

Relationship between Psychological Safety And Knowledge-Sharing Behaviour among Employees

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Abstract

In the contemporary organizational environment, effective knowledge sharing has emerged as a vital contributor to learning, innovation, and sustainable performance. However, employees often hesitate to share knowledge due to interpersonal risks and fear of negative evaluation. In this context, psychological safety plays a crucial role in shaping employees' willingness to engage in knowledge-sharing behaviour. The present study examines the relationship between psychological safety and knowledge-sharing behaviour among employees. Using a quantitative research approach, data were collected from 300 respondents through a structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics were employed to assess the levels of psychological safety and knowledge-sharing behaviour, while correlation and regression analyses were used to examine the relationship and influence between the variables. The findings reveal a high level of perceived psychological safety and knowledge-sharing behaviour among employees. Correlation results indicate a strong and positive relationship between psychological safety and knowledge sharing. Regression analysis further confirms that psychological safety significantly predicts knowledge-sharing behaviour, explaining a substantial proportion of its variance. The study concludes that psychologically safe work environments encourage employees to share knowledge more openly, thereby strengthening organizational learning and collaboration. The findings offer valuable insights for managers and organizations seeking to foster a knowledge-oriented and supportive workplace culture.

Keywords: Psychological Safety; Knowledge-Sharing Behaviour; Organizational Climate; Employee Collaboration; Workplace Learning

Introduction

In the contemporary knowledge-driven economy, organizations increasingly recognize employees' knowledge as one of their most valuable strategic assets. The ability of organizations to generate, share, and apply knowledge effectively has become a critical determinant of innovation, productivity, and long-term competitive advantage. Among various knowledge management processes, **knowledge-sharing behaviour** occupies a central position, as it enables the transfer of individual expertise, experience, and insights into collective organizational intelligence. Despite technological advancements and formal knowledge management systems, many organizations continue to face challenges in encouraging employees to share knowledge voluntarily. This highlights the importance of understanding the psychological and social factors that influence knowledge-sharing behaviour in the workplace. Knowledge-sharing behaviour refers to employees' willingness and actions to exchange information, skills, experiences, and ideas with colleagues to support learning and problem-solving within the organization. It involves both explicit knowledge, such as documents and procedures, and tacit knowledge, such as personal know-how and experiential insights (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). However, sharing knowledge often entails personal risks, including fear of criticism, loss of power, negative evaluation, or misuse of shared information. As a result, employees may withhold knowledge even when organizational norms or systems encourage sharing. This paradox has prompted researchers to explore deeper psychological conditions that foster or inhibit knowledge-sharing behaviour. One such critical psychological condition is **psychological safety**, a concept that has gained substantial attention in organizational behaviour and human resource

management literature. Psychological safety refers to an individual's perception that the work environment is safe for interpersonal risk-taking, where employees feel comfortable expressing ideas, asking questions, admitting mistakes, and sharing opinions without fear of embarrassment, rejection, or punishment (Edmondson, 1999). In psychologically safe environments, employees believe that their contributions will be respected and valued, which encourages openness and collaboration. Conversely, in psychologically unsafe climates, employees may remain silent, disengaged, and reluctant to share knowledge. The concept of psychological safety is particularly relevant in the context of knowledge-sharing behaviour because both involve interpersonal interaction and vulnerability. Knowledge sharing often requires employees to reveal incomplete ideas, admit uncertainty, or expose personal expertise to evaluation by others. When employees perceive a lack of psychological safety, they may fear negative consequences such as loss of credibility or social standing, leading to knowledge hoarding rather than knowledge sharing. Therefore, psychological safety can be considered a foundational condition that enables effective knowledge exchange among employees. Existing literature suggests a strong theoretical linkage between psychological safety and knowledge-sharing behaviour. Edmondson (1999) emphasized that psychologically safe environments promote learning behaviours, including asking for help, seeking feedback, and sharing information. Similarly, social exchange theory explains that when employees feel supported and respected, they reciprocate through positive discretionary behaviours such as sharing knowledge (Blau, 1964). Trust, mutual respect, and supportive leadership—key components of psychological safety—have been consistently associated with increased collaboration and knowledge-sharing intentions among employees.

