The Impact of Psychological Safety on Work Engagement and Work Withdrawal: Exploring the Mediating Role of Affective Commitment

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of psychological safety on employee work engagement and work withdrawal, with a focus on the mediating role of affective organizational commitment. Drawing upon Social Exchange Theory (SET) and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, the study develops a comprehensive framework to understand the dynamics between these variables. The research was conducted using an online questionnaire, and the sample size was 124. The findings reveal that psychological safety is significantly positively related to work engagement and negatively related to work withdrawal. Mediation analyses show that affective organizational commitment fully mediates the relationship between psychological safety and work engagement, while it partially mediates the relationship between psychological safety and work withdrawal. These results contribute to the JD-R model by highlighting psychological safety as an additional job resource that enhances positive work attitudes and mitigates negative ones. Additionally, the findings support SET by demonstrating how psychological safety fosters reciprocal positive behaviors in organizations. However, the study's cross-sectional design, reliance on self-report measures, and use of a convenience sample from smaller or family-owned firms present limitations that may affect the generalizability of the results. Future research should employ longitudinal designs and diverse samples to further explore these relationships and validate the findings. The practical implications suggest that organizations should prioritize creating psychologically safe environments to enhance employee engagement and reduce withdrawal behaviors.

Keywords: psychological safety, affective commitment, work engagement, work withdrawal, Social Exchange Theory, Job Demands-Resources model.

The Impact of Psychological Safety on Work Engagement and Work Withdrawal:

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In today's competitive business environment, organizations are increasingly recognizing the importance of fostering a supportive and engaging work atmosphere to enhance productivity and employee satisfaction (Anitha, 2014). Research has consistently shown that a positive work environment can significantly impact various aspects of employee behavior, including work engagement and withdrawal (e.g., Kahn, 1990; Saks, 2006; Harter et al., 2002). High levels of work engagement are associated with, for example, increased innovation (Schaufeli et al., 2006) and job satisfaction (Harter et al., 2002), while work withdrawal behaviors such as absenteeism and turnover can lead to significant costs for organizations (Johnson & Davis, 2020). Therefore, it is not a surprise that organizations and employees alike benefit from the investigation of relevant antecedents to engagement and withdrawal behaviors at work. Many researchers posit that, for example, the connection between aspects of Human Resource Management and performance is established indirectly through the attitudes of employees (e.g., Falkenburg & Schyns, 2007), which highlights the importance of individual employees and aids us in moving into a multifaceted view of the precursors of work engagement and work withdrawal, in which factors that directly affect employees are included.

Understanding the factors that influence these critical outcomes is essential for developing effective organizational strategies for boosting desirable work attitudes, such as engagement and commitment, and diminishing the negative effects of undesirable work attitudes and behaviors, such as withdrawal. This study aims to explore the impact of psychological safety, or the perception that taking risks and challenging existing organizational practices is safe (Edmondson, 1999), on work attitudes. Namely, I am investigating the intricate relationships between psychological safety, affective organizational

commitment, work engagement, and work withdrawal. By integrating Social Exchange Theory and the Job Demands-Resources Model, this research provides a comprehensive framework to understanding how these concepts interact and influence each other, offering valuable insights for both scholars and practitioners in the field of organizational psychology.

Theoretical Framework

To fully understand the complex dynamics at play in the workplace, it is essential to draw upon established theories that explain how various factors influence employee behaviors and attitudes. This study leverages two prominent theories – Social Exchange Theory (SET; Blau, 1964) and the Job Demands-Resources Model (JD-R; Demerouti, 2001) – to develop a comprehensive framework and explain how a psychologically safe environment can foster a sense of affective commitment among employees, which in turn enhances engagement and reduces withdrawal behaviors (see Figure 1).

Figure 1.

