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Original Article

THE IMPACT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY ON EMPLOYEES WELL-BEING AND INNOVATION IN THE EDUCATIONAL SECTOR OF KARACHI

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ABSTRACT

Psychological safety has emerged as an important organizational factor influencing employees' psychological experiences, workplace behaviors, and organizational outcomes. A psychologically safe work environment may enable employees to express ideas, ask questions, acknowledge mistakes, and engage in interpersonal risk-taking without fear of embarrassment or negative consequences. The present study examined the relationship between psychological safety, employee well-being, and innovation among employees working in educational institutions in Karachi, Pakistan. A quantitative, cross-sectional research design was employed. Data were collected from 250 employees working in educational institutions through a structured self-report questionnaire. Psychological safety was measured using Edmondson's Psychological Safety Scale, employee well-being was assessed using Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale, and innovative work behavior was measured using Janssen's Innovative Work Behavior Scale. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson product-moment correlations, regression analyses, and mediation analysis. The findings demonstrated significant positive relationships among psychological safety, employee well-being, and innovation. Psychological safety significantly predicted employee well-being and innovation, while employee well-being also significantly predicted innovative work behavior. Mediation analysis further indicated that employee well-being partially mediated the relationship between psychological safety and innovation. The findings highlight the importance of psychologically safe educational workplaces in supporting employee well-being and encouraging innovative behavior. The study provides implications for educational leaders, organizational administrators, and human resource professionals seeking to develop supportive, collaborative, and innovation-oriented work environments.

I. INTRODUCTION

Organizations operating in contemporary environments face increasing demands for adaptability, collaboration, creativity, and continuous improvement. Technological developments, changing organizational structures, globalization, and increasing performance expectations have transformed the nature of work and intensified the importance of employees' psychological experiences within organizations. Although financial, technological, and strategic resources remain important, organizational effectiveness also depends on the psychological conditions that allow employees to communicate openly, collaborate effectively, and contribute new ideas. Employee well-being and innovation have therefore become important areas of organizational psychology. One psychological condition that has received considerable attention is psychological safety. Edmondson (1999) conceptualized psychological safety as a shared perception that a team or workplace is safe for interpersonal risk-taking. In psychologically safe environments, employees are more likely to express opinions, ask questions, provide feedback,

acknowledge mistakes, and introduce unconventional ideas without excessive fear of embarrassment, rejection, or punishment. Psychological safety therefore creates conditions that facilitate communication, learning, collaboration, and experimentation (Edmondson & Lei, 2014).

Psychological safety is particularly relevant to employee well-being. Employees who perceive their workplace as supportive and non-threatening may experience greater freedom to express themselves and seek assistance when needed. In contrast, environments characterized by fear, excessive hierarchy, criticism, or interpersonal insecurity may increase psychological strain and discourage employees from openly communicating their concerns. Previous research has associated psychological safety with positive employee experiences, engagement, learning, and workplace outcomes (Frazier et al., 2017; Newman et al., 2017). Employee well-being is itself an important organizational outcome. Well-being extends beyond the absence of psychological distress and includes positive functioning, meaningful relationships, autonomy, personal growth, environmental mastery, self-acceptance, and a sense of purpose (Ryff, 1989). Within educational organizations, employees may face considerable interpersonal and occupational demands, including workload, administrative responsibilities, changing curricula, technological demands, and continuous interaction with students and colleagues. A workplace that supports employees psychologically may therefore contribute to healthier functioning and more positive organizational behavior. Another important organizational outcome is innovation. Innovative work behavior involves employees generating, promoting, and implementing new ideas within the workplace (Janssen, 2000). Innovation requires employees to take interpersonal and professional risks, particularly when introducing unfamiliar approaches or questioning existing practices. Psychological safety may therefore provide an important foundation for innovative behavior because employees are more likely to share ideas and experiment when they believe that mistakes or unconventional suggestions will not result in negative interpersonal consequences.