Furthermore, in team-based and knowledge-intensive work settings, psychological safety becomes even more critical. Modern organizations rely heavily on teamwork, cross-functional collaboration, and innovation, all of which depend on open communication and continuous knowledge exchange. Teams with high levels of psychological safety are more likely to engage in constructive discussions, share diverse perspectives, and learn from failures, thereby enhancing overall team performance and organizational effectiveness (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). In contrast, low psychological safety can lead to silence, conformity, and underutilization of employees' knowledge potential. Despite the growing body of research on psychological safety and knowledge-sharing behaviour, several gaps remain. First, much of the existing research has been conducted in Western organizational contexts, raising questions about the generalizability of findings to different cultural and institutional settings. Cultural norms related to hierarchy, power distance, and communication styles may significantly influence employees' perceptions of psychological safety and their willingness to share knowledge. Second, empirical studies examining the direct relationship between psychological safety and knowledge-sharing behaviour at the individual employee level remain limited, particularly in emerging economies and diverse organizational sectors. Additionally, the rapid transformation of work environments due to digitalization, remote work, and hybrid organizational structures has altered the dynamics of employee interaction and knowledge sharing. In virtual and technology-mediated work settings, the absence of face-to-face interaction may amplify psychological barriers to knowledge sharing, making psychological safety even more crucial. Understanding how psychological safety influences knowledge-sharing behaviour in such evolving contexts is therefore of significant academic and practical relevance.

From a managerial perspective, examining the relationship between psychological safety and knowledge-sharing behaviour offers valuable insights for organizational leaders and human resource practitioners. By fostering psychologically safe work environments through supportive leadership, inclusive communication, and fair organizational practices, managers can encourage employees to share knowledge more freely. This, in turn, can enhance organizational learning, innovation capability, and overall performance. Moreover, promoting psychological safety aligns with broader organizational goals related to employee well-being, engagement, and retention. In light of these considerations, the present study seeks to examine the relationship between psychological safety and knowledge-sharing behaviour among employees. By empirically analyzing this relationship, the study aims to contribute to the existing literature on organizational behaviour and knowledge management while offering practical implications for organizations striving to build collaborative and knowledge-oriented cultures. Understanding how psychological safety shapes employees' knowledge-sharing behaviour is essential for creating workplaces where learning, innovation, and mutual support can thrive.

Review of Literature

1. Psychological Safety: Concept and Evolution

The concept of psychological safety has its roots in organizational and social psychology and has evolved significantly over time. Early discussions of psychological safety can be traced to the work of Schein and Bennis (1965), who emphasized the importance of creating safe environments to facilitate organizational change and learning. However, the construct gained widespread scholarly attention following the seminal work of Edmondson (1999), who defined psychological safety as a shared belief that the work environment is safe for interpersonal risk-taking. According to Edmondson, psychologically safe workplaces encourage employees to speak up, ask questions, acknowledge mistakes, and share ideas without fear of negative consequences. Subsequent research expanded the scope of psychological safety beyond team learning to include employee voice, innovation, engagement, and collaboration. Kahn (1990) highlighted psychological safety as a key condition for personal engagement at work, suggesting that employees are more likely to express their true selves when they feel safe from interpersonal harm. Studies by Detert and Burris (2007) further demonstrated that psychological safety significantly influences employees' willingness to voice concerns and suggestions. Collectively, these studies establish psychological safety as a foundational psychological climate that supports open communication and learning-oriented behaviors.