Model of Hypothesized Relationships
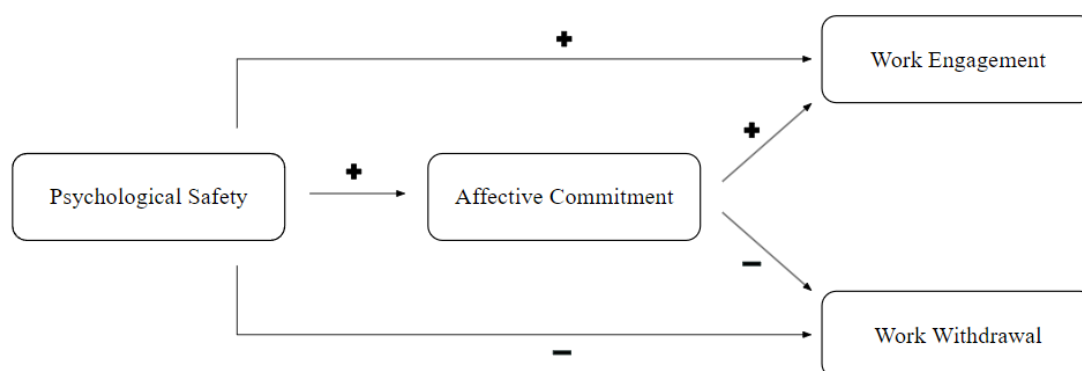
The Social Exchange Theory posits that relationships work based on exchange and transaction, and it encompasses three principles to elucidate the relationship between employees and employers: rationality, reciprocity, and specificity (Foa & Foa, 2012). The rationality principle posits that employees are likely to form relationships with organizations

that offer desirable rewards and fulfill the employees' basic needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence. The reciprocity principle suggests that the social relationships between employees and employers are inherently reciprocal. In other words, when an employee perceives that they have gained something from their organization, they feel the need to reciprocate with wanted behaviors. Lastly, the specificity principle asserts that only reciprocal exchanges can sustain the relationship between employees and the organization (Cheung, 2000; Blau, 1964). In the context of psychological safety and work attitudes, the SET argues that when employees perceive higher psychological safety in their organizations, they are likely to feel the need to reciprocate, thus resulting in higher engagement and commitment and less withdrawal behaviors.

On the other hand, The Job-Demand and Resources Model (JD-R) offers a conceptual framework applicable to various organizational contexts, focusing on specific demands and resources within each organization to address employee stress and well-being (Demerouti et al., 2001). The model posits that job resources can boost intrinsic motivation in employees due to having a facilitating effect on basic human needs, namely autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). These resources can help employees combat the negative effects of increasing job demands, and employees generally perform best when the match between resources and demands is equal (Demerouti et al., 2001). Prior research has shown that these additional resources can enhance job attitudes, such as affective commitment (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) and job behaviors, such as organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB; De Lange et al., 2008). Job resources have also been shown to be negatively correlated with withdrawal behaviors, such as turnover intention (Salanova et al., 2005).

Although the JD-R model has often been utilized in the context of specific job demands, such as the additional demands that come from being an immigrant (Ulusoy et al., 2016), it can be argued that additional job resources can also protect employees against the

negative effects of basic job demands. In the study by Kirk-Brown and Van Dijk (2016), psychological safety was suggested to be a significant resource when buffering against the negative consequences of increased job demands in employees with chronic illness. In this study, the researchers found that psychological safety was associated with positive increase in other work attitudes, such as affective commitment, especially when employees were facing additional demands (in this case, mental illness). However, psychological safety also led to increased affective commitment in the reference group, albeit the effect was smaller. The researchers also found that psychological safety was negatively associated with unwanted behaviors, such as turnover intentions (Kirk-Brown & Van Dijk, 2016). Therefore, we can argue that additional resources, such as psychological safety, are likely to lead to other positive work attitudes when employees face increased demands, but also when dealing with general job demands.

SET and JD-R together offer a comprehensive lens to analyze workplace dynamics. While SET emphasizes the importance of reciprocal relationships in fostering positive work behaviors, JD-R highlights the critical role of balancing job demands and resources to maintain employee well-being. Integrating these theories provides a nuanced understanding of how psychological safety can lead to improved work engagement and reduced work withdrawal through affective organizational commitment.

