

** $P < 0.01$

Regression Analysis

Table 2. Mediation Analysis

Direct Effect of Psychological Safety on Creative Performance					
Effect	SE	t	P	LLCI	ULCI
0.25	0.12	2.02	0.050	0.1	0.5
Total Effect of Psychological Safety on Creative Performance					
Effect	SE	t	P	LLCI	ULCI
0.39	0.11	3.4	0.001	0.16	0.62
Indirect Effect of Psychological Safety on Creative Performance					
Effect	Boot SE	LLCI	ULCI		
0.14	0.07	0.03	0.310		

The results revealed that psychological safety has a significant impact on creative performance because the beta value is 0.25 and statistically, it is less than 0.05 . Hence we accepted hypothesis 1. It has also been identified that job involvement has a significant impact on creative performance and job involvement partially mediates the relationship between psychological safety and creative performance.

Discussion

The current study highlighted an important issue of the performance of the employees who are working in the public sector organizations of Pakistan. The employees are not giving up on the mark performance because they have the awareness that the organization is liable to retain them even if they are giving normal performance rather than creative performance (Khan & Malik, 2017). Such

employees are the real liability to the organization because public sector organizations are providing job security to all of their permanent employees (Malik & Khan, 2020). The said issue was highlighted and empirically tested in the current study and the results suggested that psychological safety is a significant contributor to employee creative performance. The results also revealed that job involvement is partially mediating the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The results are aligned with the previous studies where it has been identified that the employee with creative performance tries to accomplish a task in a new way, think beyond the complex procedures rather than believe in simplification of the procedure, the development of new ideas and implementation of these ideas in a way to meet the requirements of effective and efficient behavior (Anderson, De Dreu, & Nijstad,

2004). Since creativity was gained importance in literature (Amabile, 1996), researchers are continuously trying to identify the antecedents of creativity or creative performance (Oldham & Cumming, 1996). Employee engagement and employee involvement are strong predictors of creative performance (Zhang & Bartol, 2010). The results of the current study identified that an employee's creative performance is dependent upon psychological safety and job involvement plays a partial mediating role in the said relationship as Amabile (1996) suggested that there are some potential antecedents of creativity that can influence the creative behavior of employees. He suggested personal, contextual and environmental factors which are the potential contributor to employee creativity or creative performance. Creative performance gains attention when organizations face strong competition from their competitors in terms of resources. Organizations with the ability to influence the organization outside the environment or having the ability to gain maximum resources can survive. Human resource is one of the important resources among other resources. So organizations are trying to motivate and invest in

this resource in a way to gain creative performance. Employees with creative performance and innovative work behavior are the real assets of the organization (Herold, Farmer, & Mobley, 1995) and the creativity of employee have been identified as a source of organizational innovation (Amabile et al., 1996). Moreover, scholars identified that creativity is an important component of an organization's success and effectiveness.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The study took a moderate sample size. However, still identified as too small to generalize the results. The study also focused on public sector related organizations and it requires that the private sector is also important and this sector is dependent upon the creative performance of employees. So future studies should take this sector as well to generalize the phenomena of psychological safety. Moreover, future studies should also take the antecedents of psychological safety such as leadership style and organization support.

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