The relationship between psychological safety, employee well-being, and innovation may be particularly important within educational institutions. Educational organizations depend heavily on human interaction, collaboration, knowledge sharing, creativity, and adaptation. Teachers and other educational employees are expected to respond to changing student needs, adopt new approaches, solve problems, and contribute to institutional development. A psychologically unsafe environment may inhibit these behaviors by encouraging silence and fear, whereas a supportive environment may facilitate both employee well-being and innovation. The Pakistani organizational context provides an important setting for examining these relationships. Cultural and organizational characteristics such as hierarchical communication, respect for authority, and perceived power distance may influence employees' willingness to disagree, express concerns, or introduce new ideas. Existing research has examined employee workplace happiness (Hussain & Hussain, 2025), job satisfaction (Ghayas et.al., 2023), stress (Hussain & Hussain, 2025), and workplace spirituality (Ghayas et.al., 2022; Ghayas et.al., 2023; Hussain & Hussain, 2025) in Pakistan; however, relatively limited attention has been given to the integrated relationship between psychological safety, employee well-being, and innovative work behavior within educational institutions. The present study therefore addresses this contextual gap by examining psychological safety, employee well-being, and innovation among employees working in educational institutions in Karachi. Specifically, the study investigates whether psychological safety is positively associated with employee well-being and innovation and whether employee well-being acts as a mechanism through which psychological safety contributes to innovation. Based on the literature and theoretical framework, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H1: Psychological safety is positively related to employee well-being.
H2: Psychological safety is positively related to innovation.
H3: Employee well-being mediates the relationship between psychological safety and innovation among employees in the educational sector.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Psychological Safety

Psychological safety has become an important concept within organizational behavior and organizational psychology since its conceptualization by Edmondson (1999). It refers to the perception that individuals can take interpersonal risks without fear of humiliation, rejection, or punishment. Psychological safety allows employees to

express concerns, ask questions, provide feedback, acknowledge mistakes, and contribute ideas openly. Edmondson and Lei (2014) emphasized that psychological safety facilitates interpersonal communication, learning, and knowledge sharing. Similarly, Frazier et al. (2017) identified psychological safety as an important organizational factor associated with employee engagement, learning, and performance. When employees feel accepted and respected, they may be more willing to participate actively in organizational processes rather than remaining silent because of fear. Psychological safety may be particularly relevant in organizational cultures characterized by hierarchical relationships. In contexts where employees perceive substantial power differences between themselves and organizational authorities, employees may be reluctant to question decisions or express disagreement. Such conditions can restrict communication and reduce opportunities for learning and innovation.

Employee Well-Being

Employee well-being represents employees' positive psychological functioning and quality of experience within their personal and occupational lives. Ryff's (1989) multidimensional model conceptualizes psychological well-being through six dimensions: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Within organizational settings, employee well-being is associated with positive functioning, engagement, motivation, and effective workplace behavior. Employees who experience supportive and respectful working environments may be better positioned to manage workplace demands and maintain positive psychological functioning. Psychological safety may contribute to this process by reducing the interpersonal risks associated with expressing opinions, seeking help, and acknowledging mistakes. The educational sector presents a particularly important context for employee well-being because educational professionals frequently manage multiple responsibilities, including teaching, student interaction, administrative work, curriculum requirements, and organizational changes. Supportive organizational environments may therefore serve as important resources for maintaining employee well-being.

Innovation and Innovative Work Behavior

Innovation is an essential component of organizational effectiveness because organizations must continuously adapt to changing demands and develop new approaches to problems. Janssen (2000) conceptualized innovative work behavior as a process involving the generation, promotion, and realization of ideas. Innovation requires more than creativity. Employees must also feel sufficiently secure to communicate ideas, challenge existing practices, experiment with alternative approaches, and potentially make mistakes. Psychological safety may therefore provide an important social condition for innovation. Research has suggested that psychologically safe environments encourage learning, knowledge sharing, creativity, and innovative behavior because employees are less concerned about the interpersonal consequences of taking risks (Carmeli et al., 2010; Frazier et al., 2017).

Psychological Safety and Employee Well-Being

Psychological safety can influence employee well-being by creating an environment characterized by trust, acceptance, open communication, and interpersonal respect. When employees believe that they can express themselves without negative consequences, they may experience greater psychological comfort and authenticity. The relationship between psychological safety and employee well-being is consistent with the theoretical perspective proposed by Edmondson (1999), according to which psychological safety enables employees to participate more freely in interpersonal and learning processes. Previous research has also reported positive relationships between psychological safety and employee outcomes, including well-being and engagement (Frazier et al., 2017; Newman et al., 2017).