Psychological Safety

Psychological safety can be defined as the perception that taking risks and challenging existing organizational practices is safe (Edmondson, 1999). In other words, when employees perceive high levels of psychological safety in their organizations, they are often more willing to voice out their concerns and opinions because there is little to no threat of negative consequences, such as layoffs or discrimination. A workplace with high perceived psychological safety fosters feelings of security, trust among colleagues, and mutual respect

(Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). This does not imply the complete absence of problems or conflicts, but rather that employees engage less in self-protective actions and more in constructive problem-solving, often leading to greater productivity (Edmondson, 2004).

In prior research, psychological safety has been shown to be positively associated with both individual and organizational outcomes and negatively buffer against unwanted consequences of, for example, increased job demands (e.g., Poon, 2013; Kirk-Brown & Van Dijk, 2016.) Research has also shown strong, positive correlations between psychological safety and work engagement (e.g., Kahn, 1990; May et al., 2004). Additionally, Basit (2017) postulated that psychological safety can lead to felt obligations in employees, making them more likely to reciprocate with positive work attitudes and behaviors when they perceive that their organization is safe and fair (Basit, 2017). In contrast, psychological safety has been shown to be negatively associated with work withdrawal attitudes and behaviors, such as turnover intentions. For example, Takase and colleagues (2008) examined the effects of psychological safety in healthcare workers and concluded that when employees are able to challenge current practices and opportunities in their organizations, the intention to leave said organization is lower (Takase et al., 2008). The concept of psychological safety is crucial for fostering supportive work environments that allow employees to take risks without fearing consequences (Edmondson, 1999). When employees feel safe speaking up, they are more likely to engage fully with their work and contribute to the organization's success.

Work Engagement

Work engagement refers to a positive, fulfilling state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption, and employees are considered engaged when they are mentally attentive, emotionally invested, and physically active in their job duties (Kahn, 1990). Within organizations, engagement is evident when employees demonstrate focused attention on their tasks, prioritize completing them efficiently, exert effort for optimal outcomes, confidently

contribute ideas, and leverage their thoughts, emotions, intuitions, and experiences to perform their tasks to the best of their abilities (Kahn, 2010).

Increased engagement at work has several beneficial effects on both individual employees and organizations. For example, engagement has been positively linked to both individual and organizational performance outcomes (e.g., Rich et al., 2010), general employee well-being (Kim et al., 2017), and job satisfaction (Hakanen & Schaufeli, 2012). Furthermore, the research conducted by Pandita and Singhal (2017) showed that engaged employees directly affect organizational outcomes via the actions of retaining customers, earning significantly larger profits, and enhancing work atmosphere within the organization (Pandita & Singhal, 2017).

Based on numerous prior research that have found a significant, positive relationship between psychological safety and work engagement (e.g. Carmeli & Gittell, 2009; May et al., 2004; Salanova et al., 2005) in combination with the Social Exchange Theory, it can be reasoned that employees who perceive higher psychological safety from their employes and organizations are more likely to feel the need to reciprocate with wanted work behaviors, such as work engagement. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that there is a positive relationship between psychological safety and work engagement.

Hypothesis 1a: Psychological safety is positively related to work engagement.

Work Withdrawal

Work withdrawal refers to a set of attitudes and behaviors where employees distance themselves from their job responsibilities and work environment (Fuentes & Sawyer, 1989), and often includes both turnover intentions and turnover behaviors. Work withdrawal intentions, such as turnover intentions or job searching while having an active contract (Somers & Birnbaum, 2000), are the precursors to actual withdrawal behavior (Turan, 2015). Work withdrawal behavior, in turn, encompasses a series of attitudes and actions undertaken

by employees within their workplace, and can be defined as behaviors that are aimed at creating physical or psychological separation between employees and their work environment and duties (Rosse & Hulin, 1985). Withdrawal behaviors, in turn, can be classified into two categories: physical, such as intended absenteeism or tardiness, and psychological, such as negligent behavior and daydreaming during the workday (Lehman & Simpson, 1992; Turan, 2015; Fuentes & Sawyer, 1989).

