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**ARE EMPLOYEES MORE LIKELY TO ACCEPT ORGANIZATIONAL
CHANGE IF PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY HAD
BEEN PREVIOUSLY ESTABLISHED**

**A Research Project
Presented to the Faculty of
The Graziadio Business School
Pepperdine University**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science
In
Organization Development**

**by
Sara Strueby
July 2019**

This research project, completed by

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under the guidance of the Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the faculty of The Graziadio Business School in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE
IN ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

To meet customer demands, organizations must continuously change to stay competitive in the external market. This can be challenging for organizations that have employees who are fearful of organizational changes. The purpose of this study was to understand if employees would be more likely to accept organizational changes if they had previously established psychological safety. The researcher conducted 12 qualitative interviews to assess the participants level of psychological safety pre and post organizational change. Due to the limited data, the study's research question was not adequately addressed. The findings from this study indicated psychological safety is impacted by management. A discussion is provided to provide suggestions for future research that may be able to build off the present study.

Keywords: organizational change, psychological safety

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Businesses change constantly to remain competitive with customer demands (Healy & Supancich, 2019). Examples of such change include introduction of new products or services, strategic direction change, re-structure, new technologies, or new capabilities. Sometimes, these changes are unwanted and can spark a negative reaction amongst employees. This reaction can stem from a perceived lack of uncertainty and threat to job security (Elst et al., 2014). This perceived threat to job security is a reason why organizational change can create employee fear (Weeks, Roberts, Chonko, & Jones, 2004).

With the need for organizations to constantly change, how might employee fear impact an organization? Research on employee fear indicates that fear can cause dysfunctional behavior and reduce employee productivity (Lebel, 2017). If an organization has a fear-based culture, the organization may not be able to shift quickly and stay competitive with customer demands. One example of an organization with a fear-based culture that could not keep up with customer demands is Kodak (Forbes, 2012). For over 40 years, Kodak was the market leader in film photography. At its peak, Kodak captured 90% of the US film market and was one of the world's most valuable brands. Despite its brand and large market share, Kodak failed to capitalize in the digital market space, lost market share, and filed for bankruptcy in 2012 (Forbes, 2012). The company failed to shift to digital products due to fear of hurting its lucrative film business. Had Kodak bypassed its fear-based culture and encouraged innovation, they may have been more likely to shift and stay competitive with customer demands.

Organizations may want to look at factors, such as psychological safety, to reduce fear of organizational changes.

Psychological Safety is defined as “being able to show and employ one's self without fear of negative consequences of self-image, status or career” (Kahn, 1990, p. 708). An organization with fearless employees is an organization with high psychological safety (Edmondson, 2018). Psychological safety can be beneficial to organizations as employees are more likely to take organizational risks and create innovations (Ning & Jin, 2009). The phenomenon of psychological safety is an important factor as employees are more likely to take risks when they do not fear failure or consequences. If employees are not afraid of failure or consequences, this mindset will likely produce more innovative products or services, which will promote strong organizational performance (Guimaraes, 2017).

Purpose

If psychological safety can reduce fear and promote employee innovation, could a psychologically safe environment help employees embrace organizational change? The purpose of this study was to determine if employees were more likely to accept organizational changes if psychological safety had been previously established.

Significance of the Study

Literature discussed in Chapter 2 will explain how employee resistance and fear to organizational changes can impact employee performance and productivity. This study researched if factors of psychological safety could support an employee when facing organizational changes. With organizations continuing to change to meet customer demands, it will become increasingly important for organizations to learn how to

positivity support employees through organizational changes. The intention of this study was to determine if psychological safety could be a phenomenon used to positively support employees during an organizational change.

Organization of the Study

The purpose of this introduction was to explain the importance of studying psychological safety and organizational change. Chapter 2 reviews existing research on organizational change and employee resistance, psychological safety and employee performance, and psychological safety and organizational change. Chapter 3 outlines the study's research methods and design. Chapter 4 describes the qualitative findings. Chapter 5 presents the findings of the study and provides recommendations, study limitations, and implications for further research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this research was to study the effects of organizational change to determine if psychological safety has an impact on an employee's ability to accept organizational change.