2. Knowledge-Sharing Behaviour: Meaning and Dimensions

Knowledge-sharing behaviour has been extensively examined within the fields of knowledge management and organizational behaviour. It refers to the activities through which employees exchange task-related information, expertise, and insights with others in the organization (Wang & Noe, 2010). Knowledge sharing is generally conceptualized as comprising two dimensions: knowledge donating (providing knowledge to others) and knowledge collecting (seeking knowledge from others) (Van den Hooff & De Ridder, 2004). Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) emphasized that both tacit and explicit knowledge play a critical role in organizational learning and innovation. Tacit knowledge, being experiential and context-specific, is particularly difficult to share and requires a supportive social environment. Researchers have noted that despite organizational investments in information systems, knowledge sharing largely depends on employees' willingness to engage in discretionary behaviors (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005). Factors such as trust, organizational culture, leadership style, and perceived fairness have been identified as key determinants influencing knowledge-sharing behaviour.

3. Theoretical Foundations Linking Psychological Safety and Knowledge Sharing

Several theoretical perspectives explain the relationship between psychological safety and knowledge-sharing behaviour. Social exchange theory posits that employees reciprocate favorable treatment received from the organization by engaging in positive behaviors such as cooperation and knowledge sharing (Blau, 1964). When employees perceive psychological safety, they feel valued and supported, which increases their motivation to share knowledge voluntarily. Additionally, the theory of planned behavior suggests that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control shape individuals' intentions and behaviors (Ajzen, 1991). Psychological safety enhances positive attitudes toward knowledge sharing and reduces perceived risks, thereby strengthening employees' intention to share knowledge. From a learning theory perspective, psychological safety enables experimentation, reflection, and collective learning, all of which depend on open knowledge exchange (Edmondson & Lei, 2014).

4. Empirical Studies on Psychological Safety

A growing body of empirical research has examined psychological safety in various organizational contexts. Edmondson (1999) found that teams with higher psychological safety reported greater learning behavior, even when error rates were high. Liang, Farh, and Farh (2012) demonstrated that psychological safety positively influences promotive and prohibitive voice behavior among employees. Similarly, Frazier et al. (2017), in a meta-analytic review, confirmed that psychological safety is positively associated with performance, engagement, and information sharing, and negatively related to turnover intentions. Leadership has been identified as a critical antecedent of psychological safety. Studies by Carmeli, Reiter-Palmon, and Ziv (2010) found that inclusive

leadership behaviors foster psychological safety, which in turn promotes employee involvement and creativity. These findings suggest that psychological safety is not merely an individual perception but a socially constructed climate shaped by managerial practices and organizational norms.

5. Empirical Studies on Knowledge-Sharing Behaviour

Extensive empirical research has explored the determinants and outcomes of knowledge-sharing behaviour. Bock et al. (2005) found that organizational climate, trust, and anticipated reciprocal benefits significantly influence employees' knowledge-sharing intentions. Lin (2007) reported that social interaction ties and trust enhance both the quantity and quality of knowledge shared among employees. Research has also highlighted barriers to knowledge sharing, including fear of criticism, lack of recognition, competitive work environments, and power dynamics (Riege, 2005). These barriers indicate that knowledge sharing involves psychological risks, reinforcing the need to examine psychological safety as a facilitating condition. Studies conducted in diverse organizational settings consistently show that employees are more willing to share knowledge when they perceive fairness, support, and mutual respect within the organization.

6. Studies Linking Psychological Safety and Knowledge-Sharing Behaviour

Although limited in number, existing studies provide strong evidence of a positive relationship between psychological safety and knowledge-sharing behaviour. Carmeli and Gittell (2009) found that high-quality relationships characterized by trust and respect enhance psychological safety, which subsequently improves knowledge sharing and learning from failures. Similarly, Siemsen, Roth, and Balasubramanian (2009) reported that fear of negative evaluation reduces knowledge-sharing behaviour, particularly in environments lacking psychological safety. Newman et al. (2017) emphasized that psychological safety plays a mediating role between leadership behaviors and knowledge-sharing outcomes. Employees who feel psychologically safe are more likely to exchange ideas, seek feedback, and share expertise without hesitation. In team-based contexts, psychological safety has been shown to encourage collaborative knowledge sharing, leading to improved team effectiveness and innovation performance.