Work withdrawal intentions and behaviors can be hazardous for both individuals and organizations. In the context of individuals work withdrawal behaviors, such as daydreaming or decreased commitment, can lead to, for example, career stagnation (Johns, 2010), increased stress and anxiety (Spector et al., 2006), and decreased job satisfaction (Leiter & Maslach, 2009). In the context of organizations, withdrawal can lead to harmful consequences such as decreased productivity (Gagne & Deci, 2005), increased costs (Hemp, 2004), and lower employee morale (Leiter & Maslach, 2009). Additionally, work withdrawal has been associated strongly with counterproductive work behaviors, or the intentional actions by employees that harm or are intended to harm an organization or its members, such as theft, sabotage, workplace aggression, or intentional inefficiency (CWB; Carpenter & Berry, 2017). Thus, it is crucial for employers to ensure that work withdrawal intentions and behaviors stay to the minimum within their organizations.

Prior research has shown psychological safety to be negatively associated with work withdrawal (e.g., Baer & Frese, 2003; Detert & Burris, 2007; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). Similarly to work engagement, the relationship between psychological safety and work withdrawal can also be reasoned based on social exchange. It is likely that when employees perceive higher psychological safety in their organizations, they will feel a need to reciprocate to the organization, thus leading to less unwanted work attitudes such as withdrawal

intentions and behaviors. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the relationship between psychological safety and work withdrawal is negative.

Hypothesis 1b: Psychological safety is negatively related to work withdrawal.

Affective Organizational Commitment as a Mediator

Organizational commitment refers to a set of an employee's attitudes and behaviors that work to show dedication to their organization and is often classified into three distinct types: affective, continuance, and normative (Meyer & Allen, 1991). These types are considered as separate concepts, meaning that an employee can, for example, experience high affective commitment and low normative commitment simultaneously. In this study, I will specifically focus on affective commitment due to its close relevance to psychological processes and its direct relevance to intrinsic motivation (Poon, 2013). Affective organizational commitment refers to an employee's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in their organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

Prior research has shown various positive effects that stem from employees' affective organizational commitment, such as work engagement. Poon (2013) suggested that affective commitment works to boost work engagement because of two reasons: first, affectively committed employees are more likely to experience stronger identification with their organization, and second, affectively committed employees often experience higher levels of general job satisfaction than their less committed counterparts (Poon, 2013). In contrast, affective commitment has also been shown to have a negative impact on withdrawal behaviors, such as turnover intentions and realized turnover (Kirk-Brown & Van Dijk, 2016), and both physical and psychological work withdrawal (Somers & Birnbaum, 2000).

Additionally, research has shown strong, positive correlations between psychological safety and affective organizational commitment (e.g., Kirk-Brown et al., 2016; Ulusoy et al., 2016; Li et al., 2022). According to Edmondson (1999), psychological safety can be is an

organizational factor, and it can therefore be used to predict employees' affective commitment to their organizations (Edmondson, 1999; Li et al., 2022). Furthermore, previous studies have shown that employees who felt high psychological safety in their organizations experienced more organizational support and were more willing to suggest new ideas and practices (De Clercq & Rius, 2007), leading to higher commitment. In contrast, a psychologically unsafe work environment diminishes mutual trust, forcing employees to manage anxiety and stress independently. This situation restricts positive emotional experiences and weakens their emotional connection to the organization (Lyman et al., 2020).

As mentioned before, the Job-Demands and Resources Model states that a match between the level of work demands and available resources is likely to lead to positive effects, such as higher intrinsic motivation and commitment (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), and additional resources may aid in combating the negative effects of increased job demands (Demerouti et al., 2001). Based on the combination of these prior research findings and the Job-Demands and Resources Model, we can argue that psychological safety works as an additional resource for employees which decreases the negative effects of general job demands and enhances affective organizational commitment. Higher affective commitment in employees, in turn, is likely to result in higher work engagement and lower work withdrawal. Although all four variables in this study are conceptually close in proximity to each other, the JD-R offers a reasonable explanation for the direction of the relationships in the model (see Figure 1), and we can therefore assume that affective commitment mediates the relationships between psychological safety and work engagement and work withdrawal.