This chapter summarizes the existing literature on employee behavior during organizational changes. The researcher selected literature that studied: Employee Fear and Resistance to Organizational Change, Psychological Safety and Employee Performance, and Psychological Safety Supporting Organizational Impact and Change. The psychological safety literature focuses on how psychological safety can positively attribute to employee performance and organizational changes. The literature in this chapter was carefully selected to support the purpose of this study.

Employee Fear and Resistance to Organizational Change

The following literature explains how organizational change can create employee fear and resistance. The researcher included literature on employee fear and resistance to demonstrate how organizational change can cause negative employee behavior which could impact job performance. The literature in this section provides context into why the researcher chose to study psychological safety and organizational change.

Weeks, Roberts, Chonko and Jones (2004) conducted a study on employee fear and organizational changes to determine the relationship between employee fear and job performance. Weeks et. al (2004) hypothesis was "A sales manager's perception of the sales organization's readiness for change will be positively related to his or her level of performance". They found that employees with a high level of fear are more likely to have low acceptance of organizational change, and employees who have low change

readiness will likely show a decrease in job performance. In the discussion, Weeks et al. advised organizations with turbulent environments to hire employees who have high acceptance to change.

A study on three different types of employee resistance was conducted by Rafferty (2017). The three types of resistance are (Rafferty, 2017, p. 251):

- Affective Resistance: “Negative emotions that individuals feel about change”
- Behavioral Resistance: “Negative actions or intentions to act in response to change”
- Cognitive Resistance: “Negative beliefs about change (ex. change is unnecessary)”

Rafferty (2017) conducted research with participants who were experiencing a restructure, change in work, or change in staff. The study issued two participant surveys conducted four months apart. The purpose of the study was to determine how employee resistance can change over a period of time. A finding from the first survey showed that employees are initially likely to show Affective Resistance when they report a high volume of changes. A study from the second survey found that participants with Affective Resistance in the first survey shifted to Cognitive Resistance in the second survey. Rafferty (2017) discussed that the shift in resistance was due to employees being further along in the change curve.

Wayne Bovey (2001) studied resistance through the role of defense mechanisms. Bovey (2001) conducted research with participants who were actively experiencing an organizational change. Bovey (2001) collected data on four maladaptive defense mechanisms: denial, dissociation, isolation of affect, and projection. The results of this study showed that higher maladaptive defense mechanisms correlate to a higher

resistance to change. The findings indicated that projection was the defense mechanism with the strongest association to change resistance. An additional finding was that, “individuals who are unconsciously inclined to use maladaptive defenses are more likely to resist organizational change” (Bovey, 2001, p.11). Bovey (2001) discussed the importance for management to focus on the human factor of change as opposed to focusing solely on the technical components.

Shaul Oreg (2011) studied resistance and organizational change. Oreg (2011) conducted research during an organizational change to study the multiple causes of resistance. Oreg had two hypotheses. The first, was that employees will show Affective Resistance to change. The second, was that employees who have low trust in management would resist organizational change. The results supported both hypotheses. The results showed participants who had little trust in management displayed behavioral resistance towards the change. An additional finding showed individuals with little trust in management show Affective and Cognitive Resistance towards change.

The literature discussed in this section shows how fear and resistance can negatively impact organizations. The impact to organizations is decreased employee job performance, which is caused by unproductive employee behavior. This literature supports why this study’s topic is important for organizations who implement change regularly.

Psychological Safety and Performance

The literature discussed in the following section explains how psychological safety was used to enable positive employee performance. The literature explains how psychological safety supports employee behavior or actions that lead to strong

performance. The three articles below link high psychological safety with employees who have little fear of retaliation.

Kessel, Kratzer, and Schultz (2012) researched how psychological safety enables knowledge sharing and creative performance. The purpose of their study was to determine if psychological safety had a link to creative performance. The research was conducted within a health care clinic and data was collected from patients and health care professionals. Kessel et. al. (2012) collected creative performance data from patients. Psychological safety and knowledge sharing data was gathered from healthcare providers. Their findings showed perceived psychological safety contributes towards creative performance. Kessel et. al. discussed this was the first study to research psychological safety and creative performance at a group process level. The study found that knowledge sharing is an important action to create psychological safety. This study determined teams that share knowledge are more likely to have higher psychological safety and creative performance.