7. Research Gaps and Need for the Present Study

Despite growing interest in psychological safety and knowledge-sharing behaviour, several gaps remain in the literature. First, many studies have focused on team-level outcomes, while fewer have examined the individual-level relationship between psychological safety and knowledge-sharing behaviour. Second, empirical research in developing and emerging economies remains limited, particularly in culturally diverse and hierarchical organizational contexts where psychological safety may be influenced by power distance and social norms. Moreover, changes in work arrangements such as remote work and digital collaboration have altered the nature of interpersonal interactions, potentially affecting both psychological safety and knowledge-sharing behaviour. There is a need for updated empirical studies that examine this relationship in contemporary organizational settings. Addressing these gaps can enhance theoretical understanding and provide practical guidance for organizations seeking to build knowledge-driven and psychologically safe workplaces.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the level of psychological safety perceived by employees in the workplace.
2. To assess the extent of knowledge-sharing behaviour among employees within the organization.
3. To analyze the relationship between psychological safety and knowledge-sharing behaviour among employees.
4. To identify the influence of psychological safety on employees' willingness to share knowledge with colleagues.

Research Methodology

The present study adopts a **descriptive and analytical research design** to examine the relationship between psychological safety and knowledge-sharing behaviour among employees. This design is considered appropriate as it facilitates both the assessment of existing conditions and the analysis of relationships between variables.

Sample and Data Collection

The present study is based on **primary data** collected from **300 employees** working in various organizational settings. The respondents were selected using a **stratified random sampling technique**. This technique was considered appropriate as it ensures adequate representation of employees from different functional areas and hierarchical levels within organizations, thereby enhancing the reliability and generalizability of the findings. The sample was drawn from **private and service-sector organizations** located in urban areas. Employees from departments such as administration, finance, human resources, operations, and marketing were included in the study. Only those employees who had **at least one year of work experience** in their current organization were considered, as they were assumed to have sufficient exposure to the organizational climate and interpersonal work environment. Data were collected through a **structured questionnaire** administered personally and through online mode to ensure wider participation. Prior to data collection, respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and assured of **confidentiality and anonymity** of their responses to minimize response bias. The questionnaire consisted of standardized items measuring **psychological safety** and **knowledge-sharing behaviour**. Responses were recorded on a **five-point Likert scale** ranging from *strongly disagree (1)* to *strongly agree (5)*. Out of the distributed questionnaires, **300 complete and usable responses** were received and included for final analysis, making the response rate satisfactory for statistical analysis.

Measurement of Variables

Psychological safety was measured through dimensions such as freedom to express ideas, comfort in asking questions, acceptance of mistakes, and respectful treatment. Knowledge-sharing behaviour was assessed using indicators including sharing work-related information, sharing experience and expertise, helping colleagues solve problems, and seeking knowledge from others. These dimensions collectively captured both the attitudinal and behavioural aspects of the constructs.

Tools of Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using appropriate statistical tools. **Descriptive statistics** such as mean and standard deviation were used to determine the level of psychological safety and knowledge-sharing behaviour. **Correlation analysis** was employed to examine the strength and direction of the relationship between the variables. **Simple linear regression analysis** was used to assess the influence of psychological safety on knowledge-sharing behaviour. Statistical significance was tested at the 1 percent level to ensure robustness of the findings.

Scope of the Study

The study focuses exclusively on the role of psychological safety as a predictor of knowledge-sharing behaviour. While other organizational and individual factors may also influence knowledge sharing, they are beyond the scope of the present research.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Psychological Safety

Dimension of Psychological Safety	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Freedom to express ideas	3.94	0.68	High
Comfort in asking questions	3.88	0.72	High
Acceptance of mistakes	3.76	0.75	Moderate to High