Hypothesis 2a: Affective organizational commitment partially mediates the positive relationship between psychological safety and work engagement, such that higher levels of psychological safety will lead to higher affective organizational commitment, which in turn will lead to higher work engagement.

Hypothesis 2b: Affective organizational commitment partially mediates the negative relationship between psychological safety and work withdrawal, such that higher levels of psychological safety will lead to higher affective organizational commitment, which in turn will lead to lower work withdrawal.

Methods

Design and Procedure

Prior to data collection, the research study was approved by the ethics committee of the Faculty of Behavioral and Social Sciences of the University of Groningen, and it was a collaborative effort between two MSc students. The study utilized a cross-sectional design in which all variables were measured using an online questionnaire offered to participants through an online survey platform, Qualtrics. The questionnaire was offered in two languages, English and Dutch, to ensure a sufficient sample size, and consisted of 38 questions in total. The target population for the study was working people, and thus, the only exclusion criteria were that (a) participants had an active work contract and (b) participants had sufficient knowledge of English or Dutch.

Recruitment was done mainly with convenience sampling by utilizing social media platforms, targeted emails, and invitations in the form of flyers and business cards. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and participants were not offered compensation. The study was available online from February 9th, 2024, to April 18th, 2024 and could be accessed with a hyperlink or QR code. The questionnaire took around 7 minutes, and participants were free to complete it at their own time. Participants were first informed about the purpose of the study, and then asked to give their consent for participation. They were then asked to provide general demographic information, such as age and gender. To maintain anonymity, participants were not asked to provide any information that could be used to identify them. Participants were then asked to answer 38 questions in total about the following

topics: firm size, family affiliation, psychological safety, affective commitment, work engagement, and work withdrawal. A short debrief was offered at the end of the study, along with confirmation of participants' consent to participate.

Sample

The total number of answers was 201, out of which 77 were eliminated from the final analysis due to incomplete answers or refusal of consent. This led to a final sample size of 124, out of which 45.2% were female, 54.0% were male, and 0.8% reported as other gender. The age of participants ranged from 17 to 67 ($M = 33.71$, $SD = 14.248$). 18.5% of participants answered in English and 81.5% answered in Dutch. Due to the collaborative nature of the study and the central research question of the second student, the sample mostly consisted of people from small firms (83.1%) or family firms (63.7%), with a minority of participants working in large, non-family-owned companies (16.9%).

Measures

Psychological Safety

Psychological safety was measured with the scale by Edmondson (1999), modified to fit the organizational level instead of group level as used in Carmeli et al. (2008). The Cronbach's alphas of the original studies were $a = .82$ and $a = .78$, respectively, and the Cronbach's alpha in this study was a bit lower with the value of $a = .65$. The Dutch translation of the study was adopted from Van't Hof (2013, $a = .75$). The scale consists of seven items, such as "*Members of this organization are able to bring up problems and tough issues*" and is measured on a 7-point Likert scale (*1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree*).

Affective Commitment

Affective commitment was measured using the scale by Allen and Meyer (1990, $a = .91$) that consists of seven items, such as *"This organization has a great deal of personal*

meaning for me". The scale is measured on a 7-point Likert scale (*1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree*). Cronbach's alpha of this scale in our study was *a = .89*.

Work Engagement

Work engagement was measured using the shortened version of the Utrecht Engagement Scale by Schaufeli et al. (2006, *a = .85-.92*). The Dutch version was by Schaufeli & Bakker (2004, *a = .93*). Cronbach's alpha in our study was a = .94. The scale consists of nine items, such as *"I feel happy when I'm working intensely"*. It is measured on a 7-point Likert scale (*1 = Never, 7 = Always/Every Day*).

Work Withdrawal

Work withdrawal was measured using the scale by Turan (2015), which is a modified version of the original withdrawal scale by Lehman and Simpson (1992). The scale divided physical withdrawal (*a = .81*) and psychological withdrawal (*a = .77*) into separate categories. In this study, the Cronbach alpha values were, respectively, *a = .44* and *a = .68*. However, when the two categories were combined, Cronbach's alpha was higher with a value of *a= .72*. Therefore, to ensure higher reliability, in the final analysis the two scales were combined into one withdrawal scale. The scale consists of 11 items in total, such as *"I take longer lunch or rest breaks than allowed."* (physical) and *"I put less effort into my job than I should."* (psychological). It is measured on a 5-point Likert scale (*1 = Never, 7 = Always*).