Agarwal and Farndale (2017) researched psychological safety and strong employee performance. Specifically, Agarwal and Farndale (2017) looked to determine the effect psychological safety has on creative implementation (CI). Agarwal and Farndale (2017) defined CI as, “process of converting creativity or ideas into new and improved products, services, or ways of doing things” (p. 440). The study found that when employees did not fear taking risks, they were able to positively contribute to the CI process.

Similarly, Kark and Carmeli (2009) researched psychological safety and employee involvement in creative work, focusing on psychological safety’s impact on

vitality. Kark and Carmeli (2009) defined vitality as “the positive feeling marked by the subjective experience of having energy” (Kark and Carmeli 2009, p. 788). The results supported a positive relationship between psychological safety and vitality. In addition, the feeling of vitality was positively associated with involvement of creative work. The findings of this study supported the phenomenon that psychological safety is positively related to employee involvement in creative work.

The literature on psychological safety and employee performance described how psychological safety supports employee creativity and performance. Each study discussed how psychological safety data was collected and measured against performance and creativity. Results showed that high psychological safety indicated high employee performance. In each study, the presence of perceived psychological safety (i.e. vitality, knowledge sharing, etc.) contributed to a positive organizational outcome. This literature supports the researcher’s study because if high psychological safety can positively impact employee performance, this phenomenon could support high employee performance during organizational change.

Psychological Safety Supporting Organizational Impact and Change

The researcher included two studies on how psychological safety supports organizational impact and change. Similar to the literature on psychological safety and performance, the literature explains how psychological safety positively enabled the environment to allow for organizational change. Unlike the research on psychological safety and performance, the quantity of research available on psychological safety and organizational change was limited.

A study from Page, Boysen, and Arya (2019) focused on improving organizational culture. The research question for this study was: “In what ways does work culture lead to employees feeling psychologically safe?” (Page et. al. 2019, p. 30). The study measured: employee feedback on organizational culture, employee perceived psychological safety, ways employees and leaders can impact organizational culture, and how well the employees understand the mission and values. The overall findings from this study indicated that employees and managers can make organizational impact by having a culture with psychological safety factors. These factors include: trust, integrity, mutual respect, and no fear of retaliation. This culture would make employees more comfortable in providing ideas and concerns to leadership. The discussion mentioned that 94% of the individuals who responded to the study were aware of the company’s vision. However, only 65% could articulate how employees’ roles fit into the vision. Page et. al. (2019) indicated there may be opportunity for leadership to share how employees’ contributions directly impact the organizations vision. Page et. al. (2019) explained that psychological safety practices could lead to a better connection between leadership and employees. Page et. al. (2019) discussed that having a stronger leader and employee connection may lead to a greater organizational impact.

Similarly, Rao (2014) found employees were more willing to talk about future changes when they felt perceived psychological safety. The purpose of this study was to use the Appreciative Inquiry framework to “cultivate openness to change in a relatively volatile setting” (Rao, 2014, p. 80). Through a qualitative Appreciative Inquiry process, participants co-created their needs to discuss organizational changes. The participants desired a more psychological safe environment and believed psychological safety factors

would better support employees during changes. The specific psychological safety characteristics were: 1) leadership who took care of their employees and protected them, and 2) no fear of retaliation. Rao discussed that by allowing participants to discuss and create psychological safety characteristics, the participants develop a readiness for change.

Literature from Page et. al. and Rao discussed how psychological safety supported organizational change and impact. While other factors contributed (i.e. Appreciative Inquiry framework) to the change and impact, psychological safety was a mechanism to positively achieve and create the desired outcomes from employees and managers. The findings from Page et. al. and Rao support this study as the results demonstrate that psychological safety was the foundation for employees to make a positive contribution.