Psychological Safety and Innovation

Psychological safety may also influence innovation by reducing employees' fear of interpersonal risk. Generating and promoting new ideas can expose employees to criticism or rejection, particularly when proposed ideas challenge established practices. Employees who perceive greater psychological safety may therefore be more willing to participate in innovative activities. Research has associated psychologically safe environments with creativity, learning behavior, knowledge sharing, and innovation. Supportive interpersonal relationships may enable employees to experiment and contribute ideas without excessive concern about negative evaluation (Carmeli et al., 2010).

Employee Well-Being and Innovation

Employee well-being may further contribute to innovative work behavior. Positive psychological functioning can support motivation, resilience, engagement, and cognitive flexibility, which may facilitate employees' ability to generate and implement new ideas. Kark and Carmeli (2009) highlighted the role of positive psychological states in creative and innovative behavior, while Zhou and Hoever (2014) emphasized the importance of psychological experiences in workplace creativity. Employees who experience higher levels of psychological well-being may therefore have greater psychological resources available for problem-solving, creativity, idea generation, and organizational participation.

Theoretical Foundation

The present study is primarily informed by Psychological Safety Theory (Edmondson, 1999), which proposes that employees are more likely to engage in learning, communication, experimentation, and interpersonal risk-taking when they perceive their work environment as psychologically safe. The study is also informed by Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), which emphasizes the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness for psychological well-being and motivation. A psychologically safe environment may support these needs by allowing employees greater freedom of expression, opportunities for meaningful contribution, and stronger interpersonal relationships. The Job Demands-Resources perspective further provides a useful organizational explanation because psychological safety can be conceptualized as a workplace resource that may support employee well-being and desirable organizational outcomes. The present study consequently conceptualizes psychological safety as an organizational resource that may contribute to employee well-being and, subsequently, innovative work behavior.

III. METHOD

The study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine the relationships among psychological safety, employee well-being, and innovation. Data were collected through self-report questionnaires from employees working in educational institutions in Karachi.

Participants

A total of 250 employees working in educational institutions in Karachi participated in the study. Participants were selected through a non-probability convenience sampling approach. The sample included employees working in educational organizations, including teaching and non-teaching staff. Participants were required to be adults working in educational organizations and to have sufficient exposure to their organizational environment and workplace relationships. Participants who were interns, temporary or freelance workers without a consistent organizational relationship were excluded. The demographic profile indicated equal representation of male and female participants. Of the 250 respondents, 125 (50%) were male and 125 (50%) were female. The largest age group was 20–30 years (46.4%), followed by 30–40 years (36.4%). Approximately half of the participants worked in private-sector educational organizations (50.4%). The largest proportion of respondents reported 10–15 years of work experience (38.8%).

Measures

[I] Psychological safety was assessed using Edmondson's (1999) Psychological Safety Scale. The scale assesses employees' perceptions regarding whether their workplace environment permits interpersonal risk-taking, including expressing ideas, asking questions, and acknowledging mistakes without fear of negative consequences. [II] Employee well-being was assessed using Ryff's (1989) Psychological Well-Being Scale. The measure assesses dimensions of psychological functioning including autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. [III] Innovation was assessed using Janssen's (2000) Innovative Work Behavior Scale. The measure captures employee behaviors related to the generation, promotion, and implementation of ideas within the workplace.

Procedure

Permission was obtained from selected educational organizations before data collection. Organizations were contacted through email and face-to-face communication, and the purpose and nature of the research were explained to organizational representatives. Eligible employees were invited to participate voluntarily. Participants were provided with information about the purpose of the study, the nature of participation, and their rights as research participants. Informed consent was obtained before data collection. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary, that they could withdraw, and that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential. The questionnaire consisted of demographic information followed by the psychological safety, employee well-being, and innovative work behavior measures. A total of 250 valid responses were included in the final analysis. Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic characteristics and study variables. Pearson product-moment correlations were conducted to examine relationships among psychological safety, employee well-being, and innovation. Regression analyses were conducted to assess predictive relationships, and mediation analysis was used to examine whether employee well-being mediated the relationship between psychological safety and innovation. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Participation was voluntary, participants were permitted to withdraw, and confidentiality and anonymity of responses were maintained.