Results

The statistical analysis in this study was conducted with a regression analysis using PROCESS Macro (Hayes, 2022). Before the initial analysis, I performed the necessary assumption checks for linearity, homoscedasticity of residuals, multicollinearity, and normality of residuals. The linearity was tested using scatterplots of all relationships, and all showed a sufficiently linear relationship. Normality of residuals was tested using a normal P-P plot. The graph shows little deviations, suggesting normality of residuals. The assumption

of homoscedasticity was tested using a scatterplot, which shows that the residuals are evenly

spread, and thus we can assume homoscedasticity. Lastly, multicollinearity was tested using

the variance inflation factor. The VIF-value was below 10 (*VIF* = 1.375), which lets us

assume the absence of multicollinearity. The data met all the assumptions, and therefore, I

could continue with the main analysis. I then analyzed descriptive statistics and checked the

correlation values between variables by using a simple linear regression analysis (see Table

1.).

Table 1.

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	1.	2.	3.	4.
1. Psychological Safety	124	5.24	.914	-			
2. Affective Commitment	124	5.10	1.244	.522**	-		
3. Work Engagement	124	5.23	1.173	.421**	.727**	-	
4. Work Withdrawal	124	1.58	.394	-.500**	-.444**	-.455**	-

*p <.05, **p<.01*

Hypotheses Testing

I first tested hypothesis 1a and hypothesis 1b by conducting linear regression analyses.

The correlation between psychological safety and work engagement was significantly positive

(*r = .421, p < .01*), supporting hypothesis 1a. In turn, the correlation between psychological

safety and work withdrawal was significantly negative (*r = -.500, p < .01*), supporting

hypothesis 1b. Therefore, we can conclude that psychological safety is positively related to

work engagement, and negatively related to work withdrawal.

Table 2.

Model Summary for Each Regression

Dependent variable	R-squared	Adj. R-squared	F	p

Affective Commitment	.273	.267	45.74	<.001ᵃ
Work Engagement	.177	.170	26.28	<.001ᵃ
Work Withdrawal	.250	.244	40.61	<.001ᵃ

a.   *Predictor: Psychological Safety.*

I then tested the mediation effect of affective commitment on the above relationships with PROCESS Macro (Hayes, 2022) to test hypothesis 2a and 2b. The model predicting the mediator from the independent variable was significant, $F(1, 122) = 45.57$, $p < .001$, with $R^2 = .273$ (see Table 2). The model predicting the dependent variable, work engagement, from psychological safety and affective commitment was also significant, $F(2,121) = 26.28$, $p < .001$, with $R^2 = .177$. The indirect effect of psychological safety on work engagement through affective commitment was significant, $b = .469$ (95% CI: [.311;.664]). However, the direct effect of psychological safety on work engagement was non-significant ($b = .073$, $p = .439$), whereas the total effect was significant ($b = .54$, $p < .01$). This suggests that the positive relationship between psychological safety and work engagement is fully mediated by affective commitment, which does not support Hypothesis 2a. However, it is important to note that a mediation effect does exist, even if it is not partial as I hypothesized.

The model predicting the dependent variable, work withdrawal, from psychological safety and affective commitment was significant, $F(2,121) = 40.61$, $p < .001$, with $R^2 = .250$. The indirect effect of psychological safety on work engagement through affective commitment was significant, $b = -.057$ (95% CI: [-.116; -.008]). Similarly, regarding the effects of psychological safety on work withdrawal, the direct effect ($b = -.16$, $p < .001$) and the total effect ($b = -.22$, $p < .001$) were significant. This supports Hypothesis 1b and suggests that the negative relationship between psychological safety and work withdrawal is partially mediated by affective commitment.

Table 3.