The literature in chapter two provides important context on employee emotions and behaviors during organizational changes. The information validates why researching mechanisms to reduce employee fear and resistance is important for organizations that regularly implement organizational changes. The researcher believes the literature discussed on psychological safety elevates the potential positive impact this phenomenon could produce for organizations.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this research was to study the effects of organizational change to determine if psychological safety has an impact on an employee's ability to accept organizational change. The chapter discusses the research design, measurement, sample population, and data analysis. The chapter closes with a summary.

Research Design

The design for this study consisted of qualitative interviews with individuals who had recently experienced an organizational change. The researcher chose qualitative interviews to gather participants view, stories, and real experiences of psychological safety (Creswell, 2014). The researcher was trying to understand what specific actions look place that impacts psychological safety. The researcher conducted semi-unstructured interviews and used measurement questions (Appendix A) to assess participants psychological safety before and after the change. One interview was conducted with each participant. Each interview had two parts; before and after an organizational change. In doing so, psychological safety was measured before and after the organizational change. Using data from these interviews, the researcher used Grounded Theory (Creswell, 2014) to abstract reoccurring themes that appeared across the breadth of interviews.

Measurement

The researcher asked participants pre-organizational change and post-organizational change questions. The intention of the pre-organizational change questions was to measure the individual's perception of psychological safety *before* the organizational change. The intention of the post-organizational change questions was to gather the individual's level of psychological safety *after* the organizational change.

The interview questions used for this study were based on Amy C. Edmondson's study on psychological safety and interpersonal trust (1999). Additional questions were gathered from a study by Christopher H. Thomas on conceptual structure of engagement (2007). (Interview questions can be found in Appendix A)

Data Collection and Sample Population

The researcher conducted 12 interviews with employees who recently experienced an organizational change using a convenience sample. The type of organizational change was not considered as a part of this research. The sample size consisted of ten individual contributors and two managers. The selection criteria for the selected participants is outlined below:

1. The employee must have experienced an organizational change within the last 12 months. The purpose of the organizational change was not critical to the study.
2. Participants must be employees who experienced a change in position, responsibilities, or manager.

Data Analysis

The researcher conducted interviews and used Grounded Theory (Creswell, 2014) to analyze the data collected. In doing so, the researcher asked participants a series of questions and recorded responses. Repeated concepts were collected from the data and codes were used to tag them. The codes were formed into categories, which were then developed into themes. The themes generated from this data were used to interpret and answer the research question: Are employees more likely to accept organizational changes if psychological safety had been previously established in the workplace?

Protection of Human Subjects

First, an email was sent to a pool of candidates that met the selection criteria for this research. The email described the purpose of the study and informed candidates that participation in the study was optional and confidential. If the employee expressed a willingness to participate in the research, another email was sent that included the “Inform Consent with No Signature” waiver.

Next, interviews were audio recorded on the researcher’s iPhone in a private conference room. The audio files were transferred from the iPhone to an encrypted hard drive. iPhone data is protected by thumbprint identification.

Finally, in a password protected file on the researcher’s computer, subjects were coded with a pseudonym. In a separate password protected file, the researcher transcribed audio recorded interviews. Identifiers were used in the transcriptions to protect personal identities. The researcher identified interview notes with the pseudonym code. Once all audio recordings were transcribed, files were deleted from the iPhone.

Summary

This chapter reviewed the research methodology for this research project, including the research design, measurement, data collection, data analysis, and protection of human subjects. This study used Grounded Theory (Creswell, 2014) analysis to identify themes from interviews with participants. The next chapter discusses the results from this study.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this study was to determine if employees are more likely to accept organizational change if psychological safety in the workplace had been previously established. This chapter will discuss the results from this study.

Sample

The researcher completed 12 interviews. All participants were individuals who experienced an organizational change within the last six months. Additionally, all participants experienced a change in manager or change in role & responsibilities as an outcome of the organization change. Of the population sample, 83% were individual contributors and 17% were managers.

Results

The most frequent theme of the pre-organizational change portion of the interviews was "*Perceived manager favoritism.*" This theme occurred in nine of the subjects. If an individual were similar to their manager in terms of thought, work, and communication style, the manager showed public favoritism towards that individual. Participants cited "rejection if their manager felt they were not smart," "favoritism towards extroverts," and "special treatment for employees working outside of working hours" as examples to support this theme.