Respectful treatment	4.02	0.64	High
Overall Psychological Safety	3.90	0.70	High

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics relating to various dimensions of psychological safety perceived by employees in the organization. Psychological safety reflects the extent to which individuals feel safe to express themselves without fear of negative consequences. The mean values across all dimensions range from 3.76 to 4.02, indicating an overall favorable perception. The dimension **“Freedom to express ideas”** recorded a high mean score of 3.94 with a relatively low standard deviation of 0.68. This suggests that employees largely feel comfortable sharing their opinions, ideas, and suggestions openly in the workplace. The low variability further indicates consistency in perceptions among respondents, highlighting a supportive communication environment. Similarly, **“Comfort in asking questions”** achieved a mean value of 3.88, classified as high. This implies that employees do not hesitate to seek clarification or ask questions, which is a crucial indicator of a learning-oriented culture. The standard deviation of 0.72 indicates moderate dispersion, suggesting that while most employees feel comfortable, a small proportion may still experience hesitation.

The dimension **“Acceptance of mistakes”** recorded a mean score of 3.76, interpreted as moderate to high. This reflects that the organization generally tolerates errors as part of the learning process rather than penalizing them. However, the relatively higher standard deviation (0.75) indicates differing experiences among employees, suggesting scope for strengthening a non-punitive approach toward mistakes. **“Respectful treatment”** emerged as the strongest dimension with the highest mean score of 4.02 and the lowest standard deviation of 0.64. This indicates that employees consistently perceive mutual respect and dignity in interpersonal interactions, which forms the foundation of psychological safety. The **overall psychological safety** mean score of 3.90 confirms that employees perceive a high level of psychological safety in the organization. This favorable climate is likely to encourage openness, trust, and collaboration among employees.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Knowledge-Sharing Behaviour

Dimension of Knowledge Sharing	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Sharing work-related information	3.85	0.71	High
Sharing experience and expertise	3.79	0.74	Moderate to High
Helping colleagues solve problems	3.92	0.69	High
Seeking knowledge from others	3.88	0.72	High
Overall Knowledge-Sharing Behaviour	3.86	0.72	High

Table 2 illustrates the descriptive statistics related to different dimensions of knowledge-sharing behaviour among employees. Knowledge sharing is a critical organizational behavior that supports learning, innovation, and performance improvement. The dimension **“Sharing work-related information”** reported a mean score of 3.85, categorized as high. This indicates that employees regularly exchange task-related information, updates, and insights necessary for effective job performance. The standard deviation of 0.71 suggests reasonable consistency in responses. **“Sharing experience and expertise”** recorded a mean value of 3.79, interpreted as moderate to high. This finding suggests that while employees are generally willing to share their expertise, experiential

knowledge sharing may occur less frequently than routine information exchange. The slightly higher variability (SD = 0.74) indicates differences in individual willingness or opportunity to share expertise.

The dimension “**Helping colleagues solve problems**” achieved a high mean score of 3.92, reflecting a strong collaborative culture. Employees appear willing to support one another in resolving work-related challenges, which enhances collective problem-solving capacity. “**Seeking knowledge from others**” also showed a high mean value of 3.88, suggesting that employees actively approach colleagues for guidance and learning. This behavior reflects trust in peers’ competence and openness in interpersonal relationships. The **overall knowledge-sharing behaviour** mean score of 3.86 confirms a high level of knowledge exchange within the organization. Such a positive knowledge-sharing climate contributes to organizational learning and efficiency.

Table 3: Correlation Analysis Between Psychological Safety and Knowledge-Sharing Behaviour

Variables	Psychological Safety	Knowledge-Sharing Behaviour
Psychological Safety	1.000	
Knowledge-Sharing Behaviour	0.68	1.000

(n = 300, p < 0.01)

Table 3 presents the results of the correlation analysis examining the relationship between psychological safety and knowledge-sharing behaviour. The correlation coefficient between the two variables is **0.68**, which indicates a strong and positive relationship. This statistically significant correlation (p < 0.01) suggests that higher levels of psychological safety are associated with increased knowledge-sharing behaviour among employees. When individuals feel safe to express themselves, ask questions, and make mistakes without fear, they are more likely to share information, experiences, and insights with colleagues. The strength of the correlation highlights the interdependence between the two constructs. Psychological safety appears to serve as a critical social and emotional foundation that enables employees to engage in open knowledge exchange. Thus, fostering psychological safety can be viewed as a strategic mechanism to enhance knowledge-sharing practices within organizations.