IV.RESULTS

Table I: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 250)

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	125	50.0
	Female	125	50.0
Age	20–30 years	116	46.4
	30–40 years	91	36.4
	40–50 years	43	17.2
Employment Sector	Private	126	50.4
	Government	66	26.4
	NGOs	58	23.2
Work Experience	1–5 years	43	17.2
	5–10 years	53	21.2
	10–15 years	97	38.8
	15–20 years	28	11.2
	20–25 years	28	11.2

The sample consisted of 250 employees from the educational sector. Male and female participation was equal (50% each). Most respondents were between 20–30 years of age (46.4%), followed by 30 -40 years (36.4%). The majority were employed in the private sector (50.4%), while most respondents had 10 -15 years of work experience (38.8%).

Table II: Pearson Correlations among Psychological Safety, Employee Well-Being, and Innovation

Variables	1	2	3
1. Psychological Safety	--		
2. Employee Well-Being	.468**	--	
3. Innovation	.619**	.632**	--

**p< .001

There was a significant and positive correlation with Employee Well-Being with Psychological Safety (r = .468, p < .001), such that greater psychological safety was correlated with higher levels of well-being. Psychological Safety also had a strong correlation with Innovation (r =.619, p < .001), which indicates that workplaces where employees believe they will not be demeaned or embarrassed will have innovative behaviors. There was a significant positive

correlation between Employee Well-Being and Innovation (r = .632, p < .001), which the shows that more well-being felt by employees, the more inclined they are to perform innovative work behavior.

Table III: Regression Analyses Predicting Employee Well-Being and Innovation

Predictor	Outcome Variable	*B*	*β*	*t*	*p*	R^2
Psychological Safety	Employee Well-Being	0.892	.468	8.34	< .001	.219
Psychological Safety	Innovation	1.355	.619	12.41	< .001	.383
Employee Well- Being	Innovation	0.726	.632	12.84	< .001	.399

Psychological safety significantly predicted employee well-being (β = .468, t = 8.34, p < .001) and explained 21.9% of the variance in employee well-being. Thus, H1 was supported. Psychological safety also significantly predicted innovation (β = .619, t = 12.41, p < .001) and explained 38.3% of the variance in innovative work behavior. Therefore, H2 was supported. Employee well-being significantly predicted innovation (β = .632, t = 12.84, p < .001) and accounted for 39.9% of its variance. This finding provides support for the proposed pathway between employee well-being and innovation and forms an important component of the subsequent mediation analysis. The positive relationship between psychological safety and employee well-being is consistent with Edmondson's (1999) theoretical proposition that psychologically safe environments allow employees to express themselves and participate in workplace interactions without excessive fear. The finding also corresponds with previous research linking psychological safety with positive employee experiences, engagement, and well-being. The significant relationship between psychological safety and innovation is similarly consistent with research suggesting that psychological safety facilitates experimentation, knowledge sharing, creativity, and innovative behavior. Employees who do not anticipate embarrassment or punishment may be more willing to introduce new ideas and participate in organizational improvement. The relationship between employee well-being and innovation further suggests that positive psychological functioning may provide employees with psychological resources that facilitate creativity, engagement, and innovative behavior.

Table IV: Multiple Regression Predicting Innovation

Predictor	*B*	*t*	*p*
Psychological Safety	.414	8.41	< .001
Employee Well-Being	.438	8.91	< .001

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine whether psychological safety and employee well-being jointly predicted innovation. The combined model explained 53.3% of the variance in innovation (R^2 = .533). Psychological safety remained a significant predictor of innovation (β = .414, t = 8.41, p <.001), while employee well-being was also a significant predictor (β = .438, t = 8.91, p < .001). These findings indicate that both psychological safety and employee well-being contribute independently to innovative work behavior.

Table V: Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects of Psychological Safety on Innovation Through Employee Well-Being

Effect	*B*	*t*	*p*	*LLCI*	*ULCI*
Total Effect (c)	1.355	12.40	< .001	—	—
Direct Effect (c')	0.906	8.41	< .001	—	—
Indirect Effect (a × b)	0.449	—	—	0.317	0.596

The proposed mediation model examined whether employee well-being explained part of the relationship between psychological safety and innovation. Psychological safety was specified as the independent variable, employee well-being as the mediator, and innovation as the dependent variable. Psychological safety significantly predicted employee well-being (B = 0.892, t = 8.34, p <.001). Employee well-being also significantly predicted innovation (B = 0.504, t = 8.91, p <.001). The total effect of psychological safety on innovation was significant (B = 1.355, t = 12.40, p < .001). When employee well-being was included in the model, the direct effect of psychological safety on innovation remained significant (B = 0.906, t = 8.41, p < .001), although it was reduced from the total effect. The indirect effect was 0.449, with a 95% bootstrap confidence interval ranging from 0.317 to 0.596.