Coefficients for Each Path

Predictor	Dependent Variable	Coefficient (b)	SE	t	p
Psychological Safety	Affective Commitment	.71	.105	6.76	<.001
Psychological Safety	Work Engagement	.073	.094	.78	.439
Psychological Safety	Work Withdrawal	-.16	.039	-4.12	<.001
Affective Commitment	Work Engagement	.66	.069	9.56	<.001
Affective Commitment	Work Withdrawal	-.08	.029	-2.81	.006

Table 4.

Indirect Effect

Effect Type	Indirect Effect	Bootstrap SE	Bootstrap LCI	Bootstrap UCI	Significance
PS > AC > WE	.468	.090	.308	.657	Significant
PS > AC > WW	-.057	.027	-.114	-.008	Significant

Discussion

The current study was designed to explore the effects of psychological safety on key employee outcomes, specifically work engagement and work withdrawal. Specifically, I wanted to know whether employees' perceptions of greater psychological safety are related to increased engagement at work and decreased withdrawal behaviors. Additionally, I sought to examine the role of affective organizational commitment as a potential mediator in these relationships.

The findings from this study provide robust support for the hypothesized relationships between psychological safety, work engagement, and work withdrawal. Specifically, the

results indicate a significant positive relationship between psychological safety and work engagement, as well as a significant negative relationship between psychological safety and work withdrawal. These findings lend strong support to Hypotheses 1a and 1b, respectively. Furthermore, the mediation analysis revealed that affective organizational commitment plays a mediating role in both relationships. Interestingly, the relationship between psychological safety and work engagement was found to be fully mediated by affective commitment, while the relationship between psychological safety and work withdrawal was only partially mediated by affective commitment. This outcome suggests that while affective commitment is a critical factor in translating psychological safety into increased engagement, other factors might also contribute to reducing withdrawal behaviors. Therefore, while Hypothesis 2b, which predicted partial mediation of the relationship between psychological safety and work withdrawal, was supported, Hypothesis 2a, which predicted partial mediation of the relationship between psychological safety and work engagement, was not fully supported.

The research presented here emphasizes that psychological safety alone is not sufficient to drive engagement. The full mediation of the relationship between psychological safety and work engagement by affective organizational commitment underscores the importance of fostering deep emotional ties between employees and their organizations. Employees who perceive a safe environment are more likely to develop strong emotional bonds with their workplace, leading to higher levels of engagement. This finding suggests that while safety provides the foundation, commitment acts as the essential conduit through which this safety transforms into active engagement. Without a sense of emotional investment, employees may not fully capitalize on the benefits that psychological safety offers. Therefore, organizations must recognize that psychological safety and affective commitment are not separate constructs but interconnected drivers of employee engagement.

Similarly, the partial mediation observed in the relationship between psychological safety and work withdrawal reveals that psychological safety significantly reduces withdrawal behaviors, but this reduction is not entirely dependent on affective organizational commitment. This finding is crucial because it suggests that while commitment plays a role, there are other factors at play—such as personal stressors, external job market conditions, or work-life balance issues—that also influence an employee's decision to withdraw. Organizations must therefore look beyond merely fostering commitment and consider a holistic approach to addressing withdrawal behaviors, one that includes support for managing external pressures and life circumstances that may contribute to withdrawal tendencies.

These nuanced findings highlight the complex interplay between psychological safety and employee outcomes, offering new insights into the mediating processes at work. Moreover, these results are consistent with prior research in the field (e.g., Kahn, 1990; Edmondson, 1999), further validating the importance of psychological safety in organizational settings.

Theoretical Implications

This study makes significant contributions to the existing literature on organizational behavior, particularly within the frameworks of the Job Demands-Resources Model (JD-R) and Social Exchange Theory (SET). From a theoretical perspective, the findings extend the JD-R model by identifying psychological safety as an additional job resource that can help employees manage and counteract the negative effects of job demands. By enhancing psychological safety, organizations can foster environments where employees feel secure and supported, which in turn promotes positive work attitudes such as increased engagement and affective commitment. These findings suggest that psychological safety acts as a buffer against the stressors associated with job demands, leading to more resilient and motivated employees.