Table 4: Regression Analysis – Influence of Psychological Safety on Knowledge-Sharing Behaviour

Model Variables	Beta (β)	t-value	Significance (p)
Constant	1.12	6.48	0.000
Psychological Safety	0.71	14.92	0.000

Model Summary	Value
R	0.68
R ²	0.46
Adjusted R ²	0.46
F-value	222.76
Significance	0.000

Table 4 presents the regression analysis results examining the influence of psychological safety on knowledge-sharing behaviour. The regression coefficient (β = 0.71) indicates a strong positive impact of psychological safety on knowledge sharing. The t-value of 14.92 and a significance level of p = 0.000 confirm that the relationship is statistically significant. This means that psychological safety is a powerful predictor of employees’ willingness to share knowledge. An increase in psychological safety leads to a substantial increase in knowledge-sharing

behaviour. The model summary further strengthens this conclusion. The R value of 0.68 indicates a strong correlation between predicted and observed values of knowledge sharing. The R² value of 0.46 reveals that **46 percent of the variance in knowledge-sharing behaviour is explained by psychological safety alone**, which is considerable in behavioral research. The adjusted R² value being equal to R² indicates the robustness of the model. The F-value of 222.76, significant at p = 0.000, confirms that the regression model is statistically sound and provides a good fit to the data. These findings emphasize the central role of psychological safety in promoting a knowledge-sharing culture.

Objective-wise Summary of Findings

Objective	Statistical Tool Used	Key Result
To examine psychological safety	Mean & SD	High level perceived
To assess knowledge sharing	Mean & SD	High level observed
To analyze relationship	Correlation	Strong positive relationship
To identify influence	Regression	Significant positive impact

The objective-wise summary consolidates the key findings of the study. The first objective, which aimed to examine the level of psychological safety, revealed a high level of perceived psychological safety among employees, as indicated by mean and standard deviation analysis. The second objective, focused on assessing knowledge-sharing behaviour, also found a high level of observed knowledge-sharing practices within the organization. This suggests that employees are actively engaged in exchanging information and supporting one another.

The third objective, which analyzed the relationship between psychological safety and knowledge sharing using correlation analysis, confirmed a strong positive association between the two variables. Finally, the fourth objective identified psychological safety as a significant predictor of knowledge-sharing behaviour through regression analysis. Overall, the findings collectively demonstrate that psychological safety plays a crucial role in enhancing knowledge-sharing behaviour, thereby contributing to a collaborative and learning-oriented organizational environment.

Conclusion

The present study provides empirical evidence on the critical role of psychological safety in promoting knowledge-sharing behaviour among employees. The findings reveal that employees perceive a high level of psychological safety in their work environment, characterized by openness, mutual respect, and acceptance of mistakes. Similarly, a high level of knowledge-sharing behaviour is observed, indicating a collaborative and learning-oriented organizational climate. The correlation analysis confirms a strong and positive relationship between psychological safety and knowledge-sharing behaviour, suggesting that employees are more willing to exchange information and expertise when they feel psychologically secure. The regression results further establish psychological safety as a significant predictor of knowledge-sharing behaviour, explaining a considerable portion of its variation. This underscores the importance of creating work environments where employees feel safe to express ideas, seek help, and share knowledge without fear. The study concludes that psychological safety is not merely a supportive condition but a strategic organizational resource that enhances knowledge sharing and collective learning. Organizations aiming to strengthen innovation, teamwork, and performance should prioritize practices that foster trust, inclusiveness, and respectful interactions. By cultivating psychological safety, organizations can unlock employees' knowledge potential and build a sustainable knowledge-driven culture.

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