The second most frequent theme was "*Employees feared retaliation.*" This theme occurred in eight of the subjects. Similar to the first theme, the second theme is based on three re-occurring groups of data: fear of retaliation if mistakes were made, fear of retaliation to giving an opposing opinion, and fear of retaliation to taking a risk. One participant said, "No! Not at all. I would get fired." Another mentioned, "It was difficult.

She had an idea and if you agreed with her – she would be helpful. If you had different thoughts or pushed back, then it was hard. She said she was open to different opinions, but I don't think in she really was." Participants believed that mistakes would leave a black mark on their image and feared any form of dissent would bring retaliation (e.g., termination) from their manager.

The third theme was "*No collaboration.*" This occurred in six of the subjects. Information was shared that several managers invited employees to recommend ideas for improvement. In doing so, examples were shared where the manager quickly dismissed ideas and only agreed with information that aligned to the managers predetermined thinking. One participant said, "I would often say let's not do this and advise against this. My manager would say, 'I hear you and we are going to do it my way.'" It was said managers verbally welcomed employees to challenge the status quo but made changes only if it aligned with the managers opinions.

The fourth theme was "*Low employee trust in team.*" This theme occurred in four of the subjects. While this theme occurred least often, it is worth identifying due to the small population size of this study. With a larger participant pool, it is possible that this theme could have been more prevalent. The data for this theme came from responses to the question, "In this team, is it easy to discuss difficult issues and problems?". Low trust in leadership decision making was due to managers having little technical experience. Participants cited that managers "rejected collaborating with technical experts" and "created priorities in a vacuum without consulting technical experts".

The most common theme of the post-organization portion of the interviews was "*focus on individual well-being and team success.*" This theme occurred in seven of the

participants. Participants described the new manager as being able to, “show vulnerability and empathy with employees,” “show interest by asking questions about employee satisfaction,” “create a vision or roadmap that employees can understand,” and “take actions to remove roadblocks.”

The second theme was “*High employee commitment.*” Equal to the first post-organizational change theme, this occurred in seven of the subjects. This data was based off the response to the question: “Are you enthusiastic about providing a high-quality product or service?” Much of the data collected indicated a high commitment to quality of work. Participants described themselves as: “having high energy for the work and feeling lucky that I get to do it” and “my enthusiasm is high because it is a product of myself.”

The third theme was “*Little fear in retaliation.*” This occurred in six of the subjects. This theme was developed from feedback to the question: “When you make a mistake, is it held against you?” Trust in manager increased for employees who received a new manager after the organizational change. Participants shared the following experiences: “I made a mistake and my new manager said, ‘just fix it’, with no retaliation” and “my manager provided feedback and coached me on how to be successful.”

The fourth theme was “*Trust team vision.*” This occurred in five of the participants responses. Participants cited that the increase in trust in team vision was due to the manager’s technical expertise. Participants were quoted as saying: “I am a lot more enthusiastic about my work because I now believe we are moving in the right direction,” “I’m enthusiastic about the new operating model,” and “my manager has demonstrated

experience in the subject matter, which makes me confident that we are heading in the right direction as a team.” As such, manager technical expertise seemed to be linked with employee’s confidence in direction of team vision.

Results of Findings

The purpose of this study was to determine if employees were more likely to accept organizational change if psychological safety had been previously established before the change.

To evaluate this, the researcher studied the individual responses to the pre and post organizational change questions. For each question, the researcher used the definition of psychological safety (Kahn, 1990, p. 708) to categorize each response as “Indicates Psychological Safety” or “Does Not Indicate Psychological Safety”. This led the researcher to the tabulation shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Results of Findings