In terms of Social Exchange Theory, the study provides empirical evidence that supports the theory's central tenet: when employees perceive a high level of psychological safety, they are more likely to reciprocate with positive organizational behaviors. The transactional nature of the employee-organization relationship is reinforced by these findings, demonstrating that psychological safety fosters a sense of obligation in employees to contribute positively to the organization. This sense of obligation manifests as increased work engagement and affective commitment and decreased withdrawal behaviors and intentions. Therefore, the study not only corroborates existing SET-based research but also adds a new dimension by showing how psychological safety can be a key driver of these reciprocal behaviors.

Practical Implications

In practice, the study offers several actionable insights for organizations. To enhance employee engagement and commitment and to reduce withdrawal behaviors, organizations should prioritize creating a psychologically safe work environment. This can be achieved through various interventions, such as leadership training programs that emphasize the importance of open communication, inclusivity, and support (Edmondson & Lei, 2014; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). Leaders play a critical role in shaping the psychological safety climate, and as such, they should be equipped with the skills to foster trust, encourage risk-taking, and support their teams. Additionally, organizational policies should be designed to promote psychological safety, with measures such as anti-bullying policies, open-office designs, and regular feedback mechanisms (e.g., Einarsen et al., 2011; London & Smither, 2002). By institutionalizing these practices, organizations can create an environment where employees feel valued and safe, ultimately driving better organizational outcomes.

Limitations

Despite the contributions of this study, it is essential to acknowledge several limitations that may impact the interpretation and generalizability of the findings. First, the study's design and the conceptual closeness of the variables suggest the possibility of bidirectional relationships. Although this study provides insights into significant correlations between the variables and potential causal pathways, the cross-sectional nature of the data limits the ability to draw definitive conclusions about causality. For example, it is possible that in addition to psychological safety leading to increased affective commitment, commitment may also lead to increased psychological safety. Future research should employ experimental or longitudinal designs to further investigate these relationships and to confirm the directions of the observed effects.

Second, the study relied on self-report measures collected through an online questionnaire. While self-report instruments are widely used in organizational research, they are susceptible to various biases, such as social desirability bias and common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Participants may have responded in ways that reflect what they perceive as socially acceptable rather than their true feelings and behaviors. Additionally, self-reports provide only a single perspective, which may not fully capture the complexities of the constructs being measured. Future studies should consider using multi-source data, such as peer or supervisor ratings, to triangulate findings and reduce the potential for bias.

Third, the participant pool was drawn using convenience sampling, which may limit the generalizability of the results. The sample predominantly consisted of employees from smaller firms or family-owned businesses, which may have unique cultural and structural characteristics that influenced the findings. While there is no specific reason to believe that these factors would significantly alter the relationships examined, it is important to be cautious in generalizing the results to broader populations or to different organizational contexts (Dyer, 2006). Future research should aim to replicate these findings with more

diverse samples, including participants from various industries, organizational sizes, and cultural backgrounds, to enhance the robustness and applicability of the results.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study underscores the pivotal role of psychological safety in shaping desirable employee outcomes, such as work engagement and affective organizational commitment, while simultaneously reducing undesirable outcomes like work withdrawal. Through a comprehensive analysis of how psychological safety interacts with affective organizational commitment, the findings provide both theoretical insights and practical applications that are essential for modern organizations. In today's dynamic and highly competitive business environment, understanding these internal mechanisms is crucial for fostering work environments that enhance productivity, innovation, and employee satisfaction.

Ultimately, this research emphasizes the need for ongoing exploration into the mechanisms that drive employee engagement and retention. As the workplace continues to evolve, understanding how psychological safety and affective commitment operate within these new contexts will be essential. Organizations that can adapt by fostering environments where psychological safety and commitment are mutually reinforced will be better positioned to thrive in an ever-changing business landscape. By recognizing the intertwined nature of these constructs and implementing practices that enhance both, organizations can create environments that not only protect employee well-being but also empower employees to contribute meaningfully to organizational success. The findings presented here suggest that future research should continue to explore these relationships and further clarify the pathways through which psychological safety influences workplace behavior. With this deeper understanding, organizations can develop more effective strategies to support their workforce, ensuring sustained employee engagement and performance well into the future.

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