Because the confidence interval did not include zero, the indirect effect was statistically significant. The findings therefore indicate partial mediation by employee well-being.

V. DISCUSSION

The findings supported Hypothesis 1, showing that psychological safety significantly and positively predicted employee well-being. Employees who perceived their workplace as psychologically safe were more likely to experience positive well-being. This finding is consistent with Edmondson (1999), who proposed that psychological safety allows employees to express ideas, ask questions, and acknowledge mistakes without fear of negative consequences. The result is also supported by Malik et al. (2021), Nazir and Shafi (2018), Frazier et al. (2017), and Newman et al. (2017), who highlighted the positive relationship between psychological safety and employee outcomes and well-being. Hypothesis 2 was also supported, indicating that psychological safety significantly predicted innovation. Employees who felt safe to express ideas and take interpersonal risks were more likely to demonstrate innovative work behaviors. This finding is consistent with Baer and Frese (2003) and Carmeli et al. (2010), who emphasized the role of psychological safety in promoting learning and innovation. Similar findings were reported by Khan et al. (2021), Sajid and Shahzad (2020), and Yasin and Khalid (2023).

The findings further showed a significant positive relationship between employee well-being and innovation. Employees with higher well-being may have greater psychological resources to engage in creative thinking and problem-solving. This is consistent with Diener et al. (2018), Kark and Carmeli (2009), and Zhou and Hoever (2014), who linked positive psychological states with creativity and innovation. Finally, the mediation analysis showed that employee well-being partially mediated the relationship between psychological safety and innovation. This suggests that psychological safety may promote innovation both directly and indirectly by supporting employees' well-being. The finding is consistent with Kark and Carmeli (2009) and Newman et al. (2017), highlighting the importance of positive psychological experiences in facilitating innovative work behaviors. Overall, the findings suggest that fostering psychological safety and employee well-being may help educational institutions create environments that support innovation.

Implications

The findings have several practical implications for educational institutions, organizational leaders, and human resource professionals. First, educational institutions should develop organizational climates in which employees can express opinions, raise concerns, acknowledge mistakes, and contribute suggestions without fear of humiliation or retaliation. Open communication and mutual respect can strengthen employees' perceptions of psychological safety. Second, leadership development programs should emphasize behaviors associated with psychologically safe leadership, including active listening, constructive feedback, supportive communication, conflict management, and openness to employee perspectives. Third, organizations should strengthen employee well-being initiatives. Educational employees frequently manage multiple professional and interpersonal demands, and organizational support for psychological well-being may contribute to healthier functioning and stronger workplace engagement. Fourth, educational organizations should establish formal opportunities for employees to generate and implement new ideas. Innovation committees, collaborative projects, idea-sharing forums, and recognition of innovative contributions may provide employees with opportunities to translate creativity into organizational improvements. Finally, organizations should periodically assess employees' perceptions of psychological safety, well-being, and organizational support. Such assessments can help organizational leaders identify areas requiring improvement and develop interventions that are responsive to employees' experiences.

VI.CONCLUSION

The present study examined the relationships among psychological safety, employee well-being, and innovation among employees working in educational institutions in Karachi. The findings demonstrated significant positive relationships among all three variables. Psychological safety significantly predicted employee well-being and innovative work behavior, while employee well-being was also positively associated with innovation. Most importantly, the mediation analysis demonstrated that employee well-being partially mediated the relationship

between psychological safety and innovation. This suggests that psychologically safe workplaces may encourage innovation not only directly by enabling employees to express ideas and take interpersonal risks, but also indirectly by supporting employees' psychological well-being. The findings highlight psychological safety as an important organizational resource within educational institutions. Workplaces characterized by openness, mutual respect, trust, and supportive communication may provide conditions in which employees can maintain positive psychological functioning while contributing creatively to organizational development.

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