Participant	Pre-Organizational Change		Post-Organizational Change	
	# of Responses that did <i>Not</i> Indicate Psychological Safety	# of Responses that Indicated Psychological Safety	# of Responses that did <i>Not</i> Indicate Psychological Safety	# of Responses that Indicated Psychological Safety
Participant 1	7	2	0	9
Participant 2	7	2	0	9
Participant 3	7	2	2	7
Participant 4	2	7	2	7
Participant 5	7	2	1	8
Participant 6	9	0	0	9
Participant 7	9	0	0	9
Participant 8	0	9	0	9
Participant 9	0	9	2	7
Participant 10	6	3	2	7
Participant 11	7	2	2	7
Participant 12	7	2	2	7
Total of Majority Responses	9	3	0	12
Percentage of Total	75%	25%	0%	100%

From the data presented, only three participants had established psychological safety prior to the organizational change. Of those participants, 12 had psychological safety after the organizational change. Although this suggests answering “yes” to the researcher’s question – “Are employees more likely to accept organizational change if psychological safety had been previously established?” - there are two major limitations to consider before answering that question.

First, only three participants identified as being psychologically safe before the organizational change. Due to the small sample size, the researcher cannot confidently determine that having established psychological safety made participants more likely to accept organizational change. Second, there were nine participants that did not indicate

being psychologically safe before the change. Of those participants, 12 felt psychologically safe after the change. This big swing in psychological safety leads the researcher to believe that there are other factors that contributed to an employee's sense of psychological change. In the next chapter, the researcher will use the data collected to explore the factors that might have contributed to the increase in psychological safety.

Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to determine if employees were more likely to accept organizational change if psychological safety in the workplace had been previously established. This chapter concludes the study by discussing the findings. Study recommendations, limitations, and possibilities for future research are also discussed.

Discussion

Due to the limited data in this study, the researcher was not able to confidentially answer the research question: “Are employees more likely to accept organizational changes if psychological safety had been previously established?” However, the research produced important findings on the topic. The major finding from this study was perceived psychological safety is impacted by perceptions of managers.

Data collected from the pre-organizational change questions showed that all four themes were related to a negative view towards management. The themes collected were manager favoritism, fear of retaliation, lack of collaboration between manager and employees, and low trust in team vision. The most frequent theme displayed was manager favoritism towards individuals who share commonalities with the manager. Participants expressed that if they had a different opinion than that of their manager, they would not feel comfortable providing input. In addition, they perceived their manager treating them differently if they had a different work or communication style from the manager.

The pre-organization finding aligns to Kahn’s (1990) definition of psychological safety as participants did not feel they were able to ‘show and employ’ their natural

behaviors due to fear of consequences. Before the organizational change, participants appeared to have low psychological safety and had high fear of manager retaliation.

The data showed nine participants displayed no established psychological safety before the organizational change. The data collected after the organizational change showed the same nine participants shifted to perceived psychological safety. The researcher reviewed the data of the nine participants to determine what caused the shift to established psychological safety. The researcher found all participants received a new manager after the organizational change. This finding aligns with the themes identified after the organizational change, as three of the four themes discussed the positive impact displayed by the new manager. Participants explained their new managers spent more time with them individually and as a team. By managers taking this time, employees felt their manager “had their back”.

The post-organization findings align with Page et al. (2019) that employees are more comfortable providing input in a psychologically safe culture. Page et al. (2019) mentioned that if employees perceive mutual respect and no fear of retaliation, they are more likely to provide input to leadership. The researcher observed the connection to Page et al.’s (2019) findings by the manager inquiring about the individual’s well-being and recommendation for team improvement. Lastly, the findings from Rao (2014) align with this study as participants after the organizational change had higher psychological safety and felt their manager had their back. Rao (2014) showed employees feel higher psychological safety when they feel protection from their manager.

Finally, since the finding of this study was rooted in employee perception of managers, the researcher thought it was necessary to locate current research that is linked

to management behavior and organizational change. Sijits and Gandz (2018) described 11 leadership characteristics that support organizational change. The researcher noticed three leadership characteristics defined by Sijits and Gandz (2018) that potentially aligned with this study: collaboration, justice, and humanity. The first characteristic was collaboration. Collaboration was identified to support open dialogue with employees and encourages sharing of ideas. One of the pre-organizational themes of the researcher's study was "no collaboration". The researcher found that management did not collaborate with employees and were not open to ideas or recommendations. The second characteristic was justice. Justice was identified as a leadership characteristic to ensure employees are treated fairly. This characteristic aligned to the researcher's pre-organizational finding of "perceived manager favoritism". This also aligned to the researcher's theme of "fear of retaliation due to making a mistake." The third characteristic was humanity. Sijits and Gandz (2018) defined humanity as empathy for employees' feelings and beliefs. This aligned to the researcher's post-organizational theme of "focus on employee well-being and team success".

The finding from this study lead the researcher to believe psychological safety was created by managers. Management behaviors and actions likely will impact how employees accept organizational change.

Recommendations

The researcher's recommendations for organizations to maintain psychological safety after an organizational change include:

1. An organization should determine and define psychological safety practices.

Three of the four post-organizational change themes centered around managers. This data implies that psychological safety is created by managers actions. Therefore, an organization should determine what psychological safety actions are essential to meet organizational goals.

2. An organization should build awareness and train managers on psychological safety. Training may increase manager awareness on how psychological safety can impact employee performance. This could inform managers what actions could positively or negatively impact psychological safety.

Limitations

The following are a list of limitations that the researcher encountered while conducting this study:

1. The number of participants was limited. Due to the small sample size, the key findings could be caused by organizational factors not discovered within this study. In addition, the key findings could be heavily weighted by the data collected. Had the researcher had a larger participant pool, the key findings may have been different.
2. The participants that were a part of this study worked within the same functional group and organization. Further research should be conducted that reaches beyond one team and organization.
3. The researcher did not interview or gather the perspective of managers in this study. If all individual contributors' managers were included, their voice and context could have provided a different outcome in the key findings.

4. The researcher did not ask the participants if they wanted the organizational change before the change occurred. Due to this, it was hard to determine if the change was accepted.

Future Research Possibilities

For future research on this study's topic the researcher would recommend collecting data from a larger sample size. A larger sample size will provide more data on established and non-established psychological safety. In addition to a larger sample size, the researcher would also recommend a diverse sample size. The purpose of this would be to identify themes that are universal across cultures and industries as opposed to themes that could be linked to a specific organization or team.

An additional research topic to study would be employee resiliency. Does resiliency help employees accept organizational change faster? If so, is resiliency a skill that can be trained or distinctive to individuals?

Conclusion

Today, organizations must continuously change to meet customer demands. Literature on psychological safety indicates psychological safety supports strong employee performance and reduces employee fear of retaliation. This study's purpose was to determine if employees would be more accepting of organizational change if psychological safety had been previously established. Due to the limited data collected, the researcher was unable to confidently answer the study's researcher question. However, the findings from this study indicated management can positively and negatively impact psychological safety.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Pre-Organizational Change:

1. When someone makes a mistake in this team, it is often held against him or her
2. In this team, it is easy to discuss difficult issues and problems.
3. In this team, people are sometimes rejected for being different
4. It is completely safe to take a risk on this team.
5. It is difficult to ask other members of this team for help
6. Members of this team value and respect each other's' contributions.
7. The work climate here allows me to focus on doing my job
8. In this company, you make sure that your back is covered
9. I need to spend fair amount of time getting information to protect myself

Post-Organizational Change:

1. I am willing to really push myself to reach challenging work goals
2. I am prepared to fully devote myself to performing my job duties
3. I get excited thinking about new ways to do my job more effectively
4. I am enthusiastic about providing a high-quality product or service
5. I am always willing to go the extra mile in order to do my job well
6. Trying to constantly improve my job performance is very important to me
7. My job is a source of personal pride
8. I am determined to be complete and thorough in all my job duties
9. I am ready to put my heart and soul into my work
10. When someone makes a mistake in this team, it is often held against him or her
11. In this team, it is easy to discuss difficult issues and problems.
12. In this team, people are sometimes rejected for being different
13. It is completely safe to take a risk on this team.
14. It is difficult to ask other members of this team for help
15. Members of this team value and respect each other's' contributions.
16. The work climate here allows me to focus on doing my job
17. In this company, you make sure that your back is covered
18. I need to spend a fair amount of time getting information to project myself